

# Protests and strikes erupt in Brazil in turbulent run-up to presidential election

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Since the beginning of this year, a series of protests and strikes have erupted across Brazil against the austerity and privatization policies of the administration of Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Workers Party–PT). This movement has exposed the pro-corporate character of Lula’s third term (2023–2026). He will be the presidential candidate in the October election as part of a new “broad front” of the PT with other bourgeois and pseudo-left parties.

The latest strikes against the Lula administration have involved technical and administrative staff and hospital workers at federal universities. They are part of a broader movement by federal public sector workers to defend their wages and working conditions since Lula returned to power in 2023.

This trend intensified in 2024, during the second year of the Lula administration, when his “new fiscal framework”—which limited social spending—took effect, leading to numerous freezes and cuts in education and healthcare budgets. In May of last year, *Folha de S. Paulo* reported that the discretionary budget for federal universities during the first two years of the Lula administration was lower than that recorded during the administration of Michel Temer (2016–2018) and in the first year of the administration of the imprisoned fascist ex-president Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2022).

The national strike by technical and administrative staff began in late February and now involves more than 50 federal educational institutions across the country, with over 50 percent of the workforce on strike, according to the Fasubra union. They are demanding that the agreements signed with the Lula administration at the end of the sector’s 2024 national strike be honored.

That year, they staged a strike that lasted nearly four months, one of the longest by federal public sector workers during the Lula administration. It was accompanied by a two-month strike by teachers at federal universities and institutes. On April 16, teachers will also hold a one-day strike to demand that the administration honor the agreements reached at the end of the 2024 strike.

Both in 2024 and in the current strike, workers have faced the Lula administration’s intransigence and unwillingness to negotiate their demands. The Fasubra union, committed to containing the workers’ opposition to the PT government, has recently declared that “there was a shift in the administration’s stance” after a March 27 negotiation, with increased proposals for a benefits readjustment.

The Fasubra union has established a fraudulent and bureaucratic National Strike Committee, which is conducting negotiations with the Lula administration. Just as during the 2024 strike, its goal is to steer the strike into the dead end of bourgeois politics, isolate it from other sectors, and bury it. One of its proposals is for technical and administrative staff to pressure the “progressive party caucuses (PT,

PCdoB, PDT, PSB, PV, PSOL, and REDE) to mediate dialogue with the Presidency of the Republic, the MGI [Ministry of Management and Innovation], and the MEC [Ministry of Education].”

Meanwhile, employees from various other sectors—including doctors, nurses, and administrative staff—at the state-owned company that manages federal university hospitals across the country, Hospital Universitário Brasil (HU Brasil), went on strike in several states last Monday, March 30.

As of April 2, employees at university hospitals in 13 Brazilian states were on strike. HU Brasil is responsible for managing 45 federal university hospitals in 25 states.

According to the Condsef/Fenadsef union, “The company [HU Brasil] presented a financial proposal deemed TOTALLY INSUFFICIENT,” offering a pay raise of “80 percent of the INPC [official inflation rate]” from last year, which was 4.3 percent. In some regions of Brazil, wage losses in recent years have reached up to 25 percent. Workers are also demanding better working conditions and a benefits adjustment.

With the collective bargaining dispute set for trial on April 2, employees at various university hospitals ended their strike. The Superior Labor Court (TST) ruled that 80 percent of employees must remain at work, and HU Brasil threatened to deduct strike days from the striking employees’ pay.

Created in 2011 during the administration of former PT President Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016), HU Brasil represented a major step in the privatization of public healthcare in Brazil. Its implementation led to an increase in workplace abuse, precarious working conditions, and outsourcing at federal university hospitals.

Prior to these strikes, a protest by labor inspectors in January exposed the efforts by the Lula administration to benefit one of Brazil’s largest corporations. The inspectors staged a work stoppage against the direct interference by Labor Minister Luiz Marinho, a former CUT union bureaucrat, to remove a JBS meatpacking unit from Brazil’s “slave labor blacklist.” The minister’s decision was based on an opinion from the Attorney General’s Office (AGU) that cited the company’s “economic relevance.”

A labor inspector interviewed by Agência Pública said: “There is a sense of discouragement and outrage that we haven’t seen in a long time. During the Temer [2016–2018] and Bolsonaro [2019–2022] administrations, there was no interference like there is now.”

This was not an isolated case. A report by UOL on Wednesday revealed that Minister Marinho had, for the fourth time in six months, overturned “a notice of violation holding [the contractor] LCM Construção liable for slave labor.” According to the report, the company “has at least 8.3 billion reais [US\$1.65 billion] in contracts

signed with the federal administration.”

During Lula’s first two terms in office (2003–2010), JBS was one of the main beneficiaries of the so-called “national champions” policy. Billions in investments from the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES) and union-linked pension funds helped internationalize the Brazilian company, which eventually became the world’s largest meat processing company.

