

Close schools across Brazil to save lives!

**Statement of the Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education in Brazil
6 September 2021**

The Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education in Brazil (CBES-BR) calls upon teachers, parents and students to fight for the immediate closure of schools across the country in defense of the lives of children and the entire population threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The widespread reopening of schools in Brazil, amidst the rapid spread of the more infectious Delta variant of the coronavirus, is a heinous political crime. Its motivation is not concern for the impact on young people's learning and socialization abilities, as hypocritically claimed by the bourgeois politicians who have been scrapping public education for years, but the efforts to reopen all economic activities in the interests of capitalist profit.

The same social murder policies are being adopted by the capitalist class in different countries, provoking a wave of political opposition from educators and workers internationally. In Brazil—where about a month ago hundreds of thousands protested against the homicidal response of Jair Bolsonaro's fascistic administration to the pandemic—the anger of teachers and the population against the unsafe reopening of schools is rapidly growing.

The fact that the trade unions are not calling for any struggle against this criminal policy is not a sign of passivity on the part of rank-and-file workers but proof that these organizations do not correspond to their interests and are not their legitimate representatives.

The CBES-BR aims to give expression to Brazilian workers and youth yearning for struggle and to arm them with a program of eradication of the pandemic based on science and the political independence and the international unity of the working class.

The pandemic is still out of control

Around the world, infections, hospitalizations, and deaths from COVID-19 are again on the rise. This new global wave of the pandemic is being driven by the spread of the Delta variant, notable for its ability to break through vaccines and to reproduce itself at a rate thousands of times higher than the original SARS-CoV-2.

The Delta variant is taking over Brazil at a frantic speed, with all the barriers to its spread lifted by the criminally irresponsible measures of the federal government and local governors and mayors. Laboratory analyses last week indicated the prevalence of this variant in 80 percent of samples in Rio de Janeiro and 69.7 percent in São Paulo; it is likewise the most prevalent in Minas Gerais.

The deceleration of the infection and death curves in Brazil hide the "intense circulation of the virus, with the expansion of the Delta variant," according to the Fiocruz COVID-19 Observatory. While more than 600 people continue to die every day in Brazil, the country confronts an imminent new catastrophic explosion of the pandemic. It must be immediately stopped!

Schools are not safe

The idea promoted by the ruling class that schools are islands, where the coronavirus does not proliferate and children do not contract, get sick from or transmit COVID-19, is a dirty lie.

The widespread return of in-person teaching in the country since August is causing a wave of coronavirus outbreaks in all schools. In the capital of Rio de Janeiro, municipal teachers have reported 94 schools functioning with infected staff or students, while another 100 facilities are totally or partially closed due to COVID-19 cases. The government of São Paulo announced that in August alone, 3,668 cases of coronavirus were confirmed in schools, the vast majority, 2,873, were students; while another 2,239 suspected cases are still under investigation.

Sending millions of unvaccinated children and adolescents into schools—mostly in poor structural condition, overcrowded and lacking adequate ventilation—is tantamount to sending them into buildings on fire. The consequences are potentially catastrophic both for the lives of young people and for the acceleration of the pandemic.

Children are not immune!

Even before being hit by the Delta variant, Brazil already had one of the highest rates of COVID-19 child deaths. Official data, admittedly an underestimate, recorded 1,200 deaths of children under 18 in 2020, 45 percent of them were children under two years old. In the first six months of 2021 alone, 1,581 10- to 19-year-olds died from COVID-19.

Children and adolescents who contract COVID-19 are at risk not only of dying but of developing Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C), which attacks multiple organs and creates other possibly permanent illnesses.

It is estimated that between 3 and 12 percent of children infected with COVID-19 will develop Long COVID, with potential damage to their mental health and cognitive development, said Dr. Malgorzata Gasperowicz of the University of Calgary, Canada at the *World Socialist Web Site* online event, "For a global strategy to stop the pandemic and save lives!"

At the same event, public health expert and professor at the University of Otago, New Zealand Dr. Michael Baker stated: "The precautionary principle means that you do not allow a population to be exposed to a hazard when you do not know the consequences of that and when you think that the effects may be severe."

This means that it is impermissible to reopen schools until the COVID-19 pandemic is fully under control.

For the eradication of the pandemic of COVID-19

The Delta variant, just as the Gamma variant, originated in Manaus, which drove the second devastating wave of COVID-19 in Brazil, a monster created by the criminal policies of the capitalist class. As long as the coronavirus is allowed to find human hosts to reproduce, it will continue to mutate and evolve into more contagious forms.

