

Não vai ter golpe (?)

Reflections and background to the anti-coup march this Friday 18th March

On Friday 18th March thousands of Brazilians took to the streets for a peaceful march in support of the government united under the chant, 'NÃO VAI TER GOLPE!' (there will not be a coup). This mobilisation came about in reaction to a week of political dramas and as a direct challenge to the protests that took place on Sunday, which was just one of a series of protests that calls

in Brazil has been a bit like trying to follow a Mexican telenovela, after missing the first three episodes. This is made worse by the media's version of events, particularly that of the dominating right-wing company *Globo*.

Not only is it necessary to understand the series of events and key figures involved, but it is important to realise that the political



THE MARCH PREPARING TO SET OUT FROM PRAÇA DOIS DE JULHO

for the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, the current president elected democratically in the 2014, winning by a narrow margin in the second round of voting with 51.6% of the votes.

Having recently arrived in Salvador de Bahia, following the political situation here

structure and culture in Brazil, is very different to that of the UK, a system characterised by a culture of 'British manners'. So here is an over-simplified background to the political situation in Brazil to help understand the dramas that this country is living.

Brazil today as a continuation of Brazil yesterday

Getúlio Vargas: This gaucho from Minas Gerais came to power in 1930 when Brazil was in the midst of a political crisis. In 1937 he undertook a coup supported by the military and successfully established the Estado Novo, that would see him in power until he announced democratic elections in 1945. By the end of his rule the Estado Novo was not well regarded by the majority of the population, but Vargas` popularity seemed to remain untainted and many called for him to remain in power. This was avoided by a coup carried out by Dutra, a candidate with a military background who would be supported by Vargas and go on to win the elections. Vargas then came back into power in 1950, by means of democratic elections, but this time without the support of the military. Carlos Lacerdas, the leading member of the opposition who also controlled a large part of the media, started a rigorous campaign against Vargas. Reading newspapers from the early 1950s. However, on 24th August 1954 Vargas committed suicide and became a form of martyr with millions of Brazilians taking to the streets in favour of the deceased president and against the opposition. An interesting observation here is that, whereas the media and the population often perpetuate one other`s views, there seems to be a history of division between the press and popular opinion, which is only made evident in times of crisis.

Military dictatorship: In the ten years following the death of Vargas, there were numerous attempts at military coups. In a nutshell (which is worth nibbling a bit more on if you have the time) these years consisted of rigorous programs of modernisation, a serious economic crisis and the polarisation of society. This all took place against the backdrop of the Cold War

at the exact moment when the Cuban revolution turned the glaring eyes of the USA towards Latin America (excuse my lack of neutrality in this last phrase). This instability and polarisation opened the way for the military coup which would install a military dictatorship that was to last 21 years.

Brazil today: Brazil has a presidential system, where the president is elected every four years. The current president is Dilma Rouseuff who belongs to the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT). This party, within the simplified dichotomy, would be characterised as left-wing. The PTB first came into power in 2003 under the charismatic leadership Lula da Silva, a man of the people who rose through the ranks to President against all odds having come from a working-class background in the North-East. The PT under Lula implemented a series of programs such as `Mi Casa Mi Vida`, which guaranteed an improvement in living conditions for the poorer sectors of Brazilian society. In the past few years the PT has lost serious credibility due to a series of events: the corruption scandals which implicated the party and the national petrol company Petrobras; the economic crisis that followed the boom, and the anti-social measures introduced to cater for the 2014 World Cup.

Final observations: Brazil has a history of coups, populism, military intervention and has alternated various times between democratic and authoritarian regimes. For anyone interested in looking more into the catalysts of political confrontation in Brazil, the question of Agrarian Reforms and land distribution has always been an issue that has sparked conflict in society.



THE MARCH ENTERING PRAÇA CASTRO ALVES

Break-down of recent events

Friday 4th March: As part of *Operação Lava Jato*, an investigation looking into large scale corruption cases, Lula is detained.

Sunday 13th March: Impeachment march

Wednesday 16th March: The decision is announced to try and insert Lula as a minister. 'Why would they want to do this? How can Lula become a minister while in the process of legal investigations? How does this change the legal proceedings?' I hear you ask. If Lula were to become minister he would not go through the standard legal process, but instead the case would be taken to the Supreme Court. The version given by the right wing press is that Lula is trying to avoid the judge Sergio Moro, a judge with a clear right-wing political agenda who would head the legal

case. Those in favour of the government, however, stress that Lula's popularity and political abilities means that his presence as minister could be the government's saving grace.

