Strikes spread across Brazil on the eve of the elections

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Brazil has seen in recent weeks a wave of strikes in the public and private sectors, part of an international movement of the working class against austerity policies and cuts to social rights to finance domestic repression and militarism.

These struggles are erupting at a decisive moment: the eve of the October 4 general elections, with the Trump administration escalating the imperialist offensive against Latin America and openly intervening in the Brazilian electoral process in favor of the fascist candidate Flávio Bolsonaro.

The timing is no accident. These strikes are an expression of the growing repudiation by the working class of all representatives of the political establishment in one of the most unequal countries in the world. This includes the government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Workers Party—PT), which since 2023 has implemented a program of austerity, privatization and attacks on social rights, opening once again the path for the rise of the far right in Brazil.

Bitter experience has shown that the workers in Brazil can secure their rights only by advancing an independent struggle, nationally and internationally, against the unions and the union federations that once again place themselves at the service of Lula's candidacy and work to suppress these struggles.

Metalworkers' strikes in Bahia and São Paulo

A politically revealing case of the strike wave is taking place at the industrial complex of the BYD in Bahia. On Friday, September 25, workers shut down the assembly lines in a 24-hour strike, with the metalworkers demanding a 9.5 percent raise against the company's offer of 4.5 percent.

Significantly, the Chinese electric auto company is one of the trophies of the Lula government's "neoindustrialization" policy, which also includes a growing budget for Brazil's defense industry.

The strike is only the tip of an iceberg. In April, the Ministry of Labor placed BYD on the "Dirty List" of slave labor, after a task force rescued 163 Chinese workers—a number that later rose to 224—subjected to workweeks of up to 70 hours, with their passports confiscated, watched over by armed guards and housed in unhealthy conditions. The company obtained an injunction to remove its name from the registry three days later, and the then-secretary of Labor Inspection, Luiz Felipe Brandão de Mello, was dismissed by the labor minister, the former union bureaucrat Luiz Marinho. The Union of Labor Auditors denounced "undue interference" to shield a multinational that is a partner of the government.

The current metalworkers' strike at BYD in Camaçari is a direct continuation of the ferment and struggle of the workers that began in December 2025, when some 2,000 outsourced construction workers shut down work at the industrial complex against the degrading conditions at the construction sites. The workers also denounced the leadership of the PT-controlled union for protecting the interests of the automaker and the government, which ultimately led to the creation of a new union.

The year 2026 has registered a strong metalworkers' mobilization in the Paraíba Valley, in São Paulo, where the Metalworkers' Union of the São José dos Campos Region, affiliated to the Morenoite-led CSP-Conlutas, has a history of supporting militarism and spreading nationalist poison among workers. In early September, workers at General Motors (GM) in São José dos Campos approved a strike alert demanding a 3.5 percent real raise against the automaker's initial refusal. Earlier, the city of Jacareí was the scene of a 38-day strike, between July and September, at Parker Hannifin, an American multinational manufacturer of industrial components and auto parts.

The Morenoite bureaucracy has also been cultivating systematic relations with the Shawn Fain bureaucracy of the United Auto Workers (UAW) in the US, including a recent visit to its headquarters to hold "discussions on wage campaigns, the challenges posed by the transition to electric vehicles, the reorganization of the automotive industry, and the prospects for strengthening international solidarity among workers in the sector." But the attacks on GM workers are developing across borders — this year alone the company has thrown 1,200 workers out of their jobs at its Oshawa plant in Canada even as it reported more than $12 billion in pre-tax earnings and has carried out further layoffs at its Factory Zero plant in Detroit with the UAW maintaining silence. The collaboration between the two apparatuses serves not to develop the necessary united struggle against the transnational corporation, but to block the international unification of GM workers in Brazil and the United States.

Federal public sector workers continue struggle against Lula government

The strike by workers at the state-owned Caixa Econômica Federal, one of Brazil's largest banks, which began on September 10, is the strongest in the public sector since the historic "Six-Hour Strike" of 1985. The central impasse is the health plan: the bank, which earns R$ 15 billion a year, refuses to guarantee access to health care for its own workers. Despite the Superior Labor Court (TST) having ordered the unions to keep 60 percent of the workforce on the job in the branches, or face a daily fine of R$100,000, rank-and-file workers have defied this requirement.

