

University and school strikes shake São Paulo on the eve of explosive elections in Brazil

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São Paulo has been shaken by a wave of education strikes and protests over the past several days, with tens of thousands of workers and young people taking to the city's streets on virtually every day this week. On Monday, some 2,500 students from the three São Paulo state universities—USP, Unicamp, and Unesp—marched united through the city center, blocking Avenida da Consolação. Students returned to the streets on Tuesday along Avenida Paulista. On Wednesday, teachers and staff from the municipal public school system rallied in front of City Hall, marking their 16th consecutive day on strike. They protested again on Friday, after the City Council sanctioned the very salary cut their strike was fighting—a move that, far from extinguishing the movement, inflamed it further.

These actions are not disconnected episodes. They form the living picture of an eruption of the class struggle in São Paulo—unfolding alongside mobilizations of the same character across Latin America, and inscribed within the international wave of strikes and protests. Their political significance is highlighted when situated within the crisis of the Brazilian bourgeois regime on the eve of the first presidential elections since the attempted fascist coup of January 8, 2023.

The violent eviction and the expansion of the strike

The USP strike reached the one-and-a-half-month mark on May 14. Launched on April 14 by the technical and administrative staff of Sintusp, it was swiftly joined by students, whose central demand is raising the student assistance grant under the PAPFE program to the São Paulo minimum wage of 1,804 reais. The contrast with the status quo is stark: the grant currently pays 885 reais to students in situations of social vulnerability living off campus, and a mere 330 reais to those in on-campus housing. After weeks of deadlock with the university administration, students occupied the Rector's Office on May 7.

The state's response came in the early hours of May 10. Around 4:15 a.m., the Military Police stormed the building without prior warning and without a judicial warrant. The State Secretariat of Public Security described the operation as employing a “surprise factor” and “moderate force.” Videos released by the Central Student Directory (DCE) tell a different story: officers lined up inside the building, forcing students through a baton gauntlet—which the Secretariat itself referred to as a “Polish corridor”—with flash-bang grenades and tear gas. The DCE reported dozens of injured and four arrested. The USP administration declared that it had not called the police and had not been informed of the operation in advance. The state government countered that there was a “flagrant offense” and that the operation ended “without injuries”—a claim directly contradicted by the footage.

The pre-dawn violence widened the revolt rather than containing it. In

the days that followed, students at Unicamp and UNESP—the two other major public universities in the state of São Paulo that, alongside USP, hold the top three positions in South America's university rankings—formally joined the strike. At least 20 degree programs and the technical-administrative staff at Unicamp entered work stoppages, and students at six UNESP campuses suspended roughly 30 percent of activities.

The next demonstration has been called for May 20: a joint demonstration by students from the three state universities alongside striking municipal teachers and subway workers. The demonstration will march to the headquarters of the Tarcísio de Freitas government, raising the slogan “Out with Tarcísio! In defense of education, public services, against privatizations.”

The reaction of the fascist governor and the far-right bloc in the state legislature lays bare the political character of the offensive underway. Tarcísio publicly declared that the strike “doesn't enter my head” while attacking its “political nature.” “Students have to study, they have to do their best,” said the governor, reducing public education to the production of labor power for the market.

Deputy Guto Zacharias filed Bill 439/2026 providing for the expulsion of students involved in strikes and a 15-year ban on enrollment at any São Paulo state university. For teachers, rectors, and administrators who “support, permit, or fail to act” in response to strikes, the bill establishes dismissal and a ten-year bar from civil service examinations. It constitutes an unprecedented assault on democratic rights in and outside campuses.

Meanwhile, far-right União Brasil city councilmen Rubinho Nunes and Adrilles Jorge personally marched to the May 11 student rally to confront demonstrators — an action that preceded by minutes the Military Police intervention with pepper spray and tear gas grenades.

Warrant-less police repression. A discourse of criminalization. Punitive legislation. This combination is not an improvised response to a university strike. It is the expression of the fascist turn of the Brazilian political regime—which finds in the Tarcísio government its boldest vanguard in the country's wealthiest and most industrialized state.

The international context of the struggles in São Paulo

What is unfolding in São Paulo is part of a broader international development. In the same week that students and teachers took to the streets of Brazil's largest city, mobilizations of the same character erupted across different Latin American countries.

In Argentina, the Fourth Federal University March brought 1.5 million people into the streets across more than 60 cities on May 12, under the slogan “Milei, obey the law”—a reference to the University Financing Law passed by Congress and suspended by presidential decree. The immediate

trigger was the publication, the day before, of new budget cuts to education and health. Seventy percent of university teachers' and staff salaries now fall below the poverty line.

In Venezuela, the Association of Professors of the Central University called a 24-hour national shutdown for May 19, after the Delcy Rodriguez regime rejected teachers' wage demands. In Bolivia, the Urban Teaching Corps held a national strike on May 11 and the Rural Teaching Corps blockaded highways for 48 hours, demanding the resignation of the Education Minister.

The concurrence of these mobilizations is not coincidental. As David North noted in his [opening address to the ICFT's International May Day Rally](#) two weeks ago, the second half of the decade is "being increasingly characterized by the eruption of the opposing tendency of social struggle on an international scale." What is emerging in São Paulo and across Latin America is a direct part of that movement.

