

Chilean police raid trade union office after month-long strike



Valparaiso, December 20 (RHC)-- After a month of strikes and protests by workers in Chile's main coastal port city of Valparaiso, street protests turned violent as the country's anti-riot police, "Carabineros," cracked down on demonstrators and raided a port union building throwing tear gas and entering the offices by force.

The Carabineros, whose special forces are being indicted for the killing of an unarmed Indigenous man, Camilo Catrillanca, last month, raided the Longshore Workers' Union offices, prompting union members to install barricades at the building.

The police forces launched tear gas and water cannons at the union offices and arrested some 20 people at the Valparaiso Longshoreman's office, according to the Central Confederation of Workers. The offices were set on fire after the raid.

Port leaders announced they would "radicalize" their 32-day struggle for a bonus, more formal contracts and improved working conditions, according to local media.

Union leader Osvaldo Quevedo told reporters: "If we were radicalized, now we are going to be four times more radicalized, they wanted a new year? ... there is no new year," promised Quevedo. He went on to criticize right-wing President Sebastian Piñera, who is celebrating one year since his electoral win, for

being what Piñera calls “passive.”

The incident set the South Pacific Terminal (TPS) on fire prompting Minister of Finance, Felipe Larrain to tell TPS and workers to become “more flexible” to reach an agreement quickly. Port workers in Valparaiso, a key port for fruit shipments, first walked off the job in mid-November and TPS, which operates Valparaiso's port, have met several times over the past month to no agreement.

In the midst of the clashes between Carabineros and workers, at least two protesters were run over by a car.

Jorge Martinez, a Valparaiso government official said: "The country does not deserve this level of violence over a disagreement that should have been dealt with quickly." The official added: "This is something that can affect our economy, tourism, our international reputation. We need an agreement now."

Valparaiso's port handles approximately 55 percent of Chile's fruit exports, including blueberries, nectarines, cherries, apples, kiwis and pears, according to the Chilean Blueberry Committee.

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