Teachers union and pseudo-left embrace São Paulo government’s herd immunity policy

Gabriel Lemos
26 May 2021

With São Paulo and all of Brazil facing the threat of a third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, right-wing Governor João Doria (PSDB-Brazilian Social Democracy Party) last week announced new measures to lift restrictions on nonessential services. Also planned this week are measures that increase the maximum number of students in classrooms.

Even in the face of this open policy to subordinate human lives to private profits, pseudo-left organizations and the São Paulo state teachers’ union, the APEOESP, have kept a complacent silence about the millionaire governor’s herd immunity policy.

São Paulo, the richest and most populous state in Brazil, is a center of the pandemic tragedy in the country with 108,000 COVID-19 deaths (out of 453,000 nationally) and 3.2 million cases. After a devastating second wave in March and April, the first weeks of May saw a small drop in the number of cases and deaths and ICU bed occupancy. However, in what many experts point to as a new surge, this week saw a 19 percent increase in the number of cases, and for the first time since late April, the ICU bed occupancy rate exceeded 80 percent.

In the most recent press conference to update the supposed pandemic containment plan, the São Paulo Plan, held last Wednesday, the Doria government made clear its policy of normalizing death by abandoning the most basic measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus. João Gabbardo, executive coordinator of the scientific committee that guides the government’s policies, said that in the next four weeks there is a forecast of an increase from 10,000 to 11,000 in the number of occupied ICU beds and an increase from 500 to 600 deaths per day.

Even in the face of such figures, which are undoubtedly an underestimate and ignore the spread of the Indian variant, detected last Thursday in Brazil, the government of São Paulo announced that, starting July 1, nonessential services will increase both operating hours from 9:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. and maximum occupancy from 40 percent to 60 percent.

This new relaxation came with the announcement of the vaccination of people from 55 to 59 years old and education professionals between the ages of 18 and 46 starting on July 1 and 21, respectively. Education professionals over 47 already received the first shot in April. According to Governor Doria, the intention is “to resume classes beginning the second semester with complete safety.” The secretary of education, Rossieli Soares, said that the vaccination of education professionals will still allow “a review of protocols and quantitative rules,” that is, it will allow the increase of the maximum number of students in class.

São Paulo could not have reached this catastrophic situation without the total complicity of the APEOESP, affiliated with the Workers Party (PT)-controlled CUT union federation, and the pseudo-left organizations that sow the illusions that workers struggles can be advanced only by putting pressure on the union bureaucracies and the PT. Directly or indirectly, they are promoting the candidacy of former PT President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in next year’s presidential elections as the only option in the struggle against the government of Brazil’s fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro.

The president of the APEOESP, PT state Deputy Maria Isabel Noronha, known as Bebel, welcomed the vaccination of teachers by the Doria government, saying she was “very pleased with the information.” She further advanced the fraudulent claim that the “APEOESP won the vaccination of education professionals.” As Doria and Soares have made very clear, the vaccination of teachers has been one of the ways the government is forcing teachers back into unsafe schools with the pandemic out of control.

Bebel also wrote not a single word on her social media accounts or on the union website about the relaxation of COVID restrictions in São Paulo. On the contrary, she used her social media to promote Lula’s candidacy after last week’s election polls showed the former president as the frontrunner in the 2022 election race. After posting that “Lula will run for president in 2022!”, she wrote that “BRAZILIANS WANT TO HAVE HOPE AGAIN. AND THE NAME OF HOPE, ONCE AGAIN, IS LULA!” Bebel’s celebration of the vaccination of teachers echoed Lula’s praise last year of Doria’s pandemic policy.

After Lula’s conviction on corruption charges was overturned by the Supreme Court in March, the former president has been trying to rebuild political alliances with the most right-wing elements in Brazilian politics which backed the PT’s 13 years of bourgeois rule but are now part of the Bolsonaro government. Lula has also had the support of prominent leaders of the pseudo-left Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL), such as Congressman Marcelo Freixo, the party’s chief advocate of a “broad front” against Bolsonaro. Since last year, the “broad front” policy has been implemented by the CUT, whose last two May Day rallies featured figures like the hated neo-liberal former President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (PSDB), with whom Lula also met last week.

Meanwhile, the state schools of São Paulo remain open. The APEOESP and Bebel have concentrated the full weight of the union’s actions on a court decision prohibiting the return to classes in the red and orange phases of the São Paulo Plan. The Doria government insists it will not comply with the ruling. Today, São Paulo is in a “transition phase” between the orange and red phases. This situation was made possible after the APEOESP sabotaged a strike against school reopenings in February that presented numbers even greater than the current 2,500 cases and 90 deaths among teachers since the beginning of the school year.

Pseudo-left’s role in sabotaging teachers strike

This sabotage of the strike was carried out in coordination with the various PSOL tendencies that are part of the union’s executive board, mainly the Morenoite Resistência group. It had already advocated that the beginning of the strike be postponed for two weeks, even if this meant

© World Socialist Web Site

more teachers and students in the schools, and consequently more infections and deaths. In all the online assemblies held until the union finally shut down the strike in early March, when the government closed the schools with the outbreak of the second wave, Resistência openly advocated ending the walkout.

