

Brazilian student and teacher unions cover for Lula government attacks on education

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Last year, numerous protests and strikes broke out in Brazil in opposition to attacks on public education promoted by the government of former president Jair Bolsonaro. These struggles were sabotaged by the student and teachers unions and diverted into support for the election of Workers Party (PT) candidate Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

Now that Lula has come to power and is carrying on with the capitalist attacks, these corporatist unions are desperately trying to cover up the successive austerity measures being imposed by his government. They aim to prevent Brazilian youth and workers from drawing the necessary lessons from the record of the PT government, which presides over a country marked by rising levels of social inequality amid an explosive international situation, and to divert their struggles from a direct confrontation with the capitalist state.

At the end of July, the government announced a cut of 1.5 billion reais (US\$ 300 million) to the federal budget, with the harshest impact on healthcare and education.

Attempting to conceal their responsibility for these attacks, the National Student Union (UNE) and other student organizations, controlled by the Maoist Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB), the pseudo-left Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL), and the PT itself, issued a call for a demonstration last Friday.

UNE has tweeted: “Federal government blocks funds for literacy, school transportation, and scholarships... On August 11, we will take to the streets all over Brazil so that the budget is immediately reconstituted. Education is an investment!” It further wrote: “[The] budget block [was] inherited by the nefarious policy of the Michel Temer government [2016-2018], which instituted a spending ceiling for Brazilian education.”

Those claims are completely fraudulent. Trying to free Lula from any responsibility for the cuts, UNE consciously omits that his government has managed last May to push his own “fiscal framework” through Congress, also limiting social and education spending, with a favorable vote by all the PT deputies.

In keeping with its intention to shield the government, the

demonstrations held by UNE last Friday were extremely restrained, both physically and politically. One of UNE’s directors, Luis Alves, told *Agência Brasil* that it was “a symbolic demonstration” to present “a demand to the government.” Its aims, Alves claimed, was to promote “an actual ‘reconstruction of Brazil,’” in reference to the Lula government’s slogan.

The effort to isolate the students’ struggle and limit protests against the Lula government’s cuts, as well as for the repeal of the pro-corporate High School reform, a growing demand of students and teachers, was also clearly seen in São Paulo, Brazil’s largest city.

In São Paulo, UNE and the other student organizations scheduled the demonstration for 8 am. That was a conscious move to prevent the protest’s expansion under conditions in which São Paulo state’s teachers are suffering a series of attacks by Governor Tarcisio de Freitas, and teachers from São Paulo’s technical schools and colleges were on strike.

UNE’s organized sabotage is being carried out in tandem with the teachers unions controlled by the PT and their pseudo-left apologists and the National Confederation of Education Workers (CNTE). They continue isolating strikes and preventing a nationally unified struggle, including with students.

In the second half of this year, teachers from numerous municipal and state education systems have continued the movement of strikes and walkouts that began earlier this year in defense of the national minimum wage and for the repeal of the High School reform. Only last week, shortly after the start of the school semester, teachers in the states of Paraíba and Alagoas went on strike. In Bahia, governed for 17 years by the PT and which in recent days has been highlighted nationally for having the most lethal military police in Brazil, teachers held a demonstration last week in front of the State Legislative Assembly and may go on strike this week.

Instead of calling for a general strike and demonstrations across all Brazilian states unifying teachers and students, the CNTE called for a counterfeit demonstration in Brasília, two

days before the UNE rallies, under the banner of a “pressure hug” directed at the Ministry of Education. Without mentioning the Lula government’s cuts to education, the CNTE wrote on its website that the demonstration “aims to *pressure* the Executive and Legislative branches for more quality in the sector and the valorization of public education and its professionals.”

The CNTE demonstration was also called to coincide with the Lula government’s announcement of changes to the so-called High School reform. In April, the government had suspended its implementation schedule and started a public consultation with teachers and students. It was widely recognized, as *Folha de S. Paulo* wrote, that “this measure was a way to reduce the government’s tension with the issue,” since “the discourse of the Minister of Education, Camilo Santana (PT), has always been to make adjustments and not to repeal” the reform.

Since taking office, Santana has filled the Education Ministry with representatives of educational foundations linked to big banks and companies behind the High School reform. The main change proposed by the Lula government was to increase the hours of regular subjects at the expense of those linked to the job market, which was welcomed by Brazil’s largest pro-corporate educational foundation, *Todos pela Educação* (All for Education).

According to it, “Ministry of Education proposals point in the right direction, since they seek to adjust and improve the original formulation, preserving the principles of the reform carried out in 2017 such as the expansion of the workload, curricular flexibility, and greater articulation of Secondary Education with Professional and Technological Education. This is an important highlight given the recent calls for repeal that have marked the public debate.”

The pro-corporate character of the Lula government’s Education Ministry was also expressed in a law sanctioned in late July establishing the Full-Time School Program. In addition to increasing Brazilian students’ time in primary and secondary schools, it aims to extend to all of Brazil the pro-corporate models in education based on “meritocracy, fiscal stimulus, with awards, where schools now have goals and indicators,” as Santana defined it at the end of last year and which he applied while governor of Ceará between 2015 and 2022.

The farcical actions of the CNTE, UNE, and other student and teachers union organizations have been accompanied by the complete silence of much of the Brazilian pseudo-left regarding the Lula government’s recent attacks on education, such as *Esquerda Online*, published by the PSOL’s Morenoite tendency Resistência, and *Diário Causa Operária*, of the Lambertist Workers Cause Party (PCO).

Meanwhile, the Morenista Revolutionary Workers

Movement (MRT), the sister organization in Brazil of the Argentine Socialist Workers Party (PTS), is presenting itself as a left political “alternative” and advocating a supposedly “independent struggle” against the PT and the Lula government. However, this is exposed by its attempt to provide a left cover for the CUT and the Brazilian unions controlled by the PT and PSOL by advancing the claim that they can be pressured to defend the interests of youth, teachers, and workers.

Since the end of last year, this failed attempt by the MRT has been further exposed in its alliance with the mother of Morenoite organizations in Brazil and from which it itself emerged, the Unified Socialist Workers Party (PSTU). The PSTU’s rightist record—from its support for the fraudulent impeachment of former PT president Dilma Rousseff, through its support for the “Ukrainian resistance” in the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, to the numerous alliances the PSTU has made in the unions with the PT and PSOL—is far from an impediment to the MRT advancing its opportunist politics by trying to forge a Brazilian version of Argentina’s Left and Workers Front-Unity (FIT-U).

As recent developments in Brazil have shown, what is holding back the development of the struggle of teachers and students in defense of public education are the nationalist and pro-corporate unions. Contrary to the claims of organizations like the MRT, which represent sections of the middle class trade union apparatus, there is nothing to reform in these organizations.

The genuine way forward in the struggle for working class political independence will only be taken through a conscious break with these organizations controlled by the PT and its pseudo-left apologists through the formation of a democratic international network of rank-and-file committees. This means building the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), launched in 2021 by the International Committee of the Fourth International, to unleash the enormous social strength of the working class in Brazil and internationally in a coordinated struggle against the capitalist system and its representatives, including the PT.



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