Bolsonaro has established himself worldwide as a leading proponent of the “herd immunity” policy, an unscientific and sociopathic theory based on the false claim that the infection of most of the population is desirable, as it would create a human shield around the most vulnerable. Its tragically proven results are mass deaths and the emergence of new, even more terrible strains.

However, the policy advocated by Bolsonaro's “opponents” in the bourgeoisie—among them the governors of the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB), like João Doria in São Paulo, and of the Workers Party (PT), like Rui Costa in Bahia—that it is possible to “mitigate” the effects of the pandemic without effectively ending it, has equally devastating consequences.

Just vaccinating the population and imposing mask mandates, while reopening schools and other economic activities, as is advocated by these political forces, is not an effective way to fight the pandemic. Without a strategy to break the viral chain of transmission, these measures can in fact become counterproductive.

A projection made by Dr. Gasperowicz estimated that with 64 percent of the population fully vaccinated, and assuming the vaccines are 60 percent effective against the Delta variant, the R-number would remain at the highly elevated level of 3.7. This means the continued spread of coronavirus and development of vaccine-resistant mutations.

The only effective and scientifically consistent strategy to fight the pandemic is *eradication*. This can only be achieved by the combination on a world scale of extensive vaccination of the population, universal testing, contact tracing and social isolation measures that include closing all schools and nonessential workplaces.

For the political independence from trade unions

This program, based on science and the defense of workers' lives, is not only ignored by the unions but openly opposed by them. Side by side with the bourgeois governments, the unions are acting to divert the working class from any effective struggle against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The National Confederation of Educational Workers (CNTE), with which most of Brazil's teachers unions are associated, has clearly exposed its strategy of covering up the social murder policy of the bourgeoisie in a manifesto titled “Health, Education and Social Assistance in Defense of Life and Democracy.”

This criminal document, a dirty rationalization of the unsafe reopening of schools, states: “In situations of stability or decrease in epidemiological indicators”—that is, the current situation of imminent catastrophe in the country—“the harmful consequences of these measures [to control the pandemic, including closure of schools] outweigh the direct risks arising from coronavirus.”

Attempting to establish an “acceptable” level of child infections and deaths, it continues: “The risk of contagion, infection, complications or death from COVID-19 is quite different by age group and by environmental safety situation; and there is potential social harm from pandemic control measures.”

The CNTE's orientation to the capitalist reopening policies is the political foundation of the criminal betrayals recently promoted by teachers unions. With strikes breaking out in different states due to pressure from the rank and file, the CNTE refused to call for a nationally

unified struggle against the reopening of schools, while local unions sabotaged workers' efforts.

Educators cannot allow new strikes to be broken by antidemocratic maneuvers by the unions, as carried out by the APEOESP and SINPEEM in São Paulo and more recently the APLB in Bahia. Rank-and-file workers must immediately establish democratic control by educators of their own struggles!

For an international struggle of the working class

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global problem, which can only be addressed on the international arena. The elimination of the virus in a single country, as has been achieved in China or New Zealand, has a merely provisional character, and the deep integration of the world economy makes it essentially impractical.

Only action by the international working class can prevent the unnecessarily loss of millions more lives to COVID-19.

The Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education in Brazil will coordinate its struggle with educators rank-and-file committees in the United States, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Sri Lanka, Australia and other countries which are fighting for the immediate closure of all schools and the global eradication of the pandemic.

These committees are united by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which fights to establish independent, democratic and militant rank-and-file organizations in factories, schools, and workplaces on an international scale, opposing the suppression of working class struggles by the corporatist unions.

We call on workers and youth throughout Brazil to raise the following demands:

- For the immediate closure of all public and private schools until the COVID-19 pandemic is eradicated!
- For universal high quality distance education! High-speed computers and internet must be provided to all teachers and students.
- Closure of all nonessential activities with full financial and social support for all working families! No parent or guardian should be forced to leave his or her child in a school to work and generate profits for the capitalist class.
- For massive investments to reform and open new schools! Brazilian schools need to be adapted to the 21st century, with classrooms reduced to a maximum of 15 students and proper ventilation systems.
- No to in-person exams! Tests like ENEM, or teaching performance evaluations, which involve hundreds of thousands or millions of young people, are super-spreader events of COVID-19. Students must mobilize themselves against them!

All workers and youth interested in taking this struggle forward should contact CBES-BR through its Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/Comit%C3%AA-de-Base-por-Educa%C3%A7%C3%A3o-Segura-no-Brasil-108409861575982/> .

Or through this form .



To contact the WSWWS and the
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