Today, Resistência is one of several organizations of the Brazilian pseudo-left that are assisting in subordinating workers struggles to the bourgeois state and to Lula. In its latest editorial on the website *Esquerda Online*, Resistência wrote that in addition to the left "pressuring Congress ... for the immediate launching of the impeachment" of Bolsonaro, "Lula should put his political weight behind the 'Bolsonaro Out' campaign." Lula has already made it quite clear he has no intention doing anything of the kind as he prepares for next year's election.

But perhaps no pseudo-left organization can perform so many political acrobatics and offer the PSOL and PT, as well as the APEOESP and CUT, a better left cover than another Morenoite organization, the Revolutionary Workers Movement (MRT), the Brazilian section of the Argentine-based "Trotskyist Fraction,, which publishes the *Izquierda Diario* website.

Since the reopening of schools in São Paulo, the MRT has insisted that the teachers struggle is not for closing schools until the pandemic is eradicated, but to demand safe conditions for a return to the classrooms from the government. It has claimed that it is possible to reopen schools "by organizing the school community for a safe return," that is, that "the school community, together with the teachers, can decide on the return, not Doria and Soares, who know nothing about the reality of our schools."

This, however, is a complete fraud. First, it has proven impossible to implement anti-COVID-19 protocols in schools with such precarious infrastructures. How, if it is already impossible to solve a global pandemic on a national level, could this be accomplished on the local level of each school remains totally unexplained by the Brazilian Morenoites.

Morenoites echo right wing in opposing measures to halt pandemic

This position was justified in the April 18 international statement of the Trotskyist Fraction, "The Capitalist Disaster and the Struggle for an International of the Socialist Revolution." Completely ignoring the fact that the European and American ruling elites closed factories at the beginning of the pandemic after workers launched wildcat strikes, it echoes the right wing by claiming that social distancing measures represent "attempts to curtail democratic freedoms and rights," while further demanding the "end ... of curfews, which serve in no way to address the pandemic."

This position is totally unscientific and anti-Marxist. In the absence of medicines against COVID-19 and amid a totally inadequate vaccination campaign, the only measure to combat the spread of the coronavirus is to implement social distancing measures.

At no point in the statement do they refer to the need to close nonessential services and schools to contain the pandemic. This policy advanced by the MRT has been accompanied by its promotion of hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin against COVID-19, two medicines widely touted by the fascist Bolsonaro in his drive to reopen the economy that have no efficacy against the disease.

The MRT has also made empty calls for the opposition to Bebel and the PT in the union, mainly the PSOL tendencies, including Resistência, to "build an anti-bureaucratic pole with class independence" for "broad democracy in the union" and to pressure the APEOESP leadership to "mobilize the teachers." Despite this, the MRT acknowledges that the "opposition unfortunately points in another direction," offering a "left cover" for Bebel and the PT. Immersed in the same unions that have piled up betrayals and become experts at organizing defeats for the working class, they are seeking to conceal that they themselves offer this left cover to the APEOESP and the PT.

Outside of all these short-term maneuvers in the unions, based on the most opportunistic political alliances within the middle-class milieu in which the pseudo-left operates, there is a tectonic process that has been building up for years in Brazil, and which, as seen most recently in Colombia, is at the point of erupting.

Throughout the past decade, Brazilian youth have held consecutive occupations of high schools and universities, while teachers have gone on strikes numerous times against the wage freezes and pension reforms of PSDB and PT governments. In 2019, the first year of the Bolsonaro government, millions took to the streets against cuts to the education budget. In the midst of the pandemic, numerous strikes and walkouts erupted against unsafe working conditions among call center, health care, industrial, oil, app delivery and, most recently, subway workers. At the end of April, private school teachers in São Paulo held walkouts against in-person classes, and last week the strike of São Paulo municipal school teachers against the reopening of schools completed 100 days.

In every instance, unions like the APEOESP, with the aid of the pseudo-left, have worked to isolate these strikes and protests and channel the enormous social anger into the dead end of bourgeois politics. In 2018, Resistência and the MRT supported the PT candidate Fernando Haddad in the second round of the presidential election against Bolsonaro. Now, these same organizations downplay Bolsonaro's ongoing coup threats and sow the illusion that Lula and the PT can solve the existential crisis of Brazilian capitalism.

Youth, teachers and the working class as a whole need another political perspective. Based on the historic betrayals of the unions and the understanding that they have ceased to be working class organizations, the International Committee of the Fourth International advocates a complete break with these procorporate organizations and the adoption of a socialist and internationalist program to put an end to the capitalist system.

To carry this struggle forward, the ICFI is calling for the formation of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), the only political instrument whose form and content can guarantee the working class a successful struggle against the herd immunity politics of the global capitalist elite and their pseudo-left apologists.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site