From Argentina to the Rio Grande, wave of teachers' strikes sweeps Latin America

Andrea Lobo, Guilherme Ferreira
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In at least a dozen countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, teachers have carried out major strikes and protests in the last month against the erosion of their pay by rampant inflation, understaffing and the deplorable state of schools.

Both the openly right-wing and the so-called "Pink-Tide" governments have rejected their demands and claimed that "there is no money." In numerous cases, they have used brutal police and military repression, as well as reprisals like layoffs.

Everywhere, the trade union bureaucracies are moving to isolate these struggles within each nation, province or even school, while using limited strikes and protests to blow off steam and impose the wage and social cuts demanded by the ruling elites.

The protest actions are a response to the attacks on living standards and social services as the ruling elites subordinate the education, healthcare and lives of workers and their children to the imperative of competing for foreign capital and markets. These struggles have intensified amid a deepening crisis of global capitalism accelerated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the US-led war drives against Russia and China. They are an important harbinger of a wider eruption of the class struggle globally.

After the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, when teachers and families were deprived of the technological, instructional, and economic resources needed for adequate remote learning, the UN has declared the worst educational crisis in the last 100 years in Latin America.

A study by UNESCO and the World Bank found a dramatic setback in reading, math and other skills, which are associated with lifelong socio-economic effects most heavily impacting the poorest layers.

Having been compelled to return to unsafe in-person learning so that parents could go back full time to produce profits for corporations and the banks, teachers, students and parents are being forced to face the burden of the accumulated deficits in learning and the emotional-health damages amid massive wage and budget cuts.

These intolerable conditions are fueling struggles across the region, which has the highest inequality in the world. The following is not a complete list, but includes the major protests waged by teachers in the recent period.

Teachers have been on strike this month in at least seven provinces in **Argentina**, including Salta, Santa Cruz, Chubut, Misiones, Jujuy, Buenos Aires Province and the city of Buenos Aires. These have been triggered by the agreement between the union apparatus and the governments to pay raises far below inflation, which is expected to reach 150 percent this year. Teachers are also fighting a massive attack against public education by the Peronist government of Alberto Fernandez, who abandoned promises to spend 6 percent of GDP on education and instead reduced the budget to the lowest level in 11 years.

These protests are being organized largely in opposition to the union bureaucracy, including assemblies of "self-convoked" rank-and-file teachers in Salta that voted to reject each offer by the government. In response, the pseudo-left is acting systematically to channel the anger behind appeals to vote in new, "combative" bureaucrats, or to merely demand that the same Peronist union leadership which belongs to the government call for a national strike.

In **Brazil**, teachers have held numerous strikes and protests for compliance with the national minimum wage since the beginning of the year. After strikes in Maranhão and Rio Grande do Norte, states governed respectively by the Workers Party (PT) and its ally, the Brazilian Socialist Party, in March and April, starting in May teachers in Amazonas, Amapá, and the Federal District began massive mobilizations. Next week, teachers in Pernambuco also threaten to go on strike.

Today, the struggle of Brazilian teachers is centered in Rio de Janeiro, where a strike completed its 44th day today (June 29). Last week, the courts ruled the strike illegal, but teachers have been challenging this decision.

Like the strike in Rio de Janeiro, many of the other strikes have lasted more than a month and teachers have suffered pay cuts, revealing their willingness to fight to reverse years of attacks on public education, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The precarious situation of teachers has been compounded by the implementation of a pro-corporate high school reform that has also generated protests from students.

However, despite the national character of this movement, the unions controlled by the PT and its pseudo-left allies have isolated the teachers' and students' struggles and subordinated them to the PT government of President Lula da Silva. Highly discredited among teachers after years of boycotting their struggles, the actions of the teachers' unions took on a criminal character when they betrayed teachers' struggles demanding the closure of school at the peak of the pandemic.

On June 21, public education teachers in **Uruguay** carried out a one-day strike and marched to the executive office building to protest budget cuts, demand wage increases and higher social spending in general. This was followed on June 27 by a national strike convoked by the main union confederation PIT-CNT to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1973 US-backed military coup.

In **Mexico,** teachers have carried out numerous strikes and marches throughout the year to protest the inadequate 8.2 percent pay increase announced by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) after

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promises of a major hike in real wages. In comparison, the cost of the basic basket of goods jumped 13.5 percent annually.

