

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

Brazilians Rising Against Temer Government's Dismantling of Pensions and Attacks on Workers' Rights

Brussels, 16 March 2017 (ITUC OnLine): More than a million people across Brazil's 27 states took part in protests on 15 March against huge cuts to pensions and social security planned by the deeply unpopular government of Michel Temer. The protests, organised by a broad coalition including all of Brazil's trade union centres, along with homeless and landless workers' movements, indigenous groups and others, were accompanied by one-day strikes by teachers, and by workers from the metals, oil, transport and public sectors. Temer, installed by a parliament riddled with corruption after the political coup against President Dilma Rousseff, has launched a brutal programme of cuts targeting workers and the poor as his government races against time to lock in its business-friendly agenda before a new round of expected corruption cases threatens to bring the government down.

In São Paulo, former President Lula da Silva addressed a crowd of 250,000 people, saying "although weak and unrepresentative, Temer has managed to assemble in Congress a political force that no other elected president has achieved. They are determined to impose a social security reform that will practically prevent millions of Brazilians from retiring. Poorer workers, especially in the rural Northeast, will retire with half a minimum wage."

ITUC President João Felicio said, "on 15 March, Brazilian workers gave a demonstration of strength and courage. They reject these labour and social security reforms, coming from an unpopular and illegitimate government. International Support will continue to be extremely importante for the resistance to these reforms, which punish the poorest people."

Under Temer's plans, a teacher would need to work 49 years without interruption to receive her full pension, as would agriculture workers. Pensions for politicians and magistrates however would be left untouched.

Lula, still Brazil's most popular politician, is seen as the most potent threat to the Temer government, and judges supportive of Temer are expected to push ahead with legal action against Lula to stop him standing again for political office. International human rights lawyers have referred the judicial campaign against Lula, led by populist lower-court judge Sergio Moro, to the UN's Human Rights Council. Commenting on the move last July, prominent international human rights lawyer Geoffrey Robertson described the judicial persecution of Lula as a "gross violation of the most fundamental right to a fair trial".

The Temer government is poised to launch a further push aimed at weakening civil society, by attacking the rights of workers to trade union representation. This will meet further strong resistance across the country, with the full support of the international trade union movement.

The ITUC represents 181 million workers in 163 countries and territories and has 340 national affiliates.

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