

As COVID-19 ravages Brazil, governments promote homicidal reopening of schools

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Brazil set new COVID-19 records for a single day on Wednesday, reporting 70,869 new cases and 1,554 deaths. With this, the country simultaneously surpassed the milestones of 2.5 million cases and 90,000 total deaths from the disease.

These figures expose one of the worst scenarios of the global pandemic. Although in absolute numbers Brazil still lags behind the United States, Wednesday's numbers surpassed those of any other country in the world.

In the midst of these catastrophic conditions, the Brazilian political establishment is promoting a campaign to reopen schools across the country as soon as possible, threatening to escalate the already soaring levels of COVID-19 infections.

The schools represent a key step for a total reactivation of the Brazilian economy, which demands that workers leave their children while they are at their jobs generating profits for the ruling elite.

The brutal irrationality of this proposal was recently expressed in a commercial produced by the Union of Private Educational Establishments of Rio de Janeiro (Sinepe-RJ). Attacking science and normalizing COVID deaths, it stated:

“Months have passed, we've learned to live with the virus. COVID will never totally leave, what ends is fear... We understood that science is the vaccine, studies have only caused confusion. Locking everyone up at home is not science. To confine is to ignore, to subtract life, to weaken, to mess with emotions. Children need to get back together, play, rebuild bonds, friendships, see their friends again.”

Although it was quickly taken off the air, after a rain of criticism by health experts, its conceptions are fully aligned with the discussions being held at the top level of the state. It is impossible not to associate them with the sociopathic positions defended by extreme-right President Jair Bolsonaro.

About a month ago, when he announced to millions of Brazilians that he had contracted the new coronavirus, Bolsonaro once again insisted that the entire population should contract the virus and called for the immediate reopening of schools.

At that moment, he was looking for a candidate for the Ministry of Education (MEC). Renato Feder, one of those interviewed, declared later to *Estadão* that the president's central concern was to have someone capable of promoting a

plan for the resumption of classes throughout the country.

The minister appointed by Bolsonaro, the evangelical preacher Milton Ribeiro, was promptly praised by national private education associations as a figure capable of advancing “the safe resumption of on-site academic activities.”

Schools are already reopening

The reopening of schools in Brazil is progressing in the same way as they were closed, without general planning, with local governments making arbitrary decisions.

However, if in the movement to close schools at the beginning of the pandemic, governors and mayors appeared as opponents of the homicidal policy of Bolsonaro, now in promoting the reopenings, they reveal the total inconsistency of their opposition.

Following the lead given by the Ministry of Education in early July, when it presented a national protocol for the resumption of classes, the state and municipal governments have approved their own protocols, which despite not setting dates, prepare the ground for reopenings at any time.

Eleven states, plus the Federal District, have already scheduled the reopening of their schools. The dates set are based on completely fabricated arguments of a supposed “stabilization” of the epidemic.

In São Paulo, the state most affected by the pandemic, an average of almost 2,000 deaths per week was commemorated by right-wing governor João Doria of the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) as a “plateau” in the spread of the disease and the time for “normalization.” Since then, he has manipulated data and the criteria of his reopening plan to allow a return to school in early September.

A number of other governments are already pushing for the resumption of classes in private schools as a spearhead to open the way for public schools, which educate 80 percent of Brazilian students with much more precarious infrastructure.

The first capital to permit the reopening of private schools was Manaus, in Amazonas, on July 6. According to the Union

of Private Educational Establishments of the State of Amazonas (Sinepe-AM), 70 percent of the units reopened, bringing about 88,000 students inside classrooms.

This week, the Amazonian governor Wilson Lima of the reactionary Christian Social Party moved up the date for the return of public schools throughout the state to August 10. The government's irresponsibility with the pandemic was already graphically demonstrated in April, when the scenes of thousands being buried in mass graves in Manaus shocked the whole world.

In Rio de Janeiro the municipal government, administered by Marcelo Crivella of the Republicans party, is promoting the reopening of private schools on August 3. The state has recorded more than 13,000 COVID-19 deaths, the second highest toll in the country, and over the last 15 days the average number of new cases has increased by more than 100 percent.

The politicians of the Workers Party (PT) and its allies, such as the Maoist Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB), are absolutely complacent in the face of this homicidal movement.

In the state of Bahia, administered by Governor Rui Costa of the PT, the Secretariat of Education stated that the resumption of classes, still not scheduled, will occur "in consonance with the rest of the country." In the neighboring state of Maranhão, the government of Flávio Dino of the PCdoB has postponed this week an already scheduled resumption of public schools, although he made sure that the school units received thousands of thermometers for the purpose of reopening them at any time.

For a movement of the working class against the reopening of schools!

Despite their efforts, the attempt by bourgeois politicians to reopen schools in the country faces massive opposition from education workers.

In São Paulo a series of online meetings held by the Secretariat of Education to discuss the resumption of schools were closely followed by tens of thousands of educators opposing the pressure for their return to classrooms.

The prospects of a return in September in São Paulo are generating a growing movement among rank-and-file workers for a strike, and the same is happening in cities all across the country.

Public school teachers in Manaus already announced a strike against the announced resumption of classes. On Thursday, public school teachers in Rio de Janeiro voted massively for a strike in case the government tries to reopen schools.

This movement reflects a nationwide willingness to fight, expressed in recent years in the strikes by millions of education workers in all Brazilian states who opposed governmental attacks on their living standards, particularly over pensions, and

the destruction of the public education system.

The educators' refusal to be sent to dangerous workplaces infected with COVID-19 is widely supported by working class families. A poll carried out by the Municipality of São Paulo of students' families registered, according to *CBN*, 90 percent opposition to the return of classes.

The struggle of teachers and school employees against the reopening of schools merges with the growing social crisis in Brazil. Millions of workers lost their jobs during the pandemic, resulting in more than half the active population being currently unemployed.

The explosion of this crisis has been contained, so far, to a large extent by the federal government's monthly payments of R\$600 (around US\$115) in emergency aid, which will be cut off this month.

As they condemn millions of families to miserable conditions, Bolsonaro and his allies intend to escalate the pressure on workers, forcing them to accept smaller wages and deadly working conditions posed by the pandemic. However, its consequence will inevitably be the unleashing of a wave of working class opposition of incalculable dimensions.

The movement of educators assumes a highly explosive character and may occupy the front line in a struggle of the working class as a whole for decent living conditions and the resumption of the economy only under safe conditions, with safety procedures and the definition of what production is essential being defined by workers themselves.

To advance this struggle, education workers need to overcome the control of the trade unions affiliated with the National Confederation of Education Workers (CNTE), which have suffocated all their last strikes, isolating their struggles locally and exhausting them until they were defeated.

It is necessary to build new organizations, democratically elected rank-and-file school and neighborhood committees. These politically independent committees will allow Brazilian workers to advance their struggle against capitalism and to unify themselves with their international colleagues, who are facing the same issues and showing the same disposition to fight them the world over.



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