The crisis of the Brazilian bourgeois regime and the October elections

These mobilizations are unfolding less than six months before the October presidential elections—the most tension-laden since the end of the military dictatorship. The first elections since the attempted coup by Jair Bolsonaro and his fascist military cabal are also taking place under the direct intervention of US imperialism. The Trump administration imposed tariffs and systematic diplomatic attacks on Brazil, openly pressuring against the Bolsonaro trial. Flávio Bolsonaro, running as a proxy for his jailed father, is statistically tied with President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in second-round polling.

This picture is a verdict on the strategy that the Workers Party (PT) and the pseudo-left have applied over the past four years. The [Lula government](#) did not reverse the offensive against the working class—it deepened it. The "new fiscal framework" cut social spending to levels below those of the Temer and Bolsonaro governments in their early years. The 2025/2026 Safra Plan allocated 500 billion reais to agribusiness—more than the combined budgets for education and health. Public debt servicing surpassed one trillion reais last year, sustained by some of the world's highest real interest rates.

This results in 59 percent of Brazilians saying that Lula "does not deserve to continue for another four years," according to a March Quæst poll. A PT deputy linked to the MST summarized it plainly at a government meeting: "People are angry with us. We get booed when we go to speak."

The pseudo-left responds to this collapse not with a break from the PT, but with deeper integration: the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL) decided in March to support Lula from the first round, without fielding its own candidate.

The PT and pseudo-left's "broad front" with the bourgeois establishment did not bury fascism. By implementing the capitalist austerity program against the working class, it only paved the way for fascists connected to Bolsonaro to continue their coup conspiracy.

Turn the student movement to the working class and the fight for revolutionary leadership!

It is in this context that the emergence of the student movement in São Paulo must be understood. In 1930, analyzing the eruption of the student protests in Spain, Leon Trotsky wrote:

When the bourgeoisie consciously and stubbornly refuses to resolve the problems arising from the crisis of bourgeois society, and when the proletariat is not yet ready to take on that task, it is frequently the students who step forward... Such revolutionary or semi-revolutionary student activity means that bourgeois society is passing through a profound crisis.

The petty-bourgeois youth, feeling that an explosive force is accumulating among the masses, tries in its own way to find a way out of the impasse and to push political developments forward.

The bourgeoisie regards the student movement half approving, half warning: if the young people deal some blows to the monarchical bureaucracy, that is fine, as long as the "boys" do not go too far and do not awaken the working masses. In supporting the student movement, the Spanish workers demonstrated an entirely correct revolutionary instinct.

This analysis provides an appropriate key to understand developments in Brazil in May 2026. It is true that the social composition of students was significantly diversified in recent years. But agitation in universities such as USP, UNESP and Unicamp—Latin America's largest universities, the historic breeding ground of the country's political and intellectual elite—has above all a symptomatic significance. It anticipates, in the consciousness of university youth, a deeper explosion in preparation within the Brazilian working class.

This is precisely why the Brazilian pseudo-left pays such critical attention to the student movement.

The PSOL, the Stalinist Popular Unity (UP) and Revolutionary Brazilian Communist Party (PCBR), and the different Morenoite tendencies at the head of the student movement are all engaged, at this very moment, in building Lula's re-election campaign or functioning as its auxiliaries.

The pseudo-left acts systematically to divert the student movement toward specific local demands, keeping it carefully removed from the decisive political questions. More fundamentally, they view this movement as the most critical ground to cultivate a layer of "radical" youth bound to their bankrupt nationalist and opportunist political perspectives. It is no accident that prominent PSOL figures such as federal deputy Sâmia Bomfim—herself politically formed within the USP student movement—speak at the student rallies.

For the pseudo-left, the significance of the student movement lies in the way this movement can be used to divert a broader eruption of the working class that is now on the agenda, training the political cadres who will sell illusions in the possibilities of reforming capitalism and sustain the new "broad fronts" with the bourgeoisie.

This role has a critical historical precedent in the wave of student radicalization at the end of the 1970's, which directly preceded the ABC paulista industrial strikes. In the school of Pabloite revisionism, especially in its Lambertite and Morenoite variants, a generation of petty-bourgeois opportunist leaders were trained. They promoted the Lula-led union bureaucracy to build the PT, which served as the principal instrument for containing the revolutionary struggle of the Brazilian working class in the decades that followed.

The current strike re-emerges after a cycle that includes the [2007](#) and [2009](#) strikes at USP and the repression of 2011 under the government of Geraldo Alckmin—that same Alckmin who now serves as Lula's vice-president. The man who sent the riot squad against USP students now sits in the government that presents itself as the democratic bulwark against fascism.

In 2007, during the previous cycle of university strikes in São Paulo, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (then ISSE) addressed a [statement to USP students](#) that retains its full validity: "Although the ISSE is a student organization, its aim is not to build a

purely student movement. It fights for students to turn toward the working class as a whole—the vast majority of the world’s population and the only social force whose interests are irreconcilably opposed to the profit system and to imperialism—in the struggle for the renewal of the international socialist movement.”

This orientation is more urgent than ever. The students who today face police batons at the USP Rector’s Office and who are preparing to march to the Palácio dos Bandeirantes must orient themselves consciously toward the working class and to fight for its mobilization as an independent political force armed with an internationalist revolutionary program.



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