

As Brazilian Workers Prepare for Strike, Temer Vows to Continue Austerity



Brasilia, April 25 (RHC)-- As Brazil's workers and social organizations prepare for one of the largest strikes against the government of unelected President Michel Temer, the unpopular head of state has insisted on moving forward with aggressive neo-liberal measures, saying that growing corruption scandals will not put a damper on his administration's economic plans for the South American country. Friday's general strike, ramping up pressure on the government, will come as corruption scandals continue to swirl around Temer and his closest allies.

In an interview with EFE news agency, Temer boasted the approval of a 20-year freeze on public spending and highlighted proposals to introduce a minimum retirement age and "strong protectionism" of labor laws as among his government's reforms with "fundamental" importance. All three controversial moves have sparked widespread protests across Brazil in recent months.

Michel Temer also argued that it is necessary to differentiate "the populist act from the popular," which he said was "for the benefit of the people, and demands a certain period to be recognized." According to Temer, low acceptance of reforms is due to his management not being guided by "populist acts," which he argued "are irresponsible, because they produce a good effect tomorrow, but a disaster the day after

tomorrow, which he claims has been taking place.

The president of the Central Workers' Union, or CUT for its initials in Portuguese, Beatriz Cerqueira, said the upcoming general strike scheduled for Friday will mark a milestone in the history of trade union demands in the country. "The strike is urgent and necessary to make the mass struggle and stop that conservative wave that they try to carry forward although the government and a national Congress that don't have legitimacy for that, by the imposition of a new model of state," Cerqueira said. "Today is not about trying to reach new achievements but to avoid setbacks," Cerqueira added, "which is why it's necessary to defeat the pension and labor reforms."

Temer has claimed that the deepening scandal in the country over corruption will not affect his government's agenda and ability to seek approval of proposed reforms. But eight of Temer's ministers are under investigation for corruption as part of the probe known as Operation Car Wash, focused on uncovering bribes the country's largest construction conglomerate, Odebrecht, and other companies paid politicians to secure contracts with the state-run oil company Petrobras.

Meanwhile, a third of the senators and 39 lawmakers are targeted in the investigation, which could prove a challenge once trying to seek legislative approval of the reforms. Temer is not under formal investigation, but Odebrecht officials alleged they had paid bribes of at least \$40 million to him during a meeting in 2010. As president, Temer has immunity from charges for alleged crimes committed before his term in office.

According to a recent poll, Temer — installed in office through a parliamentary coup against his predecessor Dilma Rousseff last year — has an approval rating of just five percent, while 93 percent of Brazilians reject his policies of neoliberal reforms and the dismantling of social plans carried out by his administration.

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