

Strike at Renault in Brazil demands more jobs

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Some 5,000 Renault workers at the Ayrton Senna Industrial Complex (CAS) in São José dos Pinhais, in the metropolitan region of Curitiba, in the southern Brazilian state of Paraná, are continuing their struggle in defiance of the union's attempts to end the movement with a defeat.

Workers voted for a new 24-hour strike on June 11, just a week after the Metalworkers Union of Greater Curitiba (SMC) ended a 29-day strike.

At the time, SMC president Sérgio Butka said that the end of the strike was “a vote of confidence by the workers in the company,” which “committed itself to presenting a new proposal within 72 hours.”

The workers' primary demand is the hiring of 300 workers to keep up with the intense pace of the production line. Throughout the strike, the company offered to hire 50 workers, and now, after the suspension of the strike, it offered 70, but this was again rejected by a mass assembly, resulting in a new walkout at the factory.

The workers had demonstrated dissatisfaction and anger with conditions at the company during the strike. They rejected the company's proposal three times in a row. In addition to hiring, the movement is also demanding R\$30,000 (US\$5,600) in profit sharing (PS) and a 6.8 percent pay rise, compared to the R\$25,000 (US\$4,700) PS and just over a 4 percent pay rise offered by Renault.

Being overworked on the production line has caused workers to fall ill systematically. According to union data published on the Legislative Assembly of Paraná website, a thousand workers are currently on leave from the factory due to repetitive strain injuries.

Also, according to the SMC itself, evidence of the current intensity of work “is the worker engagement rate on the production line, which is at 95 percent, that

is, within the work process, the worker has only 5 percent time to take a ‘breath.’”

The daily *Bem Paraná* reported that workers cannot leave the production line even for bathroom breaks. According to it, “Due to the lack of absentees, there are reports of workers having to wait up to 40 minutes to use the bathroom.”

With a daily output of around 800 vehicles, the plant stopped producing 15,545 vehicles during the strike. The movement also affected the Horse engine plant in the same complex as Renault, which has around 600 workers producing 900 engines daily.

To pressure the workers to return to work, Renault/Horse had cut their pay and had the support of the capitalist courts, which ruled the strike illegal.

In the first decision of the Regional Labor Court, on May 9, Judge Marco Antonio Vianna Mansur ordered an immediate return to work, stating that there was a “clear appearance of an abusive work stoppage” and imposing a daily fine of R\$30,000 (US\$5,600) on the union if it failed to comply with the decision. As the strike movement continued, on May 17, the Court increased the fine to R\$100,000 (US\$18,700).

The suspension of this fine was the union's great “victory.” In ending the 29-day strike, the SMC claimed that the company “accepted the proposal to suspend the court injunction against the strike movement.”

The Renault plant in São José dos Pinhais currently has around 5,000 workers, 3,500 of whom are production staff and 1,500 management staff. That's 2,000 fewer workers than in 2020 when a strike brought the plant to a standstill.

At the time, the workers were mobilizing against a mass layoff by the company. Even then, the workers told the WSWs that they were falling ill because of the

intensity of the production line. They also denounced the company for trying to take advantage of the pandemic to “discard” employees with illnesses or injuries acquired at work.

The strike lasted for 20 days and even faced police repression. The movement ended with the union agreeing to reinstate some of the 747 dismissed workers on the condition that others would give up their jobs through a Voluntary Dismissal Plan.

The current condition of a reduced and over-exploited workforce is the product of a series of defeats led by the union, whose president, Sergio Butka, has revealed himself in recent years to be an essential player for capitalist interests in the region.

The role played by Butka and the SMC was exposed in a statement by the president of Renault in Brazil in December of last year when the company announced R\$2 billion (US\$370,000) in investments at the plant for the production of a “completely new” C-SUV with a hybrid engine.

According to the company’s website, “For this investment cycle, the conditions granted by the state of Paraná and the current collective agreement with the Metalworkers Union of the Metropolitan Region of Curitiba (SMC), representing Renault in Brazil, were critical.”

As well as being the president of the SMC, Butka is the president of the Metalworkers Federation of Paraná (Fetim) and of the Força Sindical in Paraná. Força Sindical is the country’s second largest trade union federation. While having around 1,700 affiliated unions, its job is to keep workers divided in each of these unions, blocking the unification of their struggles nationally and internationally.

Renault is a French company with plants worldwide and is part of an international race for profits amid a restructuring of the auto industry with a focus on electric and hybrid vehicles. This restructuring has been carried out through a jobs bloodbath internationally.

It is in this context that the struggle of the workers at Renault in Brazil has unfolded. The movement for more jobs at Renault cannot be taken forward by Butka and the SMC. This movement requires the political independence of the workers from the union bureaucracies and the capitalist state, as well as an international orientation, which addresses workers in other factories not only in Brazil but around the world.



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