The National Confederation of Financial Sector Workers (Contraf), affiliated to the PT-controlled CUT, divided the bank workers' struggle, separating the workers of the Caixa, the Bank of Brazil (BB) and the private banks into separate assemblies, with the workers criticizing the union bureaucracy for the lack of transparency and democracy. The bank

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workers' rank and file rejected the banks' proposal in several assemblies early this month: at the BB, 87 unions rejected the agreement against only 39 that accepted it; in the private banks, rejection exceeded 30 percent even with the CUT's heavy campaign for acceptance.

At the postal service (Correios), the national strike that began on September 11 also had as its central issue the attack on the health plan. On the night of September 15, striking workers occupied the Indaiatuba logistics center, of strategic impact on deliveries in the region.

The outcome, on Friday of last week, exposed the collusion between the Lula government and the capitalist courts in breaking the strikes. The postal service filed a collective labor dispute with the TST the day after the strike began, requesting that the movement be declared abusive. The TST ruled on the dispute on September 24, considering the strike not abusive and imposing a 4.09 percent raise.

However, it altered the health plan clause: the state company ceases to be the direct provider and moves to a subsidy model with a fixed cap, opening the way to pass abusive adjustments onto the workers. Even the leadership of the CTB and CUT union federations—the first one controlled by the Maoist PCdoB—recognized this point as the greatest defeat of the movement.

The postal workers' strike cannot be separated from the Lula government's privatizing and restructuring program. The state company has accumulated a loss of R$ 5.6 billion this year and is seeking a new loan of R$ 7 billion from a consortium formed by Citibank, J.P. Morgan and Deutsche Bank. Finance Minister Dario Durigan declared in August that he faces no "dilemma" in discussing "joint ventures" and partnerships with the private sector for the postal service.

The strikes at the postal service and the Caixa came after, in the first half of the year, higher education workers carried out a four-month strike demanding that the Lula government comply with the agreement from the 2024 strike. This semester, this movement is not limited to the postal service and the Caixa: workers at the INSS (social security) are in a state of strike and permanent alert, and those at the IBGE (geography and statistics institute) have been carrying out a partial strike for more than a month.

The role of the unions in these struggles had already been exposed at the end of last year, when postal and Petrobras' oil workers carried out simultaneous strikes in December. The strikes were deliberately isolated, diverted toward bourgeois nationalism and suppressed. Like the Caixa strike today, the postal and Petrobras strikes at the end of last year are among the largest in the last 30 years in these sectors, which, if unified, could put the Lula government against the wall and expose it for what it is: a government of the bourgeoisie that administers capitalism against the working class.

Education in struggle against cuts and privatization

The various sectors of education in practically all Brazilian states carried out numerous strikes and protests throughout this year, fighting for better wages, better working and study conditions, and against pro-corporate and privatizing education programs.

Now, teachers in the state network of Sergipe have been on strike since September 8, occupying the education secretariat and defying a court ruling that declared the strike illegal with a daily fine of R$60,000. The politically decisive point: the PT formalized an alliance with right-wing Governor Fábio Mitidieri (PSD), endorsed by Lula himself, and officially supports his reelection.

In Rio Grande do Norte, teachers walked out on September 21 against the administration of PT Governor Fátima Bezerra, demanding the payment of overdue vacation pay and the retroactive payment of the National Teachers' Salary Floor.

In Belo Horizonte, capital of Minas Gerais, private school teachers carried out a strike between September 16 and 22, with a strong mobilization and broad support from students and parents. The central impasse is the employers' attempt to divide the Collective Labor Agreement between basic education and higher education teachers, in addition to the teachers' struggle for better working conditions and wages.

In Rio de Janeiro (RJ), private school teachers also carried out a work stoppage on September 2. State network professionals in RJ approved a strike alert in mid-September. They held a public rally on Tuesday, September 29, and have already approved a 24-hour strike for October 7, demanding compliance with the National Teachers' Salary Floor and wage restoration.

These recent education strikes are a continuation of a strong movement, which in the first half of the year involved the struggle of teachers, students and education workers in basic and higher education. The epicenter of this movement was São Paulo, the richest and most industrialized state in Brazil. Municipal teachers in the capital and state teachers carried out strikes in April and May against the privatization of education, while the state universities of São Paulo experienced a massive 54-day strike between April and June. This movement continued in mid-September, with workers at schools and technical colleges in São Paulo walking out at more than 70 locations across the state for better wages and working conditions.

