

Survey of Brazilian workers gathers critical information for Global Workers' Inquest into COVID-19 Pandemic

Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education in Brazil
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As part of the Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education in Brazil (CBES-BR) conducted a survey among Brazilian workers about the impact of the pandemic on their lives. The survey, distributed on Facebook, addressed different aspects of this experience, including the sanitary conditions of workplaces; workers' experiences with the infection, illness, and death of colleagues, family members, and students; the class struggles triggered by the pandemic; and the impact of the growing economic crisis.

The survey has been answered so far by 47 workers from different states of the country, among them Amazonas, Bahia, Minas Gerais, Pernambuco, Piauí, Rio Grande do Sul, Rio de Janeiro, Santa Catarina and São Paulo. The majority of them (66 percent) are educators, but health care workers, metalworkers, bus drivers, telemarketing operators, social workers and unemployed people also participated. Several gave brief testimonies on their personal situations, usually terribly painful, that they have faced in the last two and a half years.

The survey raised significant data and facts, which reveal the consequences of the criminal pandemic policies imposed by all ruling political parties (from the fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro to the governors and mayors of the Workers Party, Brazilian Social Democracy Party and others) and the capitalist companies. The truths presented here by workers have been totally ignored in the corporate media, as well as by the trade unions and pseudo-left organizations, adjuncts to the ruling class "herd immunity" campaign.

Mass infection of workers

Among all respondents, 36.5 percent said they had contracted COVID-19. Of these, 69 percent believed they infected other members of their families, and 75 percent reported having suffered some sequelae of the disease. Half of them said that the infection occurred within the workplace.

Talking about their experiences in the companies, 86 percent reported having known at least one colleague who got infected inside the workplace. And, shockingly, 46.5 percent said that at least one of their colleagues had died from COVID-19.

The data provided by educators about the exposure of children was startling: 94 percent reported that some of their students had been infected by COVID-19, and 83 percent said that the

infections occurred after schools reopened. Two educators stated that they had students who died from COVID-19.

The mass exposure of the population, including children, to the deadly and debilitating SARS-CoV-2 virus has been aptly characterized by international scientists as a policy of social murder, a reference to the definition presented by Friedrich Engels in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.

After describing the degrading situation imposed by capitalist society on the working masses, Engels questioned, "How is it possible, under such conditions, for the lower class to be healthy and long lived? What else can be expected than an excessive mortality, an unbroken series of epidemics, a progressive deterioration in the physique of the working population?"

Unsafe workplaces

The conditions to which workers were subjected by capitalist companies and governments during the COVID-19 pandemic—of which the CBES-BR survey took a sample—serve as a vivid update of the work written by Engels in 1845. Poorly ventilated and unsanitized work environments, lack of necessary protective equipment and retention of sick people at work were some of the aspects widely reported by workers.

While 51 percent of respondents described their work environment as "poorly ventilated," 56 percent said that their workplaces were not well sanitized. The vast majority, 88.5 percent, stated that there were spaces within their company where crowding of people occurred.

Considering the airborne nature of COVID-19 transmission, it was not surprising that half of those who reported having contracted the virus believed that it occurred within the workplace or on public transportation. And 33.5 percent of respondents said that at least one COVID-19 outbreak had occurred in their company.

A critical factor worsening unsafe conditions in the workplace was the response given by managers to workers and, in the case of schools, students getting sick.

Testifying against the criminal attitudes adopted by capitalist managers, 81.5 percent of those interviewed declared that when a case was found in their company, those who had contact with the infected were not dismissed; 72 percent stated that infections in the company were not disclosed to the workers; and 95.5 percent stated that under no circumstances was the work shift or the

company as a whole closed due to infection.

In relation to schools, 53.5 percent of the educators declared that when a student became sick, no one was dismissed; 37 percent reported that only the classroom was dismissed; and 7 percent said that the entire school was closed.

