

Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education gathered educators and parents from around Brazil in critical online meeting

Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education in Brazil (CBES-BR)
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On Tuesday, November 2, the Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education in Brazil (CBES-BR) held the online meeting “The need for school closures and the means to end the pandemic.” Participants included educators and parents from São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and the Federal District, as well as messages of support from members of rank-and-file committees of educators in the United States and the United Kingdom.

The event presented a comprehensive analysis of the situation of the pandemic and the class struggle in Brazil and around the world. The presentations and contributions consistently advocated a strategy of global eradication of the COVID-19 pandemic and the mobilization of an independent, internationally unified struggle of the working class.

The meeting was led by Guilherme Ferreira, a teacher in the São Paulo state network and member of the Socialist Equality Group (GSI). In his introduction, he declared: “This meeting takes place three months after the largest reopening of schools in Brazil since the beginning of the pandemic. As of November 3, the presence of students in unsafe schools will become mandatory in 19 Brazilian states, which are also eliminating social distancing in classrooms.”

He then presented the real situation of the pandemic in Brazil and the world. “Although the ruling elite and the media try to sell the idea that the pandemic is nearing its end, Brazil still has an average of almost 320 deaths per day, only 110 fewer than a year ago,” he said. “The latest estimate of underreporting is of almost 25 percent, which increases the daily deaths to 400. Regarding cases, experts point out that it could be up to 10 times more than officially reported.”

Answering the question “What prevents the elimination of the pandemic?” Guilherme exposed the corrupt strategies adopted by the world capitalist class in response to COVID-19. In Brazil, while “the fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro most clearly represents the cruel perspective of ‘herd immunity’ ... the governors of the Workers Party (PT) in the northeast, as well as João Doria of the PSDB in São Paulo, have sought to ‘negotiate with the virus,’ which breaks any deal as it evolves into more infectious variants. Today, however, all these forces are embracing herd immunity.”

Guilherme concluded with an overview of the struggles of workers around the world, who have “responded aggressively, with strikes and protests, to the health, economic and social impacts of the deadly pandemic.” It is to this social force and to the scientific program of the global elimination of the coronavirus, he argued, that the Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education in Brazil must orient itself.

The next presentation was given by Miguel Andrade, also a member of the GSI, who summarized the main presentations given by the scientists at the October 24 webinar “How to end the pandemic” held by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). As he presented this critical information for the first time in Portuguese, Miguel stated: “One of the main questions for the working class is to really understand what COVID is, so that they can take actions consistent with the problem.”

He then gave detailed explanations of the evolution of the coronavirus and the nature of the most infectious variants; how vaccines and public health measures interfere in the spread of the virus through society, and how the combination of these measures can lead to the elimination of COVID-19. He went on to elaborate how the virus is transmitted through aerosols; and the dire effects of long COVID on children and teenagers.

Miguel was succeeded by Tomas Castanheira, also a GSI member and a teacher in the São Paulo municipal public school system. Tomas reviewed the sordid record of the Brazilian trade unions and pseudo-left parties throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The PT has made it clear that it will continue as an unwavering defender of the interests of the capitalist class, no matter how many deaths of workers, elderly, and children it costs,” he stated. “And just as this party has ‘workers’ in its name only, the unions federations and local unions—controlled by the PT and its allies, or parties even further to the right—are ‘unions’ in name only.”

“The teachers’ unions have fulfilled a particularly nefarious role,” he continued. “The National Confederation of Education Workers (CNTE) attacked measures to control the pandemic,

including the closure of schools, and spread the lie that children are not significantly affected by COVID. The CNTE did everything to keep the teacher strikes that broke out all over Brazil isolated, while local unions sabotaged these struggles. The strikes of state and municipal teachers in São Paulo were both buried by anti-democratic coups by the unions, supported by the pseudo-left parties, such as PSOL.”

Tomas then called on participants to draw the necessary conclusions from these political experiences and to take the struggle for building rank-and-file committees to their schools and other workplaces.

In the discussion, participants recounted their struggles in the face of the imminent mandatory return of in-person classes. Priscila, a mother from the city of Rio de Janeiro declared: “Many parents are very worried. We are afraid to send our children on November 3, because there is no safety. My daughter is 10 years old. In her class alone there are 36 students, and the room has no window.”

She continued: “The Municipal Secretary of Education is threatening parents with losing their places in school, or their children failing the school year. We heard several reports saying that school principals are contacting parents and threatening them saying ‘social service will come to your house, you’ll lose your *Bolsa Família* [social benefit]’. We are firm, even though we are afraid. We are trying to mobilize ourselves here in Rio de Janeiro. We’re going to have a campaign on Twitter against this dangerous reopening of schools.”

Karla, a mother from the Federal District, said: “The situation here in Brasilia is practically the same as described by Priscila. Tomorrow they are going to open schools, and end masks mandates. It will be widespread tyranny. ... The Brazilian Constitution says that life comes first, and that is what I am basing myself on. So, we are not going to send the children and we are not going to accept the threats from the schools, the secretariat and the government. Are we going to suffer punishment? Yes, but we are going to stick to it.”

Luiz Henrique, a public-school teacher from Resende, Rio de Janeiro, gave a detailed account of the criminal anti-scientific policies adopted by local governments in his state, and denounced the unions that assisted the school reopenings. He declared: “The union bureaucracies, especially the bureaucracy of the SEPE-RJ, the largest union of educators in the state, consciously sought to sabotage the organization by teachers and students of a real strike, using various bureaucratic means.”

Luiz concluded with a strong appeal: “We need to fight in the workplace to build the organization of workers and students with the correct program to fight the pandemic, whose objective should be none other than the global eradication of the virus.”

The international contributions that followed, from members of rank-and-file committee in the United States and the United Kingdom, profoundly addressed the challenges faced by

Brazilian workers and the issues directly raised by participants in the meeting.

Evan Blake, who assists the work of educators rank-and-file committees throughout the United States, declared: “The formation of the Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education in Brazil is a major advance for educators and all workers in Brazil and throughout the world.”

Evan described the dire situation of the pandemic in the US. “More than 2,000 educators and 584 children have died from COVID-19, the majority undoubtedly as a result of their return to schools.” He added: “As in Brazil and throughout the world, the teachers unions have been the most vocal advocates of school reopenings. They are totally integrated with the state and serve the corporations, which demand that children go back to school in order to send their parents back to work.”

Tania Kent, a teacher and member of the Educators Rank-and-File Committee in the UK greeted the CBES-BR meeting as a “critical initiative.” She reported that, just as the Brazilian mothers reported, parents in the UK are facing threats of fines, loss of school places and even losing custody of their children if they do not send them to the unsafe schools. “The fight to protect your child from a deadly infection is deemed to be child abuse and there is no opposition to this truly Orwellian set-up.”

She then recounted the experience of parents in the UK who spearheaded the recent school strikes after unsuccessfully seeking to pressure the Labour and Tory parties and the trade unions. “They have begun to recognize that if a fight to protect lives is to be organized it must come from the working class and independent initiatives that are in conflict with the existing political set-up,” Tania declared.

The CBES-BR meeting constitutes a milestone in the development of the class struggle in Brazil. It presented an absolutely unique political perspective—based on the determinations of science, internationalism and the political independence of the working class—that is clearly interacting with the developing situation and consciousness of millions of workers across Brazil.



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