A stated goal of Lula’s third administration has been to reverse a 40-year period of deindustrialization in Brazil through a policy dubbed “New Industry Brazil.” As a symbol of this policy, the Lula administration, in partnership with the PT administration in the state of Bahia, inaugurated with great fanfare late last year a factory belonging to the Chinese electric car giant BYD.

The latest version of the “slave labor blacklist,” released on Monday, included BYD for subjecting 224 Chinese workers to conditions analogous to slavery during the construction of the Bahia plant. They were working up to 70-hour weeks and living crammed together in unsanitary conditions.

### **Privatizations advance under the Lula administration**

From Monday through Friday of this week, a demonstration brought together thousands of representatives from dozens of indigenous peoples in Brasília to denounce the neglect suffered in recent years, including under the Lula administration. Discussions at the “Acampamento Terra Livre [Free Land Encampment],” will focus on “projects seeking to operate within indigenous territories” in Brazil, reported *Folha*.

Many of these projects are directly linked to Brazilian agribusiness, and are being pushed by the Lula administration without the required consultation with indigenous communities and disregarding their enormous environmental impacts. One such project is the Ferrogrão concession, a nearly 1,000-kilometer railway for the transportation of goods from the Midwest to ports in the North of Brazil, from where they are exported. Along the way, the railroad will cut through the sensitive and biologically rich Amazon region, home to the majority of Brazil’s indigenous peoples.

A protest by indigenous peoples that lasted more than a month forced the Lula administration in late February to revoke a decree issued in August 2025 that privatized the Madeira, Tocantins, and Tapajós rivers—a total of more than 3,000 kilometers—benefiting the giant agribusiness export corporations. At the height of the movement, more than 1,000 people from 14 indigenous communities in the Tapajós region occupied the port terminal of US-based Cargill Inc., which exports soybeans, Brazil’s main export product.

The privatization of rivers is just one example of a broader project being carried under the Lula administration to hand over public and natural assets to private companies. It includes the promotion of Public-Private Partnerships for the construction and management of prisons and the use of financing by the BNDES to privatize sanitation companies and the construction of schools in various Brazilian states.

A January report in *Folha de S. Paulo* revealed that “since 1995 – when the Concessions Law took effect—there have been 160 federal auctions for highways, railways, ports, and airports. Nearly a third [50] ... are concentrated between 2023 and 2025, during Lula’s third term,” an increase over the Bolsonaro administration (2019–2022),

which saw 45 concessions. The report also quoted transport Minister Renan Filho, who declared: “President Lula, despite being personally left-leaning, leads a broad-based administration. He has never been an ideological politician.”

Lula did not reverse the privatizations carried out during the Bolsonaro administration, such as those of Petrobras Distribuidora (a fuel distributor) and Eletrobras (an electricity provider)—both of which Lula strongly criticized during the 2022 election campaign and afterward. On the contrary, his administration’s concessions program and the favorable conditions for capitalist expansion it has fostered have helped private investment reach record levels in 2025.

The fight against the Lula administration’s privatization program was led late last year by postal workers, who, together with Petrobras workers, staged one of the largest strikes in the past 30 years in Brazil.

In late March, the Lula administration included in the “restructuring plan” for the Brazilian Postal Service—presented last November—the elimination of positions that will be outsourced and a career restructuring, with the implementation of a 12-hour work shift followed by 36 hours of rest “as a significant competitive advantage ... against the competition in the parcel delivery sector,” according to the company. Even the union federations controlled by the PT and its satellites were unable to remain silent and announced they will react to the measure: “We are building a major national response to stop these setbacks.”

The harsh economic and social reality that is driving different sections of the federal public workforce to stage strikes and indigenous communities to protest is being experienced just as severely—if not more so—by the Brazilian working class in general, which is subjected to grueling workdays, low wages, and a widespread deterioration of social services.

The class orientation of Lula’s third term is clear. The 2025/2026 Harvest Plan allocates a record 500 billion reais (around US\$100 billion) to agribusiness, while this year’s combined budget for education and health is just over 400 billion reais (around US\$80 billion). Meanwhile, the budget allocated to public debt payments exceeded one trillion reais (around US\$200 billion) last year, driven by decisions of Lula’s appointees to the Central Bank to maintain the second-highest real [ currency ] interest rates in the world.

The political consequences of these reactionary capitalist policies are already apparent: opinion polls indicate that Lula’s reelection is threatened by the rising support for Bolsonaro’s son, the fascist Senator Flávio Bolsonaro. The Brazilian working class will be able to confront austerity and the threat posed by the far right only by breaking with Lula and the PT, as well as with the unions and the pseudo-left parties that orbit this bourgeois political force.



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