

Brazilian president pushes teachers towards national strike



Brasilia, February 13 (RHC)-- Brazil's National Union of Teachers of Higher Education Institutions (Andes-SN) began consultations with their grassroots organizations to call a national strike in rejection of the far-right President Jair Bolsonaro and his attacks on the Brazilian education system.

"We've been trying to negotiate insistently with the government and it has simply ignored us. The strike is a necessity," the Andes-SN president Antonio Goncalves Filho said and added that the Bolsonaro administration has deteriorated the teacher's working conditions and salaries.

The University of Ceara professor Irenisia Oliveira stressed that the interruption of activities involves more work for both students and professors because classes must be replenished in the future more quickly. However, Bolsonaro's attitude favors the outbreak of a national strike.

"There is an offensive against public servants. The government has a hostile attitude against public universities," she said and added that "people realize they have no choice but to fight very hard."

Regarding this aggressiveness against public workers, the University of Brasilia professor Luis Araujo Pasquetti recalled that the Economy Minister Paulo Guedes said that public servants are "parasites."

Statements like this show contempt for workers, which must be faced through a coordinated struggle capable of articulating several sectors simultaneously.? "The strike must be built and be broader to encompass public service workers in general... We must analyze the best time to start a strike with educators and public servants," Araujo Pasquetti said.

Besides being harmed by a government that keeps their salaries low, Brazilian teachers are being affected by budget cuts that deteriorate educational infrastructure and materials.

Teachers are concerned about the eventual approval of a constitutional amendment through which Bolsonaro could impose a cut of up to 25 percent on public servant's hours and salaries.

Following its vocation to favor employers, the Brazilian government also seeks that teachers contribute more to the pension system. "In the case of some categories of teachers, the contribution may involve up to a 22 percent discount. This discount and the income tax would reach an amount that would almost imply an expropriation of wages," Gonçalves Filho explained.

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