

São Paulo municipal teachers join strike against school reopenings

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On Thursday, educators in São Paulo's municipal public school system went on strike against the reopening of schools, joining some 180,000 colleagues in the state network who began a strike earlier this week. São Paulo City Hall had ordered its approximately 60,000 teachers, as well as other school workers, to return to schools today to organize the beginning of face-to-face classes next Monday, February 15.

The strike was called by the unions in the face of massive opposition among educators to the criminal policy of the São Paulo City Hall and the state government, both controlled by the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB), directly supported by Claudio Fonseca, the president of SINPEEM, the largest union in the city's schools.

A referendum on the strike among SINPEEM members was answered by 5,251 educators, and 90 percent declared themselves in favor of the strike. Workers denounced the union for not properly publicizing the vote.

This event is an important development in the movement among educators in Brazil and internationally in challenging the capitalist policy of putting profit interests above the social interests of preserving lives in the face of the pandemic. Other strikes have been declared in the Brazilian states of Rio de Janeiro and Paraná.

COVID-19 has already taken 234,945 lives in Brazil, and thousands of people are still dying every day in the country. On Wednesday, another 1,357 deaths and 60,271 cases were recorded. New, more infectious variants of the virus are spreading rapidly throughout the population, threatening to make these numbers explode.

São Paulo is one of the epicenters of the coronavirus

in the country. The state surpassed 55,000 deaths from the disease this week, with 332 new deaths recorded Wednesday. Reopening the schools in São Paulo means sending 13 million people, or 32 percent of the state's population between students and educators, into the streets and enclosed classrooms, with an incalculable devastating potential.

On Tuesday, just one day after ordering the return to in-person classes, the São Paulo government declared the closure of seven schools after infected employees had contact with their colleagues. Educators are already reporting COVID-19 infections and deaths in 100 state schools, many of which remain open.

The growth of the teachers strike in São Paulo is a powerful response to the coordinated campaign of the media along with the federal, state and local governments to attack the scientific truth that schools are one of the main vectors for the spread of the coronavirus in society.

In an editorial last Sunday, *Folha de São Paulo*, the newspaper with the largest circulation in the nation, insisted that "The Time for School" had come. The newspaper hypocritically tried to dissociate itself from Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro, for whom the schools should never have been closed, while defending the same homicidal policy.

Fraudulently characterizing the reopening of the schools as a "flexibilization ... necessary and well-founded," *Folha* claimed, "The fears on the part of parents and teachers are understandable, but it is misplaced to view the issue [the reopening of schools] as a dispute between defenders of life and insensitive rulers."

This perspective directly represents the views of the Brazilian capitalist oligarchy, which expanded its fortunes during the pandemic, while inequality reached

record levels, clashing with the interests of the working masses.

As the newspaper was forced to admit, the educators strike is supported by working class families, who view the sociopathic measures promoted by the government “with suspicion, if not repulsion.”

The most recent poll released by *PoderData* last Sunday points out that 58 percent of Brazilians believe that schools should remain closed, while only 37 percent declared themselves in favor of reopening them. This has been expressed in demonstrations in support of teachers in São Paulo, such as a protest by students and their families in the southern zone of the capital against the unsafe reopening of their school, reported by *GI* on Monday.

The movement in São Paulo is receiving wide support nationally. A strike by educators in Brazil’s largest state, considered the spearhead of the ruling class’s campaign to reopen schools, is agitating educators across the country.

A teacher from Amazonas responded to the *World Socialist Web Site* article about the strike in São Paulo. “All solidarity to the teachers of São Paulo. In Amazonas, last year, starting in September in the state network, science teachers were ignored, and we were forced to return to the classrooms, and this factor certainly contributed to the sad reality that we are living today. Our routine is to offer condolences to the families of colleagues; educators cannot pay with their lives for the insanity of the authorities. IN-PERSON CLASSES, ONLY AFTER THE VACCINE.”

Teachers in Pernambuco, where a strike was launched last September, are protesting the betrayal by their trade union, Sintepe, which is collaborating with the government to reopen schools. One teacher reported, “Sintepe sat down with the Paulo Câmara government [from the Brazilian Socialist Party, PSB] to draw up the protocols for the return to face-to-face classes and even participated on a commission with people from the government, visiting the schools and giving approval [for] the government to reopen them.”

Another Pernambuco teacher questioned, “What is the goal of a vaccination, especially now and for COVID? The goal is the defense of life. But for us, the government wants us to be able to teach, simply. The government doesn’t care about our health. And here comes Sintepe, with the greatest interest in solving the

government’s ‘problem,’ wanting teachers to be vaccinated soon, instead of demanding that they provide income for everyone to stay at home and have quality equipment and internet for distance learning and quality work for the teachers, besides organizing the physical space of the schools for the future, for when classes are back with health and safety.”

While education workers argue that the reopening of schools is non-negotiable, that it is not about “solving the government’s ‘problem’” but about the “defense of life,” of providing “income for everyone to stay at home.” Unions across Brazil argue the opposite.

In São Paulo, SINPEEM’s strike call stated that the action will continue “until measures are implemented to ensure health safety for face-to-face return.” The union does not make clear what measures it is referring to. It also advocated its own board’s “authorization” to “decide to call a strike during the pandemic period,” that is, without a vote by the workers. This self-proclaimed right is an attempted coup against the workers, allowing the union to break the strike at any time.

Workers in São Paulo and all over Brazil urgently need to form rank-and-file committees to take the leadership of the movement into their own hands. It is necessary to fight to unify the educators in the municipal and state public networks, in the private network, and in the different states of the country, which are being divided by the unions.



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