

As Brazilian oil workers' strike grows, Labor Court rules it "abusive"

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With more workers joining the strike at Brazil's giant state-owned energy conglomerate Petrobras, last Tuesday, February 4, Labor Court minister Ives Gandra Martins Filho ruled that 90 percent of the Petrobras workers must continue to work during the strike.

The minister also imposed daily fines of up to R\$ 500,000 (US\$ 116,000) against unions that disobey his decision. According to the oil workers' union federation FUP, which is affiliated to the Workers Party (PT)-controlled CUT union federation, the daily fines could cost the 13 unions affiliated with it as much as R\$ 4.5 million (US\$ 1 million).

According to Martins Filho, "there is a risk of shortages" due to the strike. In addition, he found that Petrobras had not breached the collective bargaining agreement signed last November as the FUP claims. The FUP has already appealed the minister's dictatorial decision, which will be discussed by the Labor Court plenary and may be reversed.

Petrobras workers have been on strike since February 1 against the closure of the Nitrogen Fertilizer Factory (Fafen) in the southern state of Paraná, the layoff of its nearly 1,000 workers and the moves by the government of Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro to privatize refineries and subsidiaries of the energy conglomerate.

Martins Filho's decision, prepared in close contact with the Bolsonaro government, is an attack on the right to strike by oil workers and other sections of the Brazilian working class. However, Petrobras oil workers have defied the minister's decision, deciding last week to continue their strike.

With the oil workers' decision to continue the strike, on February 6, Martins Filho ordered the blocking of the bank accounts of the unions participating in the walkout, while allowing temporary workers to be hired to scab on the strike. He declared that the strike is "abusive" and has "political connotation."

Martins Filho has a long record of attacks on workers, particularly oil workers. A right-wing judge and member of the reactionary Catholic order Opus Dei, he banned the start of the strike by oil workers last November, also ruling the strike abusive and threatening to block the union's bank accounts and to impose millions in fines. The unconstitutional character of Martins Filho's decision led to its being overruled at the beginning of last December by the Labor Court plenary, which considered his decision to be a violation of the right to strike.

Martins Filho's decision has not been the only police state

measure employed to suppress the struggle of Petrobras workers. Last Monday, 120 military police officers were deployed to the Duque de Caxias Refinery, in Rio de Janeiro. There are also reports that workers were prevented by the Petrobras management from leaving two refineries to keep them in operation, in addition to numerous cases of harassment against striking workers.

The Bolsonaro government is closely monitoring the strike movement at Petrobras. Last year, the daily *Folha de S. Paulo* reported that the Institutional Security Office (GSI), which controls the Brazilian Intelligence Agency (ABIN), was "closely following" the process that led to the signing of the Collective Labor Agreement (ACT) between the company and FUP "in view of the risk of strike".

Martins Filho's decision attests to the fear within the Bolsonaro government and the Brazilian ruling elite that the strike of Petrobras workers will grow and spread to other sections of public and private sector workers.

Last week, teachers from the southeastern state of Minas Gerais, the second most populous in the country with 90,000 teachers in the state public schools, and from the northeastern state of Piauí, which is governed by the PT, decided to go on strike against low wages. These strikes, which are taking place as the school year has just begun, are a continuation of the wave of teachers strikes in several Brazilian states at the end of 2019.

Also last week, the CUT affiliated postal workers union federation, Fentect, was pressured by rank-and-file workers to announce a national strike starting February 12. Since last year, postal workers have been struggling against the privatization of the company, scheduled by the Bolsonaro government for next year, and a nearly 100 percent increase in contributions to their health care plan.

However, for the second time this year, Fentect postponed the strike until March 3 after meeting with the other postal worker union federation, Findect, affiliated with the union federation CTB, which is controlled by the Maoist Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB).

Meanwhile, the strike of Petrobras workers continues to grow. On Saturday, according to FUP, the strike involved nearly 20,000 oil workers, affecting 88 Petrobras units in 13 Brazilian states, including 37 offshore oil platforms, 11 of the 13 Petrobras refineries and 17 terminals of Transpetro, the subsidiary responsible for transporting oil and gas.

Last Friday, as the oil workers' strike completed one week,

Petrobras workers and supporters gathered in front of the company's headquarters in Rio de Janeiro for a rally. A PCdoB federal deputy from Rio, Jandira Feghali, made a nationalist speech denouncing the Bolsonaro government for its "total alignment and submission" to the US, which, according to her, undermines national development. She added that we "Publicly demand that president [of the Lower House Rodrigo] Maia help in the negotiation and enforcement of the collective labor agreement (ACT)".