Conditions in the schools

Reports about the situation in the schools—of which the unsafe reopening was critical to the explosion of cases and generation of new variants and to the implementation of the “back-to-work” campaign—demand a separate topic. Many educators wrote brief statements about the situations they had faced in the last period.

An educator from the São Paulo state public school system who suffers from hypertension reported, “While working at a home office, I was never infected, but after being forced to return, in less than 20 days I contracted COVID. I believe that my immunity was very low, because I caught a flu in less than 2 months, suffering the same symptoms but a different diagnosis. After returning from vacation at the beginning of the year, I had another sick leave with a new COVID diagnosis.”

That is, in a period of less than a year, the person suffered from two COVID-19 infections. Highlighting the question of Long COVID, which already affects hundreds of millions of people around the world, the educator wrote, “This disease left me with psychological and physical sequelae. Today, my thinking is very slow, I have sudden memory loss.”

Another teacher from São Paulo, who works in the public and private school systems in the capital, reported a very similar experience. “I caught COVID 15 days after returning to in-person classes in the private network. I wasn’t hospitalized, but I was left with memory sequelae, and my anxiety increased.”

From Paulista, Pernambuco (a state governed by a supposedly “left-wing” coalition of the Brazilian Socialist Party and the Communist Party of Brazil), a teacher wrote, “In the public school system, we are currently dealing with crowded classrooms without any protective measures. Students crowd together without masks, and the government has given orders for everything to go on as normal.”

Relating the “herd immunity” policy implemented in the schools to the harsh economic attacks against the working class, another educator from São Paulo wrote, “Governments have stolen the rights of everyone, including pensioners. Cases of COVID-19 were concealed to prevent the dismissal of teachers and students, cleaning staff were fired, and many other atrocities and maladies occurred during this period [of the pandemic].”

Commenting on the same problems, an educator from Manaus wrote, “Very difficult period, where in the private school we had salary decreases and a lot of pressure to keep the students in class.”

Workplace struggles

Of those interviewed, 53.5 percent declared that they had participated in struggles for protective measures against COVID-19. They briefly told the different reasons sparking those fights: “Strike for life. Reopening the schools provided a great risk;” “The school didn’t want to dismiss the contacts of a teacher who caught COVID.” “Due to the death of a co-worker,” several educators declared. “Because of urgency in vaccination,” wrote a

bus driver. “For PPE and for guidance about the pandemic,” said a social worker.

Only 44 percent claimed that the struggles they participated in were organized by a trade union, while 25 percent said that the union organized them only partially, and 31 percent said that the unions had no participation in its organization.

A large majority of the respondents, 70 percent, declared that their union does not collect or distribute information about infections in the workplaces. And 86 percent said that their union did not oppose in any way the ending of the mandatory wearing of masks.

Conclusions

The initial results of the survey are a strong confirmation of the principles and objectives that motivated the *World Socialist Web Site’s* launching of the Inquest in November 2021. Explaining its importance, the WSWS wrote:

This Inquest is necessary to break through the cover-up, falsifications and misinformation that have been deployed to justify policies responsible for the avoidable deaths of millions since the initial detection of SARS-CoV-2. The Inquest will gather and make available to the public the ample evidence of socially malign and even criminal indifference to human life.

The ultimate goal of the Inquest is to spur a socially conscious movement for the global elimination of COVID-19, based on the international unification of the working class guided by scientific knowledge.

The survey revealed the existence of fertile ground for the development of this perspective in the Brazilian working class, in opposition to the efforts to sabotage workers’ actions by the pro-capitalist unions.

And it reaffirms the need for deepening the collaboration between the working class and socially oriented scientists, doctors and public health experts. That is the prerequisite to put forward an accurate assessment of existing risk conditions in the workplaces and for the development of new safe work practices.

The Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education in Brazil (CBES-BR), in coordination with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), is building the democratic forms of organization necessary for the working class to advance its struggle and is leading the fight to eradicate COVID-19, prevent the development of new pandemics and rebuild society on the principle of preserving human life.



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