

Argentina's Socialist Workers Party (PTS) denounces Brazilian truckers strike

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La Izquierda Diario, the publication of the Argentine Socialist Workers Party (PTS), has denounced the ongoing strike of Brazilian truck drivers, calling it a right-wing provocation that workers must oppose.

This places the PTS—and its Brazilian affiliate, the Movimento Revolucionário de Trabalhadores (MRT)—in the same camp as the right-wing government of Michael Temer. By urging its supporters to oppose the strike, the PTS is providing support for the armed military detachments that are running scab convoys through blockades with their assault rifles pointed at the picket lines.

In a May 29 article, *Izquierda Diario* calls the strike “a movement directed by the employers with a program that has no ‘popular’ element. Politically, we can say that the balance of the movement is one thing only: the strengthening of the candidacy of ultra-right-wing Jair Bolsonaro, ferocious enemy of the rights of workers, women, blacks and the LGBT community.”

On May 30 *La Izquierda Diario* wrote, “There is nothing ‘contradictory’ in the protests” and therefore “the position of workers must be clear: reject the blockades ... separate yourselves from this movement and its leadership of employers.”

The PTS position is absurd on its face. The truckers’ strike is an immensely contradictory phenomenon, involving hundreds of thousands of brutally exploited workers in a revolt against increasingly intolerable conditions of life. It includes salaried drivers, autonomous or owner-operators, as well as a shutdown by private trucking companies.

The transportation corporations and the far-right supporters of the fascistic Bolsonaro did not launch the strike nor do they direct it. The strike provoked fear in national and international ruling circles precisely because of its spontaneous and independent character,

free from the stranglehold of the trade unions.

The strike developed in a conscious struggle by truckers against the unions, which had been collaborating with the government to block opposition to the hike in gas prices. For this reason, the strike has tapped into widespread opposition among the working class, which is deeply resentful after a decade of austerity, growing inequality and corporate-government corruption.

A poll this week shows nearly 90 percent of Brazilians support the strike. On Wednesday, the country’s oil workers joined the truckers and went on strike against gas price hikes and the privatization of Petrobras, only to have their union call for a return to work within 24 hours as the courts imposed punishing fines.

The bourgeois press has warned of a “revolt” if strikes spread to other industries. The PTS’s politics reflect the interests of the roughly 10 percent of the affluent population that is less personally impacted by the rise in gas prices and on this basis opposes both the truckers strike and the growing movement toward a general strike.

La Izquierda Diario’s May 30 article states that strikers’ demand for a lowering of the cost of gas and tolls is “neither a workers’ nor a popular [demand]: it favors particularly and principally an important sector of the country’s businesses, which is the transport companies and also a petty-bourgeois section of autonomous [i.e., independent contractor] truckers.”

This statement exposes the PTS as supporters of austerity adjustments and cost-of-living hikes. The sizable share of the 500,000 striking truckers who are “autonomous” or owner-operators work brutal hours and under unsafe conditions, making on average the equivalent of between one and three minimum wages,

barely enough to survive. This layer, dismissed by the PTS as “petty-bourgeois.” initiated the walkout.

By the PTS’s logic, the Brazilian government is not only right to send troops against the truckers, but was also correct to violently repress 2013 protests over hikes to bus fares. Similarly, the Mexican government was justified in suppressing 2017 *Gasolinazo* protests over cuts to gas subsidies. Nor can Argentinian workers trust the PTS’s claims to oppose the *Tarifazo* price hikes in their country.

La Izquierda Diario blames the strike on “much confusion fed by fake news and Whatsapp groups.” According to the PTS, workers have no right to speak to one another freely or to challenge the dictatorship of the trade unions. But the strike only took place because truckers planned their actions outside of the unions through the social networking application Whatsapp, coordinating demonstrations and roadblocks and building support among family and friends.

In contrast to the PTS’s claim that “there is nothing ‘contradictory’ in the protests,” all genuine Marxists understand that the class struggle necessarily develops according to contradictions of the capitalist system, which have sharpened enormously in Brazil, a country of 200 million people, undermining every political institution while creating deepening social misery for the broad masses.

The Workers Party (PT) ruled the country from 2003 to 2016 and imposed austerity measures while falsely labeling itself “left-wing” and even “socialist.” Under these conditions, it is hardly surprising that some strikers (though by most press accounts only a minority) have been susceptible to interventions by right-wing populist blowhards like Bolsonaro and calls for military intervention in the false belief that corruption and not capitalism is to blame for the collapse of living standards.

While there is always a danger that a faction of the ruling class will seek to inflame backward sentiments and manipulate genuine social protests to further right-wing goals, it is the task of socialists to encourage strikers to broaden their appeal to the working class to block such efforts. By opposing the strike, the PTS acts to drive workers into the arms of far-right demagogues by giving them reason to associate “left” politics with suppression of the class struggle.

There is a growing resurgence of the working class

across the world, including in the United States, where teachers in state after state (where Donald Trump received the most votes) are rebelling against the teachers unions to demand large wage increases and funding for public education.

Across the world, workers are abandoning the old “left” bourgeois and social democratic parties, mostly opting for abstention from bourgeois elections but in some cases supporting demagogic right-wing candidates who posture as opponents of the political establishment, including Donald Trump in the US, Marine LePen in France, and, to a lesser extent, Bolsonaro in Brazil.

But underpinning this contradictory process is a fundamental tendency toward a coalescence of the class struggle worldwide. Workers are making use of social media to organize their struggles outside the control of the trade unions.

The PTS’s role in the Brazilian strike wave corresponds to a universal process. Pseudo-left groups representing affluent sections of the upper-middle class are intervening in strikes to block social opposition and direct it back into the trade unions where it can be controlled, isolated and suppressed. For the governments and their pseudo-left supporters, Internet censorship becomes a chief mechanism for preventing workers from communicating with one another across industries, national boundaries and even from one workplace to another.

In a globally interconnected world economy, the chief strategic task facing the working class is to expand and connect their struggles on an international level to conduct a common fight against the capitalist system. Groups like the PTS serve as conscious obstacles to the development of the international class struggle and must be opposed.



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