

Brazilian police brutally repress rallies against pension reform



Brasilia, June 17 (RHC)-- Brazilian military police were out in force over the weekend to crackdown on the thousands of protesters at massive national strike actions against government social security reforms.

In Rio de Janeiro, members of the Military Police (MP) monitored the estimated 100,000 demonstrators who took over the city's main avenues, rejecting President Jair Bolsonaro's proposal to privatize the national pension program. As citizens protested late into the night, the MP dispersed workers and students by launching tear gas and shooting rubber bullets at them. A Brasil de Fato journalist reporting from the scene says she was trapped inside a car and felt the effects of the tear gas, suffering from burning eyes and throat.

Protesters continued to shout: "I won't give up welfare or education," and "Be careful because if you mess with social security, you attack the whole country." Others refrained: "Our struggle brought workers and students together."

Bolsonaro's social security reform bill, which includes provisions to eliminate labor protections for pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers, seeks to raise the minimum retirement age to 62 years for women, and 65 for men. Anti-government demonstrators say these reforms will most affect the poor.

The president's proposal would also increase the number of contributions that a worker must make before being able to receive a monthly retirement pension, which will be equivalent to only 60 percent of his or her highest salary, rather than the current 80 percent.

In Sao Paulo where unions activists and protesters were burning tires and shutting down major roads, at least 15 students were detained by the Military Police, while two leaders at a local university were injured.

Students from the Federal Rio de Janeiro University protested along the Red Line, an expressway which connects Sao Joao de Meriti and Rio de Janeiro. They were joined there by healthcare professionals, electrical workers, and members of the Brazilian Popular Front (FBP) who were all harshly repressed by the military police.???

Petrobras oil workers stopped all their activities in the Duque Caxias, Campos dos Goytacazes and Macae refineries. During a day when even the private banks closed, open-air lectures on the pension reform took place in Brazilian cities such as Angra dos Reis, Rio das Ostras, Campos dos Goytacazes, Macae, Barra do Pirai, Barra Mansa, Valenca Volta Redonda, and Cabo Frio.

"We are showing working class strength to stop the social security reform. They are scared," said Duda Quiroga, member of a main national union, Unified Central Workers (CUT), in response of the far-right government's policies and police repression.???????

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