

Brazilian military police attack mass protest against Temer

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Riot-equipped military police staged a violent attack on demonstrators Sunday night in Sao Paulo at the end of a mass protest against the Brazilian government of Michel Temer, installed four days earlier through the impeachment of Workers Party (PT) President Dilma Rousseff.

A crowd estimated at between 50,000 and 100,000 people filled Avenida Paulista for the demonstration, which was called despite an attempt by the state government of Governor Geraldo Alckmin of the right-wing Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) to ban all gatherings there on Sunday.

There had been anticipation of bloody confrontations after the ban and the announcement that the Brazilian Army would be placed in charge of securing the Paralympic torch relay that passed through Sao Paulo en route to Rio de Janeiro, where the Paralympic games are set to open this week. Subsequently, however, Sao Paulo's Workers Party Mayor Fernando Haddad negotiated with Alckmin to secure a permit for the protest.

Nonetheless, even before the demonstration had started, Military Police units took into custody at least 26 people, including eight adolescents, who were suspected of going to join in the protest. They were held without charges until early Monday morning.

The protest itself was entirely peaceful, with large numbers of families with children and even parents pushing baby carriages in attendance. As it began to disperse Sunday night, however, police turned violently against the crowd, firing tear gas and stun grenades as well as rubber bullets and water cannon.

The police shock troops chased demonstrators into a commercial district, even firing tear gas canisters into bars where they had sought refuge.

Effectively a police riot, Sunday night's violence

followed a pattern that has been evident since protests broke out last week against the ouster of Rousseff. In a previous protest Wednesday night, a 19-year-old university student was blinded in one eye after she was hit by shrapnel from a police grenade. It was also reported that after a protest police provoked violence in the city's theater district, going so far as to fire tear gas canisters into apartment windows.

The repressive crackdown was in line with statements made by the newly installed president, Temer, who declared before his cabinet last week following the Senate's vote to permanently oust Rousseff from the presidency that the government would no longer tolerate being called *golpista* (putschist) and would respond with "firmness" to any opposition.

In advance of the Sao Paulo demonstration, Temer, attending the G20 summit in Hangzhou, China, dismissed protests against his installation as president. "They are small groups, it seems that they are minimal groups, doesn't it?" he said Saturday. I don't know the numbers but there are 40, 50, a hundred people, nothing more than this. Now, out of 204 million Brazilians, I think that this is meaningless."

Following Sunday's demonstration in Sao Paulo, Temer's finance minister, Henrique Meirelles, issued something of a correction of the president's statement, acknowledging that it included a "fairly substantial number of people," but adding that "we already had much bigger demonstrations," presumably referring to the right-wing rallies demanding Rousseff's ouster. He went on to insist that the violently repressed protest was "part of democracy, part of the free debate in the country" that helped to legitimize the impeachment of Rousseff "before the world."

Meirelles, a former international banker and IMF official, is the point man in the drive to impose

sweeping attacks on working-class living standards and social services. He was appointed as a signal to Wall Street of the government's commitment to the profit interests of the banks and transnationals. He played essentially the same role when he was appointed to head the country's central bank under the first PT government of former metalworkers union leader, President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

Speaking on Monday, Meirelles dismissed the importance of the protests, declaring, "what the voters are worried about today, correctly, is their own jobs." He claimed that the economic policies being pursued by Temer, including a 20-year social spending freeze, massive cuts to social security benefits and a counter-reform of labor laws, were necessary to reverse the country's deep economic crisis, which has driven the official unemployment rate to nearly 12 percent.

"The important thing is to show that the rhythm of carrying out the economic adjustment is on course and that it is not suffering any change in direction," he said.

While the working class is the main target of these policies, which aim to place the full burden of the crisis on its shoulders, the demonstration in Sao Paulo was largely composed of sections of students and the middle class. The Workers Party-affiliated trade union federation, the CUT, sent only its functionaries, mobilizing no section of workers from the industrial districts surrounding the city.

Various pseudo-left groups along with the "social movements" aligned with the PT and sections of the union bureaucracy attempted to politically steer the mass protest toward the demand of "diretas já." "This was the slogan, for immediate direct presidential elections, that was raised 30 years ago in the waning days of the US-backed military dictatorship. It was used to subordinate the working class to the campaign of various bourgeois parties to organize an orderly transfer of power from military to civilian capitalist rule.

The demand, raised once again by both Rousseff and her predecessor, Lula, along with the PT's pseudo-left satellites, has the same essential content today, and would serve to politically legitimize the change in regime brought about through the impeachment as well as the agenda of sweeping attacks on the working class that is now being implemented.



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