

Letter from a Brazilian teacher

The same demands, on the other side of the world

26 March 2008

It is incredible to see the same demands being made on the other side of the world. According to the World Socialist Web Site, this is what is happening in Australia in the state of Victoria. Public teachers in this state are on strike, carrying out half-day stoppages to demand a 30 percent salary increase. But it's not just that. They are demanding an end to temporary contracts, which, just like here, mean that teachers are fired at the end of the school year.

The state government, controlled by the Labor Party of recently elected Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, is offering 3.25 percent.

Just like here, the teachers want a maximum of 20 students in the classroom (in the article it is not spelled out how many they now have), and in the accompanying photo, the demand that grabs one's attention on the picket signs is "reduce class size."

There are several interviews with striking teachers, and what they most resent, outside of the excessive number of students, is being forced to keep changing schools because of temporary contracts—one teacher had taught in six schools in as many years. They also denounce the impoverishment of the schools and the government's abandonment of investment in basic infrastructure

Overcrowded classrooms, lack of teaching materials, lack of substitute teachers. The result, as one teacher says, is "kids in Year 9 or 10 who can barely read or write."

The WSWs warns that the teachers' union leadership pretends to be carrying out a struggle, but is seeking to push the teachers back, as the union aided the election campaign of the Labor Party, on both the state and national levels, and is therefore committed to these governments.

Here in the state of São Paulo, Governor Serra applies the same policies against teachers. And in the city of

São Paulo, my boss, Mayor Gilberto Kassab, does the same...and the results are the same as in Australia. Our salaries are low, and classrooms are severely overcrowded.

It's a scandal. In the schools of the state of São Paulo, there are about 40 students per class from the first year until the 8th grade, and about 45 students per class in the high schools (three years). The state has about 5,000 schools. In the schools of the city of São Paulo, where I work as a teacher, there are about 40 students per class. The city of São Paulo has about 1,300 schools.

Teachers are forced to work in three or four schools, closing up at night, increasing the length of the work day and, probably, facing an increase in the class time from 45 minutes to an hour.

It is becoming ever clear that the attacks of the bourgeoisie are carried out the world over against workers everywhere. This is also hitting workers in countries that, for us, had been considered part of the "first world."

What is demanded is a unification of all workers of the world against these attacks. What stands in the way are the leaderships of the unions and the social movements, which do not believe in socialism and negotiate ever greater concessions.

As Trotsky said, the conditions for the revolution are present, but the leaderships of the workers betray their hopes. They ally themselves with the bourgeois governments and, which is worse, try to drum up votes for the pseudo-defenders of the workers, like the Workers Party in Brazil or the Labor Party in Australia.

Our task is to sweep these treacherous leaderships out of the unions, unify all of the struggles here in Brazil and throughout the world and construct a socialist project of all the workers, a world party of the working class.

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