

Union prepares sellout of Renault strike in Brazil

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The 18-day-old strike at Renault in São José dos Pinhais, Paraná, against the dismissal of 747 worker is facing the threat of being sold out in a deal between the union and the company.

The struggle, involving thousands of workers and their families in assemblies, picket lines and street protests, is under threat of being shut down with an agreement that validates the slashing of jobs.

On Wednesday, a decision by the Labor Justice of Paraná declared the layoffs at Renault illegal for being decided outside of a negotiation with the Metalworkers Union of Great Curitiba (SMC), and ordered the immediate rehiring of those fired.

The Brazilian trade union federations and pseudo-left parties supporting them celebrated this decision as a victory for the workers at Renault. So did the SMC, as it rushed to set up a new round of negotiations with the company in order to get an “agreement between the parties, no matter what the agreement is,” in the words of the union’s president Sérgio Butka.

“We have a meeting scheduled [for Friday] to ... discuss a middle ground, which is important for the company, important for the workers, important for Paraná,” said Butka. “Let’s go back to the negotiations table, let’s discuss the PDV (Voluntary Resignation Plan), let’s discuss the PLR (Participation in Profits and Results), let’s discuss competitiveness.”

The conditions that the union says it is negotiating are not a “middle ground,” but the company’s terms presented in a sweetened form that can be sold to the workers as some kind of “victory.” Their aim is to to break the resistance that has grown over the last 18 days.

In a video recorded on a picket line last Friday, the workers demonstrated their willingness to confront even violent police repression to defend their strike.

“The police are right over there. They are just waiting to beat up the workers, all of us injured workers,” says the worker who was filming. “We’re going to keep recording to see when they’re going to advance towards the workers...

It’s not the union that’s blocking the gate, it’s the workers.”

One of the main sources of the workers’ anger is the conditions under which the layoffs took place, targeting employees removed from job due to illness or injuries suffered at work.

The wife of one of the fired workers, who is part of a group of wives who actively support the strike, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that the workers feel they have been worn out and discarded by Renault.

“[My husband] has injuries on both knees, both shoulders, his right ankle, right elbow and two spinal injuries,” she said. “He has always been healthy, and suffered all these injuries working there. Now he has to take medicine even to sleep.

“The feeling is that the company has taken advantage of the fragile moment of this pandemic to perform this cruelty. But the population understood this as wrong and the workers’ vote was 100 percent in favor of the strike.”

Many of those fired were off the job because of suspicions that they were infected with COVID-19. “It’s very sad because several were at home awaiting results, so the COVID positives may be greater than we know,” she said.

She added that despite the infections among its workers, the factory continued to operate normally until the strike broke out. “Because of the large number of people, the contagion is inevitable. Several sectors [in the plant] have suspicious cases. The workers are afraid for their families at home, but they have to go to work and end up exposing themselves.”

Without being able to bypass the immense opposition that has arisen, from not only from those fired, but also their more than 7,000 colleagues, the union is trying to divert it to serve the company’s interests.

“You are on strike because of the way the 747 left the factory, without any respect, without any care for human rights,” the union’s spokesperson declared on its Wednesday’s live stream. “Of course, it is a prerogative of the company that hires us to terminate our contract, as long as it is done in a humane way. There is a way that it can be

done.”

The jobs that Renault is seeking to destroy are jobs that won't come back. Regardless of the bonuses that are offered to each dismissed worker, they are going to be added to the army of unemployed, in which half of Brazilians are already enlisted, and which is growing rapidly around the globe.

Clearly exposing the foundations of the SMC's policy, a union official declared at a rally at the factory gate on Thursday: vWe need Renault. Renault is a great company, a great brand and we want Renault in Brazil... We are not against capital, we are not against the businessmen.”

The open obsession of the Metalworkers Union of the Great Curitiba is to guarantee the “productivity” and “competitiveness” of the companies for which it operates. Such interests not only fail to correspond with those of the working class, they are actively hostile to them.

Over the last ten years, Renault has broken sales records in Brazil, jumping from a national market share of 4.8 percent in 2010 to over 10 percent in 2019. These achievements, which the SMC calls their own, were obtained, on the one hand, through super-exploitation on the production lines, expressed in the large number of injured workers. On the other hand, they are owed to the substantial state incentives granted to Renault by the Competitive Paraná program, which diverts public money from services needed by the working class to the coffers of billionaire shareholders.

For Renault to continue, says the SMC to the workers, it needs more: new governmental incentives and new concessions from them, the slashing of jobs or valternatives that the company can use before simply dismissing.”

The crisis facing Renault workers today reflects the transformation of the nature of trade unions over the past decades, connected to the globalization of the capitalist productive process.

The revolutionary development of information and transport technologies has allowed companies like Renault-Nissan to establish themselves as transnational corporations, operating through interconnected global supply chains, exploiting the workforce across national borders.

Under these conditions, trade unions have ceased to defend even the minimum interests of the working class. In the globalized economy, the nationalist trade unions fight to attract the transnational corporations to their countries or regions, offering more competitive conditions, that is, cheaper labor.

Workers must draw the necessary conclusions and adopt a program that corresponds to the objective conditions.

The attacks on workers in Paraná are only a part of a global plan of Renault-Nissan to destroy jobs in every country in which they operate. After receiving a 5 billion euro bailout from the French government, Renault

announced plans to cut 15,000 jobs worldwide, 4,600 of them in France. And Nissan declared its intention to cut 20,000 jobs.

Unlike the unions, the working class is not divided by national interests. Against the global restructuring plans of the transnational corporations, workers need to advance an international strategy of struggle. They must join their colleagues in other countries to fight for the maintenance of all jobs, decent wages and safe working conditions during the pandemic.

Renault workers in Brazil have been harassed by supposedly “international unions,” such as Industrial and the United Auto Workers (UAW), feigning international support for their struggle. These organizations, which are fleeing the explosive revolts of the working class thousands of miles away, have direct links with European and American imperialist states.

The global unification of the working class will not happen through these organizations; on the contrary. They are in Brazil only as police agents of transnational capital, seeking to contain the explosion of international class struggle.

Workers need to create new politically independent organizations, rank-and-file factory committees. Through them, they will be able to appeal directly to their international colleagues, making extensive use of social media and the internet.

The International Committee of the Fourth International, which publishes the *World Socialist Web Site*, is the only force committed to developing a strategy for this international struggle, with the perspective of transferring political power to the working class.



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