

Brazil's Workers Party and pseudo-lefts isolate teachers' and students' struggles

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30 October 2023

Despite the broad attacks by the far-right governor of São Paulo, Tarcísio de Freitas, on education and social services in Brazil's largest and richest state, the Workers Party (PT) and its satellites on the pseudo-left are working to isolate the struggles that are emerging and prevent a united movement against capitalism in Brazil.

As part of the growing class struggle around the world, strikes, walkouts and protests have taken place in São Paulo in recent months, mainly involving education workers. In the most recent one, state public school teachers held a one-day strike and a protest in front of the São Paulo Department of Education last Friday, October 20, against the government's bill reducing the education budget from 30 percent to 25 percent of state revenue.

A political pupil of the fascistic former president Jair Bolsonaro, Tarcísio is carrying out a series of attacks on public education, advancing pro-corporate measures and censorship measures targeting supposed "left-wing indoctrination" in schools.

Also last week, the student strike at the University of São Paulo (USP), the largest university in Latin America, against the shortage of teachers and for student permanence policies completed one month.

Previously, at the beginning of August, teachers of 116 technical schools and colleges in São Paulo held a two-week strike for better wages and working conditions, while high school students held walkouts and protests against the pro-corporate "High School Reform." In September and October, teachers at USP and students and staff at the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP) held strikes against the deterioration of public universities.

The government's attacks on social services are not restricted to education and include the privatization of the state water and sanitation company, one of the largest and most profitable in the world, and of subway and metropolitan train systems. In response, workers from these public companies held a joint one-day strike on October 3.

Despite this broad movement in defense of workers' jobs and living standards, along with public education and social services, the unions and student organizations controlled by the PT and the pseudo-left, particularly the Morenoite and Pabloite tendencies in the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL), are working to isolate each of these struggles.

Most notably, the São Paulo teacher's union (APEOESP), controlled by the PT and PSOL, has carried out a systematic boycott of the teachers' struggles that have spread across Brazil

since the beginning of the year. Educators in different states launched strikes and protests demanding the national minimum wage for teachers and opposing the High School Reform. More recently, APEOSP boycotted the joint struggle of teachers, students, and workers in public companies in São Paulo.

Virtually the entire Brazilian pseudo-left remained silent about the São Paulo teachers' strike on October 20, particularly aiming to prevent any intersection with the more than one-month-long strike at the University of São Paulo. Since the beginning of the strike, Morenoite and Stalinist student organizations that control the Central Student Directory have limited the students' struggle to sterile negotiations with the Dean's office to pressure it into meeting their demands. At the last assembly, held on October 18, these organizations tried to bury the strike by claiming that "ending the strike ... cannot mean the end of our mobilization." Despite that, 64 percent of the more than 600 students present voted to continue the strike.

While publicly defending the continuation of the strike, the Morenoite Revolutionary Workers Movement (MRT) and its student organization, Revolutionary Spark, presented no alternative for students besides the dead end of negotiations with the Dean's office. On their *Esquerda Diário* website, they wrote after the student's decision to continue the strike that it is "necessary to fight to unite students ... in actions that serve to massify" the strike and "get our demands from the Dean's Office." To this end, they proposed an "artistic performance-festival" last Friday, while thousands of teachers were protesting in front of the São Paulo Department of Education.

Parochial proposals like these are far from an effective defense of public education and, more importantly, fail to address the cause of the attacks on social rights: the capitalist system. A growing social and economic crisis in São Paulo, Brazil and the world has been driven by the COVID-19 pandemic and the escalating imperialist global warfare. Under those conditions, bourgeois parties of all political stripes are launching harsh domestic policies of repression and attacks on social and democratic rights, while massively investing in the state's rearmament.

In Brazil, these policies have been implemented by both far-right politicians and the supposedly "left-wing" bourgeois sectors, such as the Workers Party. The explosion of state violence has been recently highlighted by brutal police massacres in the states of São Paulo and Bahia. Both ruled by the PT for the last 17 years, they

have registered the highest level of police murders in Brazil.

