

Brazil: Bank Workers Strike and Protest in the Streets

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Bank workers in Brasilia, capital of Brazil, met in a general assembly and voted to continue their strike which began on Wednesday. The striking bank workers decided that they will have more pickets in front of the main offices of the countries biggest bank, the state-run Banco do Brasil, as well as the private-sector giants, Bradesco and Itaú. For today they have scheduled marches at various locations in Brasilia.

The president of the bank workers union in Brasilia, Jacy Afonso, made it clear at the general assembly that the pickets must not interfere with client access to the banks. Court injunctions have already been issued ordering the union to allow clients to enter the banks.

It is reported that in Brasilia 95% of the branches of the Caixa Economic Federal (also state-run) and Banco do Brasil only have ATMs working for clients.

The striking bank workers are demanding salary adjustments to cover losses due to inflation, plus a real increase of 17.68%, along with a share of bank profits.

Ealier this year, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva commented on the legitimacy of strikes. Protests are legitimate in a democratic country, but it is important for people not to lose a sense of responsibility, said Lula in an interview on the "Breakfast with the President" radio broadcast.

The President referred to the strike by some segments of the civil service that are demanding higher salaries. According to Lula, marches, protests, and strikes represent societal conquests and signify the exercise of democracy.

He pointed out that it is important for leaders to be sensitive enough to understand that social problems in Brazil represent a debt to the population.

For the President, it is normal that civil servants want to receive a salary readjustment now, "because, among other things, people see my government and the PT's victory as a chance for them to let themselves go to a greater extent in their exercise of democracy and demand-making."

In his "Breakfast with the President" interview, Lula also explained that reorganizing a country's economy makes it difficult to satisfy many demands.

"The union leader knows that when we are concerned with controlling inflation, regaining credibility, and resuming economic growth, it does not do to make an absurd request."

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