

Thousands of Brazilian teachers stage national strike against low wages, pro-corporate high school reform

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As part of a global teachers' movement against rising inflation and attacks on public education, thousands of teachers in Brazil's 26 states and the Federal District participated on Wednesday in a one-day national strike for compliance with the national minimum wage for teachers and against pro-corporate high school reform.

Street protests were also held throughout Brazil. In the largest of them, 10,000 teachers gathered on Paulista Avenue in São Paulo.

It was the second national strike this year called by the National Confederation of Education Workers (CNTE), affiliated with the Workers Party (PT)-controlled CUT union federation, to let off steam among Brazilian teachers after an uninterrupted series of attacks on public education, stretching from the previous PT administrations through the ultra-right government of former President Jair Bolsonaro.

Educators from numerous municipal and state education systems also approved indefinite strikes this week, continuing a strike movement since the new PT administration of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva declared a 14.94 percent raise to the teachers' national minimum wage that has yet to be implemented by state and municipal governments across Brazil. Only a third of the local administrations comply with the minimum wage, which now stands at 4,420 reais (US\$ 888) per month.

On Monday, teachers in the municipal system of Guarulhos, the second largest city in Brazil's richest state, São Paulo, went on strike. A day later, dozens of teachers occupied the Citizen's Service Center for several hours in protest against the mayor's refusal to negotiate. In defiance of a court decision that ruled the strike illegal, the teachers in Guarulhos gathered in an assembly on Thursday and decided to continue the strike.

On Wednesday, teachers in the Federal District (FD)

held a massive assembly and decided to go on strike starting May 4. They are demanding a raise in their wages, which have remained at the same level since 2015. On the same day, teachers in Amapá decided to resume a strike that had been started earlier this month, demanding a 40 percent raise after 11 years without a wage increase.

Several other education strikes have occurred in Brazil since the beginning of the year. Municipal teacher strikes broke out in Fortaleza, the capital of Ceará, in early February, and in Recife, the capital of Pernambuco, in early April. Teachers struck in São Bernardo do Campo, an industrial city on the outskirts of São Paulo, and the political cradle of the PT. In Ribeirão Preto, one of the largest cities of São Paulo state's countryside, teachers staged strikes in late March and early April alongside other municipal employees for better pay and working conditions.

In the states of Maranhão and Rio Grande do Norte, teachers stayed on strike throughout the last month against governments allied with Lula. Maranhão is ruled by Carlos Brandão of the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB), the same party as Vice President Geraldo Alckmin, while in Rio Grande do Norte, the PT's Fátima Bezerra has been in power since 2019.

Despite the objectively national character of this growing movement, the CNTE union federation has worked insistently to isolate the struggles from each other, even when they happen in the same city among teachers in the municipal and state networks. With the help of the bureaucratic student organizations controlled by the PT and its satellites, the unions are also preventing the education workers' struggles from merging with youth protests against a reactionary reform of school curriculums known as "New High School."

This treacherous script repeats the sabotage by the

CNTE of a previous wave of teacher strikes last year, which the union bureaucracy sought to channel behind the election of a new PT administration. Now that Lula is back in power, the union bureaucrats are attempting to neutralize the workers' revolt by limiting its aims to applying pressure on the bourgeois state.

Expressing that idea, CNTE president Heleno Araújo, himself a member of the PT, declared on Sunday: "The return of President Lula opens the perspective for a debate to advance these discussions and put our demands into practice."

That claim is a complete fraud. The PT government has a reactionary bourgeois character, and it came to power with the open aim of representing a "broad front" of the Brazilian political establishment ruled by the financial oligarchy. Lula's new administration continues and develops his two previous terms (2003-2010), in which he proved himself as an implacable defender of the Brazilian and imperialist capitalist elites.

The anti-working class character of the Lula government is embodied in the Ministry of Education itself, led by the PT's former governor of Ceará, Camilo Santana. During his eight years as governor, Santana implemented pro-corporate policies in education in close collaboration with educational NGOs controlled by Brazil's largest banks and corporations such as the Lemann Foundation and *Todos pela Educação* (All for Education). Once appointed as minister of education, he filled his ministry with representatives of those capitalist foundations, who are behind the formulation of the reactionary "New High School" reform that excludes working class youth from learning subjects such as art, philosophy and science.

After being approved in early 2017 in the Brazilian Congress amid university and school occupations, protests and strikes, "New High School" changes began to be implemented last year. To alleviate the growing opposition among teachers and youth, the PT government announced on April 4 that it would suspend its implementation for 60 days to "publicly debate" the issue. Even though Lula himself admitted, "We are not going to repeal [the reform]," the corrupted unions and student organizations celebrated the announced "suspension" as a victory for their "pressure" on the government.

The bankruptcy of this maneuver was further exposed on Monday, when the government launched its public consultation. Fernando Cássio, a professor at the Federal University of ABC who has been denouncing the pro-capitalist character of the PT government's educational

policies, wrote on Twitter: "The 11 items in the [Ministry of Education] questionnaire basically present what the corporate foundations/institutes are fighting to keep in the reform, along with some aspects that they had already given up (because they were absolutely unacceptable)."

The irrevocable support given by the CNTE and the trade unions in general to the PT administration and its pro-capitalist policies is explained by the fact that these organizations do not genuinely represent the working class, but rather constitute a privileged bureaucracy dependent on the bourgeois national state and hostile to the workers' interests.

This perspective will be openly manifested, once again, in the fraudulent May Day rally that will be held by the CUT and other trade union federations. This year, the unions have invited to their festival President Lula, the House and Senate presidents, and São Paulo Governor Tarcísio de Freitas, a loyal ally of Bolsonaro.

In complete opposition to the corporate unions and their nationalist and pro-capitalist perspective, the *World Socialist Web Site*, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) will hold their International May Day online rally.

This revolutionary International May Day rally will fight for the organization of an independent movement of the working class and youth around the world against war and capitalism. We call on all of our readers to attend the rally on Sunday, April 30 and join us in the struggle for internationalist socialism. Register now!



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