

Towards Dilma Rousseff Impeachment: The last gasp of the demonstrations

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The holiday period and the Olympic Games, which started on Friday August 5, have been a contributory factor to Brazilians not taking to the streets in large numbers to contest or support the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff. Fatigue after more than a year of demonstrations, combined with the feeling that it's all over bar the shouting - and that the possibility of Dilma Rousseff regaining her position is very small - seem to be the most probable reasons to explain why both the left and the right are demobilized.

At Copacabana the hundred or so people wrapped in yellow and green flags (the colours of Brazil) demanding the destitution of the president are mixed up with a multitude of tourist, athletes from foreign delegations, as well as cariocas, as the inhabitants of Rio are called, out for a Sunday afternoon stroll or a spin on their bike. One of the rare people who succeeded in attracting the attention of the public was the MP Jair Bolsonaro (who dedicated his vote in favour of impeachment to the torturer of Rousseff when she was a guerrilla), who was walking along Atlantic Avenue with a toy Olympic torch in his hands alongside a personage familiar in the demonstrations against Dilma, who was wearing a Batman costume and presenting himself as a "pursuer of the corrupt".

In front of the Candelaria Church, in the centre of the city, about fifty people carrying the banners of the Workers' Party (PT) demonstrated their support of the president. The cry "out with Temer" (formerly Rousseff's vice-president, now interim president) could still be heard, in an improvised way, in the streets. At five o'clock in the afternoon, on San Salvador Square, at the same time as the performance of chorinho (popular music) that takes place every Sunday, a mixed public of young and not-so-young people began to chant "out with Temer". It was not a waste of time, since for more than two months various left groups have been meeting on this square to discuss possible actions "against the coup". At the end of the night, in Santa Teresa, the customers in a bar took up the war cry against the interim president and all those who were passing in the street chanted together against Temer.

The demonstrations that took place in twenty states of the country did not mobilize more than 5,000 people. The only city where there was more than this number was in Sao Paulo, where the demonstration in support of the president or, to be more exact, against her replacement, saw 40,000 people marching to Largo de Batata Square, led by Guilherme Boulos, president of the Movement of Homeless Workers (MTST), one of the important new leaders of the Brazilian left.

On the Avenida Paulista, one of the main thoroughfares in Sao Paulo, the demonstrators against Dilma were much fewer (the police did not provide estimates) and only the most radical of them attracted attention. A speech by the former porn star Alexandre Frota, who has recently become interested in politics and who is close to the group that demands a return of the military dictatorship, gave people something to talk about for the next week. Frota called Jean Wyllys, a left-wing MP (from the PSOL) a "poof", declared that he would spit on the former Minister of Human Rights Maria de Rosario (PT) and finally described as "dead from hunger" the singer Chico Buarque,

the television presenter Jo Soares and the actor Wagner Moura, all of whom had demonstrated against impeachment.

The actress Leticia Sabatella was also insulted in Curitiba: when a demonstrator who supported impeachment saw her passing in the street he began to scream at her “whore”, “cry your eyes out, pétista”, “tramp”. Sabatella is well-known for defending various causes concerning human rights and ecology: “We are experiencing large-scale intolerance and authoritarian behaviour. The speeches inciting hate that we hear in the country stir people up to all that. They think that by speaking like that they are more like citizens, that they are more politicised. They think that for them to live well, the other, the one who is different, must not live. That is the most painful thing to see”, she declared to the Brazilian edition of *El Pais*.

At the beginning of August, the president of the impeachment commission of the Senate, Antonio Anastasia (PSDB) gave his approval for the pursuit of the political trial against Dilma Rousseff [1]. Dilma needed the vote of 28 senators to avoid the process; if she did not obtain them, the final decision would be taken, from August 29, by Lewandowski, head of the Supreme Federal Tribunal [2]. However, on August 3, the acting president, Michel Temer, exerted pressure on the Supreme Tribunal for the vote to be brought forward to August 26. The dates have still not been confirmed.

Dilma Rousseff has also used her own weapons. She declared during an interview with BBC Brazil that if she survived the procedure of impeachment she would be ready to call new elections. That is also what 62 per cent of Brazilians want, according to the latest poll, published at the end of July by Data Folha. The PT has been envisaging for months the option that Dilma could call a plebiscite to ask whether the people want new elections. However, for the plebiscite (considered to be “unconstitutional” by a number of jurists) to take place, the approval of Congress is necessary. Although Temer is rejected by 82 per cent of the population, the support of the legislative body has always been his strongest card. The meetings he has held over the last few days with various senators show that he has sufficient control over it.

For their part, social movements such as the MTST and the group Povo sem medo (“people without fear”) confirmed that in the course of the month, during the Olympic Games, they would conduct various actions in Rio de Janeiro in order to attract the attention of the international press “against the coup by Michel Temer”. These Games, which began with a minimal presence of heads of state, who preferred not to come so as to avoid having diplomatic problems because of the political crisis in the country, seem also to be one of the last stages where the social battle against impeachment is being played out. The legal battle will remain in the hands of the Supreme Federal Tribunal.

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P.S.

* Translation IVP. <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/>

Footnotes

[1] On Tuesday August 16 the Supreme Federal Tribunal authorised an inquiry into Dilma

Rousseff for interfering with the judicial process. This decision was taken after an intervention by Dilma Rousseff protesting her innocence in the framework of the procedure of destitution for presumed mishandling of public finances. The trial for destitution is due to open in the Senate on August 25. The decision is expected within five days of that.

[2] On the morning of August 10, by 59 votes against 21, the senators decided to recommence the trial for the destitution of Dilma Rousseff, which had been suspended since the end of May. It is due to recommence from August 25