

Massive protests in Brazil against education policies of Bolsonaro

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature

Massive protests in Brazil against policies of Bolsonaro

August 13 saw protests across Brazil in over 200 cities nationwide. The demonstrations were called by the CUT union federation as well as student and social organizations. In smaller cities, crowds were in the low thousands, while at least 100,000 were estimated in São Paulo by organizers.

Demonstrators chanted and carried signs denouncing recent budget cuts, particularly against education, with President Bolsonaro fulminating against “cultural Marxism” and calling for increased orientation to market demands and less teaching of subjects that require critical thinking. A popular chant by groups of teenagers quoted by a *commondeams.org* report was “I want education, to be intelligent, because for stupid we already have our president.” The government’s privatization drive, deregulation and environmental policies came under protesters’ fire as well.

The article also noted the corporate media’s practice of reliance on the “neofascist state military police forces” for crowd numbers, which are always underestimated while figures for much smaller mobilizations by supporters of Bolsonaro’s attacks on the working class are regularly inflated. Indeed, AP, citing G1, a Brazilian news source created during the military dictatorship in 1964, reported that “thousands”—not hundreds of thousands—protested in 72 cities, “but the turnout did not match the huge crowds that joined in similar protests in May.”

Mexican teachers strike over budget, working conditions

About 150 teachers in Acapulco school district 45, in the southern Mexican state of Guerrero, began an indefinite strike August 14. The teachers’ demands include improvements in the budget for education, recategorization, and new assignments. They are also calling for an increase in the number of teachers.

The teachers and their supporters marched to the headquarters of the Education Secretariat of Guerrero (SEG) and sat in at one of the buildings. They vowed to maintain their strike as long as they do not get a satisfactory response from the SEG.

Colombian teachers union calls for strike against violence, poor health care

On August 15, the Colombian Federation of Education Workers (Fecode) issued a call to teachers to strike on August 28 and 29 to protest violence against social and union activists—including members of the teaching profession—and demand protection and security guarantees.

Violence against teachers, labor union members and social activists is a regular occurrence in Colombia. Earlier last week, Orlando Gómez, a professor at the Huasanó Agro-Empresarial Education Institute, was abducted by armed men in a rural zone in the municipality of Caloto in the northern department of Cauca, one of the most violent in the nation. His body was later found in a nearby sector.

The strike and mobilizations will also demand improvements in the provision of health care services. Although Fecode and the government have signed agreements to provide health care to its members, entities that are supposed to provide these services do not fulfill the terms of their contracts. Denial of medication, delays in surgeries and treatments, and difficulties in getting appointments are among the complaints.

A Fecode statement also denounced the Ministry of Education and Treasury for lack of transparency in evaluations, promotions and assignments, along with the threat of privatization.

Peruvian university staff protest irregularities in hiring practices, job rotations

Members of the Union of Administrative Workers of the National University of Trujillo, Peru held a protest in front of the institution on August 15. The protesting workers denounced irregularities in hiring practices and rotation of jobs.

The union accused the administration of hiring two employees without going through a competitive bidding process. A union official told reporters, “They have contracted through direct administration two functionaries, without public competition. Each employee takes away more than 3000 soles (US\$888) and they don’t do substantial work.”

The official also criticized rotations of jobs of union members in an arbitrary manner. The union is calling for dialogue with the administration and threatened a strike if the administration does not agree to meet over the issues.

Bolivian soccer team strikes for overdue pay

Players for the Club San José soccer team in Oruro, Bolivia refused to practice on August 13 to press their demand for pay that they have not received since May. The strike was supported by the technical crew, who have not received their wages since June. Chilean former player and head coach Miguel Ponce voiced his support and blasted the club's vice president, who he claimed could have paid some of the money from recent ticket receipts, but instead "carried it away."

Players for Club San José have resorted to strike action before over delayed wages. According to a deportetotal.com.bo report, first-string player struck five times in 2018 over delays in pay. The team captain has demanded a meeting with management and said that the players were "fed up" with the directors' broken promises. Nonetheless, they still traveled to play a game with the Bolívar team on August 18.

New talks at Massachusetts metalworking factory after three-day strike

Negotiations between the United Electrical Workers (UE) and management at the Kennametal plant in Greenfield, Massachusetts will resume this week after workers ended a three-day strike and returned to work August 14. The 64 members of UE Local 274 rejected the company's previous offer that sought to impose mandatory overtime, higher health insurance deductibles and an insufficient wage increase.

Chad McGinnis, a UE international representative, made clear that the strike was not called to secure workers' demands, but to obtain a new round of negotiations. "Our key demand of this strike was that the company must return to contract negotiations with us and bargain in good faith," McGinnis said. "I'm proud to say the company has agreed to return to bargaining..."

Kennametal workers struck twice back in the 1980s when the plant had 500 workers. The Pittsburgh-based manufacturer of metalworking tools operates in 60 countries and has a worldwide workforce of 10,000.

AFSCME District Council (DC) 1707 Local 205 rammed through a sellout contract extension agreement covering those early childhood education workers in New York City daycare centers run by community-based organizations (CBOs). While the deal raised salaries by as much as \$20,000, but for only about 300 of 4,000 members. Only about 600 members voted and about 25 percent of those opposed the contract. DC 1707 had taken a vote to authorize a strike for May 2, which it then cancelled on the promise of Mayor Bill de Blasio to begin negotiations.

Although the central demand of 1707's members, who are the majority of Pre-K teachers in the city, had been for years to gain wage parity with the much better paid teachers in the public schools, only those teachers for the CBOs who are certified with a Master's degree will reach parity with the public school teachers, and then not until October 2021.

The approximately 3,000 teachers with Bachelor degrees will only

reach parity with starting teacher's salaries. Support staff maintenance, food and other workers were given a \$1,800 signing bonus and a 2.75 percent increase in 2021, less than the rate of inflation.

The teacher unions have been accommodating to de Blasio at every step, allowing him to pose in his political campaign as an "education" advocate, even as he continues to underpay educators while also underfunding New York City schools.

As contract talks open Ontario Premier Doug Ford pushes for cuts

The right-wing populist government of Ontario Conservative premier Doug Ford is proposing severe cuts to the education budget that will result in the layoff of thousands of teachers and significant increases in class sizes as contract talks with teaching staff across the province open unions open.

Last week the Canadian Union of Public Employee (CUPE) education council that organizes some 55,000 ancillary workers (librarians, early child educators, administrators, custodians, etc.) voted to support "job action" should a deal not be reached with them later this autumn. The CUPE contract expires at the end of this month. Strike votes are slated amongst the entire membership in all the various union locals in the third week of September.

Meanwhile, contracts for three provincial teacher unions also expire at the end of August. Despite the expiration of contracts for about 180,000 public high school, elementary school and Catholic school teachers on August 31, the teachers' unions have instructed their memberships to report for work when the academic year begins after Labour Day. No strike votes have been scheduled.

Bathurst, New Brunswick Municipal Lockout Continues

Twenty-two receptionists, municipal clerks and IT support workers last week voted to reject a derisory contract offer from the city by 90 percent. The workers have been locked out since July 25. The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) local union executive has asked for a two percent wage rise per year over the life of a new 5-year contract. But even this proposal, which barely meets projected annual inflation rates over the coming years, has been rejected by the employer.



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