The union federations once again support Lula's candidacy

While workers are in struggle against the Lula government, the union federations are once again mobilizing to elect him. On August 20, the presidents of the nine union federations and more than 500 leaders approved the manifesto "Unionists with Lula." The manifesto states that the Lula government's project "places work and the valorization of working women and men at the center of the country's development strategy"—and promises, among its demands, the "end of the 6×1 workweek" and the "reduction of the workday."

The hypocrisy is flagrant. The same federations that promise in a manifesto the end of the six-day workweek support a government whose main industrial "showcase" was caught subjecting workers to conditions analogous to slavery—and which dismissed the secretary responsible for punishing it. The same federations that speak of "valorizing the minimum wage" support a government that is discussing "joint ventures" to privatize the postal service.

Recent events also expose the class character of the PT beyond any doubt. On September 19, Lula declared in Florianópolis that he is "not a Marxist, not a communist," and boasted that agribusiness "should not only vote [for him], but kneel" before the government's money. On September 25, he dined with 700 businessmen and bankers in São Paulo—including JBS, the global meatpacking giant which is also on the slave labor "Dirty List"—hearing demands for "spending cuts" and "fiscal adjustment." Minister José Guimarães advocates launching a document with "fiscal commitments" for a possible new term, in explicit comparison with the 2002 "Letter to the Brazilian People," Lula's pledge to the financial markets and the IMF that a PT government would honor the public debt and maintain the existing economic order.

Even the recent adjustment of the Bolsa Família (a social program for the poor) was decided by electoral calculation: according to reports from aides, Lula only made the decision after a meeting with female voters in which he heard that "the money does not last until the end of the month"

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and that the government's approval rating is not rising. The social crumbs are administered as a campaign instrument, not as a right.

The struggle against fascism requires a break with the PT

The rise of Flávio Bolsonaro in the polls—in a technical tie with Lula in the second round—is the direct result of the failure of the PT as "manager" of Brazilian capitalism and of its function of suppressing, through the CUT and the unions it controls, the class struggle in Brazil. The argument that the conviction of former president Jair Bolsonaro for the January 8, 2023 coup attempt had "buried" the fascist threat has proven false and politically complicit. Flávio, at CPAC 2026, swore to continue his father's coup conspiracy and called for the intervention of American imperialism in the Brazilian elections.

Washington answered the call, intervening openly in the electoral process in favor of Flávio. On September 19, *Folha de S. Paulo* reported that a confidential ABIN (Brazilian intelligence agency) report from August classified as "critical" the risk of interference by the United States in the Brazilian elections, pointing to commercial pressures and sanctions as attempts by the American government to contain China's influence and wear down the current administration.

In recent days, a group of American congressmen, including Senator Bernie Sanders—with whom Lula met last week during the UN General Assembly—sent a letter to Donald Trump's Secretary of State Marco Rubio. In the document, the congressmen demand clarifications from the White House about signs such as commercial tariffs, political meetings and provocative diplomatic appointments, and formally request that the United States government commit to recognizing the certified results of the presidential election in Brazil.

But the PT's response is not to mobilize workers against imperialism: it is to capitulate at every step, minimize the threat from Trump and raise military spending to historic levels, while advancing a chauvinistic "national unity" between workers and employers to secure a safer position for the Brazilian bourgeoisie amid global trade war. This further exposes the PT as a party of the Brazilian bourgeoisie that cannot break with American imperialism without threatening the national capitalists it represents.

Furthermore, the claim by the PT, the union bureaucracy and the pseudo-left that Lula's candidacy is the only way to once again prevent the advance of the far right to power is a fraud. The fascism of Flávio will not be defeated by voting for Lula, the government that is creating the conditions for its growth—applying the austerity that drives workers to desperation and courting the capital that exploits them. It will be defeated by the same movement that confronts Lula in the strikes: the independent self-organization of the working class, in rank-and-file committees outside and against the union bureaucracy, on a national and global scale, armed with an internationalist socialist program.

The struggles against austerity, against fascism and against imperialism are one and the same. All of them require a break with the PT, with the union federations and with the pseudo-left that orbit this bourgeois political force, and the construction of a revolutionary political alternative of the working class, united with the workers in the United States who oppose the fascist agenda of Trump and Rubio.

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