

## How to Legitimaze a Coup

**By Aline Piva, Research Fellow at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs and  
Frederick B. Mills, Professor of Philosophy, Bowie State University**

**This article is a Response to Dr. Sean Burges, September 15, “Brazil’s House of Cards in a Hurricane.” The article can be found here:**

**<http://www.coha.org/brazils-house-of-cards-in-a-hurricane/>**

In “Brazil’s House of Cards in a Hurricane,” our distinguished COHA colleague and professor Sean Burges declares the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff “completely legal”, defends the neoliberal “reformist” agenda of Temer and even places Temer somewhat above the fray of the “structural political crisis”. All of these claims fit neatly together, but they arguably distort the real politics of the soft coup and the popular resistance to the drive towards a neoliberal restoration in this South American country.

According to Burges, the impeachment followed due process, yet on more than one occasion Rousseff’s right to defense was denied.[<sup>1</sup>] Moreover, her accusers were unable to prove that she committed any impeachable offense. This lack of evidence supports the position (referred to by Burges as the emotional left!) that there was no legal basis to start the impeachment in the first place.[<sup>2</sup>] COHA has published several articles providing detailed accounts of how the impeachment process was used not only to avoid prosecution of some of the very senators implementing the impeachment proceedings, but also to advance a neoliberal agenda without winning constituent support for this at the ballot box.[<sup>3</sup>]

Burges goes on to defend the reform agenda of Temer, arguing that the economic problems facing the country "can neatly be wrapped up and ‘tackled’ in the standard language of pro-market, liberal economic policy, which is precisely what Temer has done." What stands in the way of Temer's reforms, says Burges, is the "structural crisis of politics." Burges fails to mention the popular resistance to Temer and his political agenda as manifest in the mass demonstrations taking place almost daily in Brazil and other countries.[<sup>4</sup>] There are good reasons for such push back: the only thing that has been "neatly wrapped up" by neoliberalism where it has reaped its bitter harvest in the region is economic and social inequality, subordination to empire, and the privatization of the commons.

As for the "structural crisis of politics" that stands in Temer's way, Burges appears to separate Temer somewhat from such politics while acknowledging that Temer has "skeletons in his own closet". For Burges, "the problems of congressional corruption that brought us down the Lava Jato and impeachment path will continue to threaten to derail any reforms brought in by Temer." However, Temer himself has been allegedly involved in the "congressional corruption", though now as interim President, he is immune to prosecution, and he has been found guilty of electoral fraud, and as a result cannot run for office for eight years.[5] Temer has not stood above the fray, and those "skeletons" are not in the closet, but on full display. Temer was, in fact, a key player in taking us down the "impeachment path," a path that "threatens to derail any reforms brought in by Temer" because it is a path that lacks democratic legitimacy.

**By Aline Piva, Research Fellow at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs and  
Dr. Frederick B. Mills, Professor of Philosophy, Bowie State University**

---

[<sup>1</sup>] "Julgamento De Impeachment No Senado é Nulo Por Negar Direito De Defesa à Dilma - Justificando." Justificando. 2016. Accessed September 16, 2016. <http://justificando.com/2016/06/06/julgamento-de-impeachment-no-senado-e-nulo-por-negar-direito-de-defesa-a-dilma/>.

[<sup>2</sup>] "Impeachment: Alargar a Acusação Inicial Fere Frontalmente O Devido Processo Legal - Justificando." Justificando. 2016. Accessed September 16, 2016. <http://justificando.com/2016/04/29/impeachment-alargar-a-acusacao-inicial-fere-frontalmente-o-devido-processo-legal/>.

[<sup>3</sup>] Coha, "Waiting in the Wings: The Vice President and Impeachment," COHA, 2016, accessed September 16, 2016, <http://www.coha.org/waiting-in-the-wings-the-vice-president-and-impeachment/>.

Coha. "Leaked Audios Reveal Plot to Oust Dilma Rousseff." COHA. 2016. Accessed September 16, 2016. <http://www.coha.org/leaked-audios-reveal-plot-to-oust-dilma-rousseff/>.

Coha. "Brazilian Senate Votes to Proceed with the Impeachment Process despite New Allegations of Corruption in the Interim Cabinet." COHA. 2016. Accessed September 16, 2016. <http://www.coha.org/brazilian-senate-votes-to-proceed-with-the-impeachment-process-despite-new-allegations-of-corruption-in-the-interim-cabinet/>.

Coha. "Death of Democracy: Brazilian President Impeached by Majority of Senate Votes." COHA. 2016. Accessed September 16, 2016. <http://www.coha.org/death-of-democracy-brazilian-president-impeached-by-majority-of-senate-votes/>.

[<sup>4</sup>] Redação. "Caros Amigos - Manifestações Pelo Fora Temer Crescem Em Todo País." Caros Amigos. Accessed September 16, 2016.

<http://www.carosamigos.com.br/index.php/cotidiano/7860-manifestacoes-pelo-fora-temer-crescem-em-todo-pais>.

[<sup>5</sup>] "Citado Na Lava Jato, Temer Coleciona Acusações E Não Pode Se Candidatar Por Oito Anos." - Notícias. Accessed September 16, 2016. <http://noticias.r7.com/brasil/citado-na-lava-jato-temer-coleciona-acusacoes-e-nao-pode-se-candidatar-por-oito-anos-10052016>.