Striking Petrobras workers, however, have nothing to gain from this appeal to Maia, who is the leader of the Democratas (DEM), the successor to ARENA, the party which ruled under Brazilian military dictatorship. PCdoB has a long record of alliances with Maia and his DEM, having supported his election for president of the Brazilian Lower House in 2017 and 2019. Last year, Maia was largely responsible for approving the Bolsonaro government's pension reform.

Feghali's call comes amid the moves of the PCdoB and other Brazilian parties to form an electoral coalitions for this year's municipal elections, which, in turn, will prepare the coalitions for the 2022 presidential election. In late January, the party launched the "Movimento 65", which replaced the hammer and sickle in the party's logo with the green and yellow colors of the Brazilian flag. According to the "Movimento 65" manifesto, its goal is "to unite leaders of the working class and of business segments", who have a "commitment to the defense of Brazil."

The movement's goal is to reproduce throughout Brazil the political alliance that governs the northeastern state of Maranhão. There, the governor of the PCdoB, Flavio Dino, who is being mentioned as a candidate for the 2022 presidential election, governs in alliance with the DEM and, in his previous term, governed in alliance with the right-wing Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB). In the last few weeks, Dino met with multi-millionaire TV host and neoliberal critic of Bolsonaro, Luciano Huck, who has close ties with the PSDB and is also being cited as a candidate for the 2022 presidential election, and with former PSDB president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC). Last year, Governor Dino followed the Bolsonaro government in pushing through pension reform in his state.

Last week, the PT also moved toward creating a broad front for the next elections. Last Monday, in the demonstration called by the union federations against the "deindustrialization" of Brazil and the presence of Bolsonaro at the Industry Federation of the State of São Paulo (FIESP), the president of the CUT, Sérgio Nobre, stated, "I have a lot of respect for many [FIESP] directors because I have already negotiated with many of them. Now, FIESP has not been an employer union for a long time, it has become a political apparatus of [its president] Paulo Skaf."

Nobre's complaint against Skaf exposes the fact that he and the other union federations leaders do not see FIESP as a class enemy. What he and the other union federations leaders would like to do is to replace Bolsonaro by negotiating away the interests of Brazilian workers with FIESP. This was further exposed in the document released by the union federations on the February 3 demonstration, which repeated the old language of bourgeois nationalism, boosting the industrial sector as of great importance for a

"development project", which will only be possible with "structured actions that involve different government bodies in tune with union and business groups."

Then, last Friday, *Folha* reported that Lula, after saying that Bolsonaro had the right to complete his four-year term of attacks on the Brazilian working class, "has defended the expansion of tactical alliances in the confrontation with the Bolsonaro government" and that the PT had authorized alliances with parties such as FHC's PSDB and Maia's DEM.

In view of the negative repercussions, the party's national directory, which met in Rio de Janeiro to celebrate the PT's 40th anniversary, hurried to launch a document defending the formation of a Popular Democratic Front in 2022 to rescue "the project of popular government initiated with Lula, in 2003."

Lula's alleged "popular government" was based from the start on a series of alliances with right-wing elements from the Brazilian bourgeoisie and subordination to the international financial markets. To assure the capitalist ruling class of his government's reliability, Lula chose as his vice-president, the right-wing industrialist José Alencar, and Henrique Meirelles, the former general director of the Fleet Boston Financial Group, as president of the Brazilian Central Bank.

The PT's document defends an "emergency employment and income plan" and a "fair and solidarity tax reform", in addition to defending as its "strategic electoral center the construction of alliances" with the PCdoB, the bourgeois parties PDT and PSB, and the pseudo-left party PSOL. According to the document, "this is how we will accumulate strength and the conditions to DEFEAT BOLSONARO AND HIS GOVERNMENT."

The attempt to present these alliances as some sort of "left" alternative to Bolsonaro is a fraud. The PT backs an alliance with the PCdoB, which in turn backs an alliance with the FHC's PSDB and Rodrigo Maia's DEM, which support the government of the fascist president.

Petrobras oil workers and those who are starting their fight against the Bolsonaro government and the PT state governments must reject the nationalist and pro-corporate appeals of the unions and the calls of the PCdoB and PT to form a broad front against the Bolsonaro government. The consequence of this political movement is the political subordination of the working class to factions of the Brazilian ruling elite dissatisfied for tactical reasons with the Bolsonaro government, for whom the PT and PCdoB have served as spokesmen.

The urgent task for Brazilian workers is the formation of rank-and-file committees to overcome the conciliatory policy of the unions and bourgeois left and pseudo-left parties with an internationalist and socialist program. This requires building the Brazilian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International to lead the working class in its struggle against Bolsonaro and for a workers' government in Brazil.



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