

Despite Evidence of Innocence, Judge Denies Freedom to 4 Political Prisoners of Manoel Ribeiro

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Continuing the unfounded campaign of criminalization against those who fight for land, on June 29, in Vilhena, in the southern cone of the state of Rondonia, there was a hearing where Ezequiel, Luis Carlos, Estefane, and Ricardo, political prisoners of Camp Manoel Ribeiro, were denied their freedom.

The hearing, as well as the whole process since the arrest, was full of absurdities denounced by the League of Poor Peasants (LCP).

Judge Lilian Pegoraro Bilharva, according to the LCP, was clearly on the side of the latifundium (the big landlords) and had already set the sentence even before the trial: punishment of political prisoners to intimidate all those who fight for land.

One of the facts that started the controversial trial was the prohibition of the participation of dozens of representatives of several democratic organizations, and of students and professors, despite the fact that the Brazilian law

establishes that trials must be public, and this particular trial was held through a virtual hearing.

However, even before this arbitrary action, one of the facts occurred that highlights the farce surrounding the arrest and trial of the peasants. The videos recorded by the military police car cameras and drone during the illegal operation that resulted in the arrest of the campers, on May 14, which were requested by the defense, were shared only a few hours before the trial, which made it impossible for the defense lawyers to explore the evidence in favor of the peasants, since they didn't even have time to watch them before the hearing.

The content of the videos is revealing as to the farcical actions aimed at criminalization. According to the images there was no confrontation. When the peasants saw the vehicles arriving, they just let off fireworks at a long distance and left, which, according to the peasants, proves that there were no shots fired against the police, as the officers alleged. The videos from the vehicles' cameras also prove that the workers didn't break the cameras or the vehicles, but do prove that the damage was caused by the police's abrupt invasion of the pasture.

During the hearing, the testimonies of the police officers were contradictory. In their speeches, they reaffirmed the demonstrably farcical version of an alleged attack. Besides the members of the repression forces, the manager of the Ipiranga farm, the farm of a latifundium landlord neighboring the Manoel Ribeiro area, a representative of the latifundium, also testified. Despite criminalizing the LCP and the peasant struggle, he was forced to state that he did not see who cut the fence of the Ipiranga farm, that he did not see any gun with the peasants, nor hear any shots.

In an attempt to characterize the peasants as leaders, the prosecutor, João Paulo Lopes—who according to the complaints has proven to be in favor of the latifundium—asked incessantly

about the issue. The peasants explained that the decisions were taken collectively through the Popular Assembly, that drugs and alcoholic beverages were forbidden in the camp, and that the peasants had only slingshots, stones, firecrackers, wooden shields, and firecrackers at their disposal. Not satisfied, he asked about the LCP flags.

According to the movement, the prosecutor insidiously insisted on the issue of the flags, saying: "If there is no direction of the movement, how do they make the flags?" Estefane's response was: "With cloth, brush, and paint," a fact that aroused the wrath of the accuser, who began to shout in anger: "I'm not stupid! You're insulting me!" He continued treating the young peasant in an aggressive manner. The LCP also claims that during the trial he was helped by the judge in the accusation that the young woman was the leader of the LCP, because she was "well-informed."

Even with all the evident proofs of the farce set up to criminalize the peasant struggle through the arrest of the four young people, the revocation of their preventive detention was denied. The prosecutor wrote in his final statement that "the area in question still breathes an air of insecurity and uneasiness" and that "the freedom of the petitioners will certainly stimulate new invasions, increasing the risk of armed conflicts" and therefore the "arrests of the accused should be maintained, since they are still essential to guarantee public order.

The young peasant fighters and their defense, with the seriousness and firmness of the just, affirmed the truth, unmasked the farce of the police, and defended the just and sacred peasant struggle, declares the LCP.

Liberdade imediata para Ezequiel, Luis Carlos, Estefane, Ricardo!

