

Brazilian teachers warn US counterparts: Trump is following Milei-Bolsonaro model to destroy public education and militarize schools

Our reporters
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The following comments were made by Tomas Castanheira, a Brazilian teacher and member of the Socialist Equality Group (SEG), to the March 15 online meeting co-sponsored by the Educators Rank-and-File Committee (ERFC-US) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IY SSE). The meeting was titled, “Free Mahmoud Khalil! Mobilize the Working Class Against Trump’s Dictatorship! Defend the Right to Public Education!” Other reports and a fuller account of the meeting can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

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I would like to thank you for this invitation. My name is Tomas Castanheira. I am an educator here in Brazil and a member of the Socialist Equality Group of Brazil. I would like to begin by saying that what workers are going through in the United States is coming as a big shock not just to workers in America but to workers all over the world. There has been a great political shift in the situation and these massive attacks against education, the living conditions of the working class and basic democratic rights will wake up a powerful movement across every section of the working class not just in the United States but all over the world.

I would like to recall my personal experiences as a teacher. I remember just as I got into education system there were massive strikes in 2017-18 that brought hundreds of thousands of people into the streets against the cuts in pensions of teachers and public employees. These strikes were betrayed and I witnessed this process.

I remember very well when I read the *World Socialist Web Site*’s account of this process, not just in Brazil but in every single continent. It was then that I understood that the movement that I went through and was going through was part of a much broader movement of educators all over the globe, which was an answer to the universal capitalist policy

of gutting social spending and pensions all over the world. The ruling class saw these programs as pools of already extracted surplus and the capitalist system was just ripping up the social rights of the working class to pay for its crisis.

But this powerful movement was dissipated by the Workers Party (PT) and its supporters in the trade union bureaucracies and pseudo-left movements. Though the working class has immense power, it is critical for workers to understand what they are living through and the political forces that are arrayed against them. The most impelling need is to have a clear political perspective.

I would like to quote briefly Leon Trotsky, who was the co-leader of the Russian Revolution and one of the greatest revolutionary strategists of all time.

“The masses, of course, are not at all impeccable. Idealization of the masses is foreign to us. We have seen them under different conditions, at different stages and in addition in the biggest political shocks. We have observed their strong and weak sides. Their strong side-resoluteness, self-sacrifice, heroism—has always found its clearest expression in times of revolutionary upsurge. During this period the Bolsheviks headed the masses.”

Brothers and sisters, this is the kind of movement we are going through. So, the greatest political task for everyone here is to develop themselves politically, to have a clear political perspective because this is what is going to lead masses of people now.

I would like to end my contribution by reading a statement from another comrade in Brazil, Guilherme, who is also a teacher. I’ll abbreviate it because of time but I think it makes a very important contribution to the discussion because it lays out the international character of the attacks being promoted in the United States that will have a profound impact in relation to Brazil itself.

Comrade Guilherme wrote that in recent years bipartisan

attacks on public education in the United States have taken place with the same content and intensity as in Brazil and throughout Latin America. Since the Trump administration came to power this process has intensified. He has been inspired by the government of Argentina's fascist president Javier Milei, who recently gifted a chainsaw to billionaire Elon Musk, the head of Trump's so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). This symbolizes what is in store for the entire working class in the Western Hemisphere: massive cuts to social and democratic rights accompanied by brutal repression of any movement to resist them.

In Brazil, the measures carried out by Milei and now Trump have been praised by right-wing politicians and the financial markets as a model. This includes São Paulo Governor Tarcísio de Freitas who is a close ally of former president Jair Bolsonaro, an outright fascist who is currently awaiting trial for attempting to violently abolish democracy in Brazil two years ago and impose a brutal military dictatorship. It is critical to understand that Bolsonaro's coup attempt was directly inspired and was fundamentally a political continuation of the January 6, 2021 coup attempt by Donald Trump in the United States.

Here in São Paulo our state governor Tarcísio de Freitas has continued the fascist policies promoted Bolsonaro, which aims to militarize the basic education. Up to 100 public schools in São Paulo are currently under threat of being converted into what they call "Civic Military Schools." The aim of this policy is to put an end to what they call "leftist indoctrination" in education to mold a constituency in the schools for a fascist dictatorship.

Several of the proposed measures are simply a return to the practices that were utilized in the schools during the bloody military dictatorship in Brazil that lasted from 1964 to 1985. Other measures are new, including the presence of what they call "Civic Military Monitors" linked to state military-security forces and wearing military style uniforms in schools. These fascist monitors would be responsible for disciplinary issues and for extracurricular activities such as the raising of the flag at the school on a weekly basis, which was constant during the dictatorship.

This monitor will also be responsible for a subject called "Values Project," which includes a two-hour class per week that "will cover ethics and civics contents." These topics, in turn, are part of the subjects of Philosophy and Sociology, which successive governments and the pro-corporate high school reform of 2017 have targeted for being part of an alleged leftist indoctrination of students.

It is important to understand what the military dictatorship promoted in the schools because this is a burning question not just in Brazil but also in the United States. In 1969, the

military dictatorship responded to major student strikes and protests by introducing two subjects into the schools called, "Morals and Civics" and "Social and Political Organization of Brazil." The main objective of those subjects was to indoctrinate students, justify the US-backed coup in Brazil and fight back against left-wing sentiments among students.

The militarization of education hasn't just happened with Bolsonaro and his local fascist allies. Similar measures are being carried out in the state of Bahia, which is governed by the Workers Party (PT), a so-called left party. The PT was formed as a "unity of the left" coalition party in the beginning of the 1980s in response to massive strikes that brought down the military dictatorship. Its main objective was to permit a transition of regimes within the framework of capitalism. It had many left-sounding ideas except the taking of power by the working class and the destruction of the capitalist state.

The PT is in power and is ruling for the capitalist class. Its answer to fascism is to promote fascist measures themselves supposedly to keep the fascists from taking power. Their answer is to promote capitalist attacks, the normalization of fascism in politics, to supposedly prevent Bolsonaro from coming back in power. There are powerful lessons here and those lessons point to the development of a conscious political leadership which is guided by an internationalist and a historic perspective. We must take up the lessons of history, take up the lessons of the Russian Revolution that brought the working class to power and the innumerable defeats caused not by the incapacity of the working class, or its supposed unwillingness to unite and fight, but by the betrayals of its leadership which prevented it from taking power.

Thank you very much.



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