On May 16, a demonstration outside of the presidential palace by teachers demanding a 100 percent increase and educational guarantees for indigenous communities was attacked by hundreds of anti-riot police.

High school teachers have also gone on strike repeatedly, charging that not even AMLO's meager increase has been applied. The National Front of Middle-High School Teachers (FNSEMS) was forced to organize a national strike on June 22. Moreover, teachers have denounced AMLO's failure to fulfill his promise to centralize all payments to teachers under the federal government. Instead, the fund for such payments (Fone) has shrunk nearly 10 percent since 2015, while salaries are still going unpaid across many regions. Protests over these issues in Michoacán, where teachers have blocked major railways, have been met with brutal repression by National Guard soldiers.

Elementary and high school teachers in Santiago, **Chile**, struck on June 14 over the "historic debt" owed to teachers that pseudo-left President Gabriel Boric had promised to pay, as well as the mental health and overwork crises facing teachers. The teachers' union, Colegio de Profesores, has continuously postponed an indefinite national strike over the "debt," which refers to the accumulation of stipulated wage and budget increases that have gone unpaid since 1981, when the Pinochet dictatorship bulldozed much of the public education system.

Boric's response to calls by teachers for a national strike earlier this month sums up the attitude of the ruling class everywhere to public education. "Chile has a historic debt with teachers that began during the dictatorship. I must be frank and responsible: the Chilean state doesn't have enough money for such reparations."

Teachers in **Peru** have been at the forefront of the mass demonstrations against the US-backed coup last December and the regime of Dina Boluarte, which has responded with murderous repression and threats to simply fire striking teachers. Teachers and other workers in the southern department of Puno have carried out a series of 24-hour strikes in May and June, demanding Boluarte's resignation, while teachers' unions have announced strikes in support of a "Third Takeover of Lima," led by indigenous organizations, planned for July 19.

Bolivian educators carried out major nationwide strikes, roadblocks and demonstrations in March and April to protest a "historic deficit," referring to unpaid hours, as well as the deterioration of conditions at schools. Teachers did not get paid for much of the time they were teaching remotely, and many schools depend on parents' associations to raise money for wages.

The Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) administration of President Luis Arce responded by deploying riot police against demonstrators and declaring that teachers have no right to strike. Since the last major demonstrations on May Day, the Urban Teachers Union Federation has kept announcing further mobilizations "in the coming weeks" while postponing these indefinitely.

In **Costa Rica**, thousands of university students and teachers across all levels marched on June 20 to Congress to protest cuts to the education budget aimed at building up the police, in the first major demonstrations against the right-wing Rodrigo Chaves administration.

In the **Dominican Republic**, teachers carried out repeated strikes and major demonstrations throughout May and June to demand higher salaries and pensions, as well as better conditions, including the timely delivery of textbooks and materials, school lunches, more staff, a proper healthcare service and the completion of countless unfinished school buildings.

In late May, teachers staged a two-day national strike over pay in **Jamaica**, and issues have not been resolved.

Throughout June, school occupations by parents, teachers and students have taken place almost daily across **Honduras,** chiefly because of understaffing. After two years of remote classes under conditions of generalized poverty and widespread illiteracy among parents, thousands of students still have no teachers.

In February, teachers from Cauca, **Colombia**, set up a camp for two weeks outside of Congress demanding better healthcare. And in late March, more than 10,000 Bogotá teachers struck and marched against overwork, pay cuts and understaffing, and were subjected to reprisals.

Beyond Latin America, recent weeks have seen ongoing strikes by UK university and college staff and strike votes by teachers in England over pay, pensions and staffing; a nearly month-long strike by 150,000 teachers in Romania demanding a major pay increase; a strike by Portuguese teachers over pay; strikes by public university workers in Slovenia; and an indefinite strike by supply teachers in Catalonia, among other struggles.

In the most advanced expression of the ongoing resurgence of teachers' struggles, the Educators' Rank-and-File Safety Committees in Michigan mobilized last week to the Warren Truck Assembly near Detroit to fight for the unity of educators and autoworkers in the struggle against layoffs and budget cuts, as both sections of workers face major contract battles in the coming weeks and months.

This struggle, which must be expanded across all major industries and beyond national borders, is being organized as part of the building of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. The IWA-RFC was launched in 2021 by the International Committee of the Fourth International to coordinate the necessary international counteroffensive of the working class against social inequality, exploitation, war, the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and every major social issue, along with their source: capitalism.

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