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Brazil

It's not a crime to struggle! End the trial of José Rainha and Claudemir Silva!

- News from around the world -

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Sentenced to twenty one years and five months of imprisonment by the 3rd chamber of the TRF-SP (Federal Regional Court-Sao Paulo) José Rainha Junior, leader of the landless, is threatened with immediate imprisonment. Alongside him, Claudemir Silva Novais was sentenced to five years and six months in prison, and four months and twenty days in detention.

José (Zé) Rainha Junior and Claudemir Silva Novais are accused of extortion. They allegedly forced two agribusiness companies and a motorway concession company to pay a contribution to the landless social movement under threat of occupation. But they are also accused on having diverted the sums received as well as some federal aid (in the form of basic food products) for their own benefit.

The prosecution provided no evidence. These were only indirect testimonies – gossip, effectively – and alleged telephone tapping, truncated, decontextualized and in any case illegal. All this is happening in the Portal de Paranapema region, west of São Paulo, the scene of violent rural conflicts for forty years, where landowners, judges and commissioners know they belong to the same world.

A relentlessness that comes from afar

Zé Rainha has already been imprisoned 13 times. But he has also won dozens of victories in the occupations in which he has been involved, often on the front line. He has thus totalled more than 20 trials, all related to his activity in the peasant movements. He has also been subject to a series of attacks, the last in 2002 by a landowner.

The real issue in this trial, in Bolsonaro's Brazil, is to make José Rainha Jr pay for more than forty years dedicated to the fight against the big landowners, their control over public lands, and the eviction of small farmers, indigenous people and Quilombolas from their plots of land. It is to make him pay for having been, in the 1980s, one of the leaders of the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Movement of Landless Rural Workers - MST), and today of the Frente Nacional de Lutas no Campo e Cidade (FNL). [1] Finally, to make him pay for leading three major occupations in this region of Pontal de Paranapema: Miriam Farias (in Sandovalina), Mandela (in Rosana), and Paulo Freire in the region of Marabá Paulista involving more than 2,500 families.

Determination intact

Prison does not scare José Rainha Jr., but he will not passively witness the political persecution of the movement fighting for land, work and housing. He defies his accusers: "Show me the evidence! There is none. It is a political trial, it is the trial of resistance, of the struggle for land, of agrarian reform. Every time the peasant movement rose up, those who were not killed were put in prison".

Zé's defence has strong legal arguments to make on appeal to the STJ (High Court of Justice) and the STF (Federal High Court). But it is the solidarity movements, the demonstrations, the positions of the organizations of workers, peasants, students, activists in Brazil and around the world, that will give him the vital energy it needs. There will be a march across the approximately 100 km between Sorocaba and São Paulo for the defence of José Rainha Junior

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and Claudemir Silva. And remember the demands of the Frente Nacional de Lutas no Campo e Cidade (FNL): the right to land, housing, work, education and, in the face of the pandemic, public and free health.

PS:

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[1] 1. Founded in 2014, the FNL (National Front of Struggle in the Countryside and City) is present in at least 11 of Brazil's states, with more than 20,000 people involved in its occupations. Its goal is to reach 100,000 by 2022.