Just as at USP, at the State University of Feira de Santana (UEFS) in Bahia, students have been on strike since the beginning of October, also against the lack of teachers and student assistance. Summarizing the higher education policies of successive PT governments in Bahia, the UEFS Teachers Association wrote on its website that they “have significantly compromised ... the budget allocated to the State Universities of Bahia” and led to “the dismantling of public universities as a project.”

The PT’s attacks on education are also being advanced by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s government. Since August, it has “frozen” 116 million reais (US\$ 23 million) of the scientific research budget. Of this sum, 50 million reais (US\$ 10 million) was already cut. Next year’s health and education budgets will likely suffer severe blows under the “sustainable fiscal regime,” which the Lula administration managed to approve in Congress last May in line with the demands of the IMF and Brazil’s financial oligarchy.

The class priorities of the PT government were also expressed in the Growth Acceleration Program (PAC), a broad program of investment in infrastructure mainly through Public-Private Partnerships for, among other areas, the construction of prisons, train and subway lines and basic sanitation – exactly the targets of the Tarcisio government’s privatization in São Paulo.

The *World Socialist Website* has widely covered the PT’s right-wing response to the attempted coup by Bolsonaro and the Armed Forces command. Seeking to improve its strained relations with the fascist military, the Lula government has announced a series of measures to boost the Armed Forces, including allocating more investments to the military than for education and health.

The unions and student organizations controlled by the PT and the pseudo-left have been giving criminal cover for these reactionary policies. Before last year’s elections, these organizations diverted every struggle of workers and youth by sowing illusions in the election of Lula. Today, they insist that the struggle against the far-right government in São Paulo should be carried out through a “broad front” with supposedly “developmentalist” and “anti-neoliberal” sections of the Brazilian bourgeoisie.

This policy has been expressed most vocally by the Morenoite Resistência tendency of PSOL, which controls the São Paulo Subway Workers Union and has several posts in the leadership of APEOESP. In its assessment of the recent APEOESP congress, it advanced the illusion that the Lula government can “reverse the giant setbacks of recent years under [the governments of] Temer and Bolsonaro,” and that it is necessary to “defend the government against the attacks of the far-right” and maintain “positions in defense of the [PT’s] program that was victorious in the 2022 elections.”

The support of PSOL’s Morenoite and Pabloite tendencies to the PT’s nationalist and pro-corporate program led them to join forces for the first time with the PT’s hated union bureaucracy in a victorious slate for the APEOESP election last May. This move also represents their joint effort to counter the growing hostility of the rank and file by advancing a phony “unity” of once rival union tendencies.

Great class battles are ahead for teachers, students, and workers in São Paulo’s public companies. Earlier this week, the Tarcisio government launched a harsh repressive measure against subway workers, firing five of them and suspending three union leaders in reprisal for the October 3 strike. At USP, the Dean’s office threatened students with failure in their subjects and even expulsion if they continued to strike.

These struggles are part of a broader movement across the working class in São Paulo, Brazil, and the world. In addition to the recent strikes by teachers and workers in public companies, workers at three GM plants in São Paulo are on strike against the bloodbath of more than a thousand jobs that the company announced last weekend.

Internationally, auto workers in the US have been on strike for six weeks, and teachers and other sectors have been demonstrating successively around the world against the social and economic attacks fueled by the ongoing pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

To liberate the potential of these struggles, workers must break free from the grip of the union bureaucracy and build independent, democratically controlled rank-and-file committees united internationally under the International Workers Alliance of Rank-of-File Committees.

It is a significant development that the assemblies of USP students and São Paulo teachers expressed broad support for the uprising of the Palestinian people against the Israeli genocide backed by the imperialist countries. As in the rest of the world, demonstrations against Israel’s war on Gaza have taken place in recent weeks in São Paulo and other Brazilian states. This indicates the enormous potential for unity between the growing struggles of the working class and the antiwar movement in Brazil and internationally.

The university students on strike represent a new generation that is undergoing a deep process of political radicalization internationally. To fight against social injustice and political reaction, and to defend its future from nuclear and climatic catastrophe, young people must make a critical political choice. They must orient themselves to the only social force and political program capable of overthrowing capitalism, which is the root cause of these problems: they must turn to the international working class and join the party of international socialist revolution, the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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