Wednesday 16th March: The judge Sergio Moro releases a phone conversation between Lula and Dilma in response to this announcement. He does this claiming that it is not serious evidence, but that the people have the right to know. Moro becomes a hero in the eyes of those pushing for the impeachment. However, it is very much illegal to release possible evidence to the public with information that could also implicate the President. Nonetheless, Moro remains unpunished and involved in the court proceedings.

Friday 18th March: The anti-coup march

Friday 18th March: It is announced that the Supreme Court accepts Lula as minister (provoking jubilation in the march that effectively ends the protests and transitions into Friday night festivities). Hours later, Gilmar Mendes, the judge of the supreme court, suspended this decision meaning that Lula will pass through the normal legal proceedings, which remain in the hands of Sergio Moros.

My position and impressions

Being an outside that doesn't entirely understand the situation and will not necessarily have to live with the consequences, I feel that it is important to remain relatively neutral until better informed. However, my own left-wing tendencies and the influence of the atmosphere at the university make me sway towards Lula and the government and away from the calls for an impeachment. Although I don't want to fall into the classic divisions of class it does very much look like the calls from impeachment come from the upper-middle class that wish to protect their business interests and preserve the *status quo*. Meanwhile, the support for Lula comes from the poorer classes and those more in favour of a fairer distribution of wealth. In addition, despite the myths of Brazil being a 'racial democracy', it is a country still very much divided along the lines of skin colour and background. Mariluz, a woman present at the march of Friday, said, 'look around you at the mix of people here; at the march on Sunday there was only rich white people with blue eyes'. By preserving the *status quo*, it is also preserving the discriminatory trends and social divides in Brazilian society.

This brings me to my concerns with the position of the international press. When reading the newspaper reports on Brazil in the UK press, I was under the impression that the marches calling for the

impeachment were made up of 'the people' rising up against a corrupt and illegitimate government, but being here I see quite a different picture. I will reiterate, these protests look more like the richer more conservative sectors of society trying to delegitimise the government in order to restore their privileges. Be careful when reading newspaper reports to fish for the facts.



'THE BLACK BRAZILIAN POPULATION IS AGAINST THE COUP. NEVER AGAIN SENZALA' (Senzalas were a type of hut that slaves were made to sleep in. They are representative of the oppression, violence and cruelty that slaves suffered at the hands of the latifundistas).

Final Observations

When I first heard that Lula was going to become a minister while in the process of legal investigations my instinct was that it was all a bit dodgy and seemed to be playing the rules. Hearing people argue that his presence as minister could save this government and therefore help bring some stability to Brazil it also seemed a bit fishy to me and dangerous to look for the salvation of the nation in one man's political abilities. However, during the march it was possible to see just how popular Lula is and the mass support that he can rally behind the government. I am

sceptical, but if the option is Lula or coup, I would say Lula. But the question is; is there really the risk of a coup?

The other question is the lack of neutrality among the Judiciary. There are even talks of a Judiciary led coup rather than a military coup. A judge has a lawful responsibility to remain neutral, but in both the cases of Sergio Moros and Gilmar Mendes they have a clear political alliance made evident, not only through their acts and lunch time reunions with opposition leaders, but through open declarations. There seems to be serious issue over the question of legitimacy and legality on both sides of the game.

The protests this week echo strongly with the events of March 1964 that preceded the military coup of 2nd April. On Friday 13th March 1964 there was a mass gathering in Rio de Janeiro with around 200,000 people who gathered to hear President João Goulart who promised to push social reforms through government. This was answered less than a week later by 'A Marcha da Família, com Deus, pela Libertade' (the family march, with god, for freedom). This took place in São Paulo and was composed mainly of religious and conservative members of the middle-class. These mass events that represented opposing sectors of society exacerbated the polarization in society allowing the military to come in with the excuse of 'restoring order'.

Although these dramatic events and protests shake up the daily routine and give the momentary impression that we are living a key historical event, the everyday continues: we eat, shit, sleep, the sun still shines and life goes on as normal with minimal changes. But let's not shut our eyes to the possibility that democracy is not a given and it could be snatched away from us at any point.

Note: It is difficult to understand the situation fully and give a good panorama. Moreover, the news stories are coming in thick and fast and change the situation daily. Therefore, although I hope this article can be informative, it should not be used as a voice of authority and I would encourage people to keep fishing.

- Molly de Dios Fisher 20-03-2016