

PT-controlled union federation betrays oil workers strike in Brazil

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On December 22, the Unified Federation of Oil Workers (FUP), affiliated with the CUT, the union federation controlled by Brazil's ruling Workers Party (PT), instructed its 14 affiliated unions to end the strike begun on December 15. At assemblies held between December 23 and 26, workers from 13 unions decided to accept the 2026 collective bargaining agreement proposed by oil giant Petrobras.

Workers from four unions affiliated with the other union federation, the National Federation of Oil Workers (FNP), affiliated with the CSP-Conlutas union federation controlled by the Morenoite Unified Socialist Workers Party (PSTU), decided to continue the strike. These four unions and the Norte Fluminense union, the only one affiliated with the FUP that decided to continue the strike, are located in regions of Brazil that account for more than 50 percent of the Petrobras' workforce and where about 80 percent of the country's oil is extracted.

In a clear attack on the right to strike, on December 27 the Labor Court issued a preliminary injunction in favor of Petrobras to keep 80 percent of workers on the job and set a fine of R\$ 200,000 for unions and their federations if they failed to comply with the ruling. On January 2 there will be a conciliation hearing in the Labor Court between the striking unions and Petrobras, and on January 6 the court is expected to rule on the collective bargaining agreement.

The FUP justified its decision to call off the strike by arguing that the new collective bargaining agreement proposed by Petrobras represents an improvement on what the company had previously offered and that this "helps us to avoid, as far as possible, any setbacks that may occur during the collective bargaining process," as it wrote on its website on December 26.

The workers who approved the continuation of the strike, however, do not believe this. Even a union leader from the Norte Fluminense union stated in a report on the FUP website that "Petrobras has not yet met the main demands of the rank and file" and that it "has not presented a proposal that addresses the main points of our struggle."

Petrobras has offered vague promises in three letters of commitment. In them, the company has pledged not to punish strikers, to present a new model for the pension fund, which has a billion-dollar deficit that has led to regular cuts for retirees, and to discuss the so-called "Sovereign Brazil Agenda," a nationalist and pro-corporate document presented by the FUP in October.

Petrobras, however, did not present any proposals to improve wages and working conditions. On the contrary, it maintained the wage increase for workers at 5.66 percent, a figure that, after discounting inflation over the last year, represents a real gain of only 0.5 percent.

These developments in the Petrobras workers strike reinforce the historical role of the FUP in dividing oil workers and preventing a unified struggle with other sections of federal public employees fighting against the attacks from the government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Workers Party – PT). Its main goal has been to provide cover for the Lula government's attacks, stifle the growing anger of Petrobras workers, who launched one of the largest strikes since 1995, and divert their struggles toward bourgeois politics.

At the beginning of last week, when the FUP was instructing its unions to end the walkout, postal workers were expanding their strike, which began on December 16, for better wages and working conditions and against a privatization plan by the company that will lead to mass layoffs. On December 23, the number of unions on strike rose from 12 to 18, out of a total of 34, spread throughout Brazil, including the largest states.

For the FUP union bureaucracy, the strike also served to further its party-political interests and prepare for its change in leadership. In the Instagram videos about the strike, general coordinator Dayvid Bacelar always appeared alongside his successor, Cibele Vieira. On December 22, he posted on Instagram saying that, after "17 years dedicated exclusively to the union movement," he was passing the baton to Vieira, who was "forged in the struggle and [is] prepared to lead" the FUP.

Bacelar, who is a member of the PT's national board and presents himself on Instagram as a "Member of two councils of President Lula's [government]," also wrote that he is planning for "new challenges." Earlier this year, he had already told the daily *A Tarde* that he will run for federal deputy in the 2026 election to renew the PT and bring the party closer to its social and union bases.

The basis for this candidacy could not be more bankrupt, fully aligned with the nationalist and pro-corporate program of the PT government. As he stated in early December at the launch of the "Comitê Brasil Soberano" (Sovereign Brazil Committee) in Bahia, his home state, "We understand that Brazilian sovereignty has been under pressure on different fronts. ... In this context, defending sovereignty means ensuring that fundamental decisions about the country's future remain under the control of the Brazilian people, ensuring development, jobs, industry, and democracy."

At the launch of the Committee, he also charged that under the government of former fascist President Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022), "strategic sectors were not only threatened but totally dismantled, such as Petrobras Distribuidora [responsible for the sale and distribution of fuels], which was privatized, or the Landulpho Alves Refinery, which was sold to the Mubadala Group of the United Arab Emirates for half its value."

However, since taking office in 2023, Lula has not reversed these privatizations nor taken measures to change Petrobras' status as a mixed-economy company controlled by the Brazilian state. He also maintained the Bolsonaro government's dividend payment policy, which this year alone offered R\$45 billion to shareholders of Brazil's largest company in terms of revenue.

Despite advancing supposedly more radical rhetoric in the Petrobras unions affiliated with the FNP, the Brazilian pseudo-left is incapable of offering a progressive response to the Lula government's attacks. On the contrary, it repeats the old language of bourgeois nationalism advanced by the PT and the FUP, offering itself as the "true patriots" in the strike.

This perspective was openly advanced by the Brazilian section of the Morenoite Permanent Revolution Current – Fourth International (PPC-FI, formerly the Trotskyist Faction), which has union leaders in Rio de Janeiro. In a December 28 article titled "5 reasons to support the national oil workers' strike" published in *Esquerda Diário*, it wrote that "supporting the oil workers strike, as well as that of the postal workers, is to defend the country's true sovereignty."

The oil workers' struggle for better wages and working conditions, however, has nothing to do with guaranteeing "energy sovereignty" for "national development," as the article also stated. In it, the Brazilian section of the PPC-FI

also argued that, in order to overcome the betrayal of the FUP, a "national strike command where the rank and file have control over decisions" is necessary.

A command like this only repeats the nationalist logic of the FUP and remains totally subordinate to the union bureaucracy, serving to cover up the attacks of the Lula government and the betrayals of the PT-controlled FUP.

What Petrobras workers need is not to defend national sovereignty but to advance a struggle independent of the Lula government, the PT and the pseudo-left around it, as well as the unions controlled by them. This means forming rank-and-file committees affiliated with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to unify their struggles with their brothers and sisters internationally.

In the face of the global assault by the ruling elites on jobs and working conditions as they turn to war and dictatorship, the IWA-RFC has advanced the need for these committees to raise an internationalist program against the root cause of these attacks, the capitalist system.

Since early December, Brazilian workers have also been able to count on a powerful tool for education, organization and international unity in their struggles: "Socialism AI," a unique chatbot developed by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) based on the classic works of Marxism and the immense archive published on the *World Socialist Web Site*.

We call on Petrobras workers and workers in other sectors to take up this program, consciously appropriate its content and carry it forward, in addition to using "Socialism AI" as a tool for clarification, organization and strengthening of their present and future struggles.



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