Brazil Students Occupy Nearly 60 Schools to Reject Austerity

Brasilia, October 11 (RHC)-- Brazilian high school students occupied at least 60 schools across the country -- mostly in the southern state of Parana -- to protest the unelected government of President Michel Temer and his administration's assault on public education that includes an unprecedented spending freeze on educational spending for the next two decades.

Occupations in Parana began last week before spreading to other states, including Sao Paulo. The movement is reminiscent of mass occupations last year that swept across dozens of public schools in Sao Paulo to reject austerity measures slated to shut down nearly 100 high schools in the state.

The latest protests have sparked a police crackdown that pushed the students at one high school in Sao Paulo, Caetano de Campos, to abandon the occupation in the interests of keeping students safe. According to Brazil's Midia Ninja, military police stormed the facility in an "'investigation' that looked more like an anti-terrorist operation."

According to tallies by movements on social media, students have occupied at least 50 schools in Parana alone. The protests reject the Temer government's provisional federal education reform, which critics say failed to consult students and teachers and will produce a deterioration in public education.

The controversial reforms, announced last month and now under expert review, would slash the number

of mandatory courses for high school students by half. Students and teachers alike have demanded the government include the education sector in any proposed changes.

Students have also slammed the Temer administration's latest neo-liberal bombshell -- a decision to freeze public spending on health, education, social welfare programs and other public services for 20 years, until 2037. The Proposed Constitutional Amendment 241/2016, known as PEC 241, needs to secure approval in Congress, but Temer's government expects it to pass.

Protesters argue the unelected reactionary government is aiming to limit critical thinking with a stranglehold on public education. Teachers have also voiced support for the student movement. In Parana, the union of public school teachers, known as APP, wrote in a statement that local educators recognize that occupations are aimed at defending quality public education and voice legitimate concerns that teachers also share. The union announced plans to strike in the "coming days."

"We reject the proposals of Michel Temer's government that threaten education," said teacher and APP President Hermes Leao in the statement, adding that teachers "welcome" the students' actions. "We will not accept a rollback of workers' rights, much less unilateral and arbitrary decisions to change education."

The Brazilian lawyer's collective Rights for All has also backed the student movement by issuing a guide on social media providing basic legal information for those involved in occupations, including advice on how to interact with law enforcement officers.

The Brazilian Union of Secondary Students has called for donations, including food and toiletries, to help fuel the occupations.

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