

Brazilian autoworkers strike after Renault fires 747 workers

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After carmaker Renault announced the firing of 747 employees at its plant in São José dos Pinhais in the southern state of Paraná, more than 7,000 of the factory's workers voted unanimously in favor of a strike, which began on Wednesday.

This slashing of jobs comes on top of the termination of 300 workers on temporary contracts in mid-May. The end of their contracts was anticipated by the corporation's reduction of up to 70 percent of their hours and wages, which were funded by the Brazilian government.

In June, about 400 Nissan workers were fired at the plant in Resende, in the state of Rio de Janeiro. As the two companies operate under a partnership, the factories in Resende and São José dos Pinhais have a shared production structure.

Anger among Renault's workers has been ignited by the fact that most of those laid off this week were employees out because of work-related injuries, or even due to coronavirus infections.

"There are several employees, several friends, who have respiratory problems and have been dismissed because they are at risk," said a worker interviewed on the picket line. "We heard of people who tested positive for COVID-19 but were dismissed in the same way."

The worker reported being fired while he was on leave because of a work-related accident, and that he received the notice by e-mail. "I'm here not only for myself, but also for the others," he said. "There's a [fired] fellow worker of mine who was having surgery; his surgery was yesterday.

"You did your part, but you're just another statistic, just another number," he declared. "Unfortunately, that's what happens in big corporations. You're making profit, you're giving your blood, you're

working overtime ... I have worked Saturdays and Sundays. But once you get hurt and you can't help 100 percent anymore, goodbye."

On Wednesday night, the police attacked the picket line of hundreds of workers and their families at the factory gates. Demanding that they let company buses pass, the police pointed their guns at the workers and arrested four union delegates.

The destruction of jobs at Renault-Nissan is taking place in the context of skyrocketing unemployment in Brazil. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, from the beginning of the pandemic until May, about eight million jobs were wiped out in the country. For the first time since the survey began, more than half of the Brazilian working-age population is unemployed.

The explosion of the social crisis has been restrained, until now, in large part because of the emergency aid of 600 reais (about US\$115) offered by the government, which reached 43 percent of Brazilian homes in June. The payment of the benefit is scheduled to stop at the end of August.

The crisis facing Brazilian workers is rooted in what are essentially international processes. The recent layoffs in the Brazilian factories are part of plans by Renault-Nissan for massive cuts in jobs and closures of plants around the world that were announced by the corporations in May.

After receiving a €5 billion bailout from the French government, Renault announced plans to slash 15,000 jobs around the world, 4,600 of them in France. Nissan, on the other hand, has since 2019 declared its intention to cut 12,500 jobs. After the pandemic, it escalated this threat to 20,000.

Last month, thousands of Nissan workers in Spain went on strike against the closure of the company's

Barcelona plant, which threatened 2,500 jobs and another 20,000 indirectly linked to its production.

In the midst of this situation, the Metalworkers Union of Curitiba region, which is directing the strike, and the Brazilian trade unions as a whole, seek to divert the Renault workers' strike towards a nationalist program of competition for jobs and international investments.

A statement signed by all the trade union federations, including the Morenoite-led CSP-Conlutas, declared: "We repudiate the intransigent attitude of the current management of the Renault plant in São José dos Pinhais/PR, because we know that the company has been receiving fiscal incentives from the Paraná state government precisely to generate and maintain jobs."

The investments they referred to were provided under the "Paraná Competitivo" program, which has been providing massive tax exemptions to Renault and other large transnational corporations, creating more profitable conditions for them to establish their plants in the state rather than in other regions of Brazil or other countries.

Such programs, defended by the unions and implemented widely by Workers Party governments, under such programs as "Inovar-Auto," represent the interests of the capitalist class and only pave the way to new rounds of wage and job cuts. This is precisely the program that the trade unions have been fighting for in recent weeks in their demonstrations for a "Production Resumption Agenda."

The only way forward for Renault's workers lies in directly confronting the profit interests of the corporation. The transnational character of the auto companies also poses the necessity of Brazilian workers coordinating their struggle with autoworkers internationally, who are suffering the same attacks.

This will only be possible through the creation of rank-and-file committees, politically independent of the unions, that will fight not only for jobs but also for the right to work under safe conditions defined and regulated by the workers themselves.



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