

Brazilian educators call strikes against homicidal reopening of schools

By Tomas Castanheira
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The efforts of Brazil's ruling elite to reopen schools amid the catastrophic spread of the COVID-19 pandemic are being met with a growing wave of resistance from education workers. On Thursday, teachers in the state of Pernambuco, in northeastern Brazil, voted massively in favor of a strike against the return of on-site classes.

Brazil has recorded close to 4.7 million coronavirus cases and more than 140,000 deaths. Roughly 30,000 new cases are being reported daily.

At the beginning of the week, Pernambuco's coalition government of the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) and the Maoist Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB) announced a sudden reopening of schools in the state, beginning next week. Angered by this decision, some 2,000 educators participated in an online meeting of the Union of Education Workers in Pernambuco (SINTEPE) and 94 percent voted in favor of the strike.

The decision to strike was reported with enthusiasm by workers on social media. One of them said: "The voice that echoed today in the meeting was historic, greater than any note or pronouncement by governmental leaders. In the face of the participation of each education professional today, it is easy to see that we have an overwhelming majority, and it is a fact that the teachers say NO to on-site activities!"

SINTEPE, however, is already preparing to conciliate with the government and indicating its plans to betray the strike. The president of the union, Fernando Melo, declared that workers' dissatisfaction was related to the "way in which the announcement of the return was made" and to the conditions in the schools that they "understand" as unsafe. And he said that the realization of the strike will depend on a meeting between the union and the government, scheduled for next Monday,

and on a new vote following that.

The reopening approved by the PSB/PCdoB government in Pernambuco is aligned with the homicidal policy promoted not only by Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro, but by their political partners in the Northeastern states, such as the governor of Maranhão, Flávio Dino of the Maoist PCdoB, and the governor of Ceará, Camilo Santana of the Workers Party (PT), who have already approved the reopening of part of the schools. In Maranhão, at least seven private schools were closed with COVID-19 infections after they were reopened by a decree of Flávio Dino authorizing their return.

The actions of Pernambuco educators, on the other hand, follow other recent strike votes by Brazilian educators in the states of Paraná and Amazonas, and by civilian teachers of the Military College of Rio de Janeiro, who prevented its reopening last week.

In Manaus, capital of Amazonas, the Union of Education Workers of Amazonas (SINTEAM) kept teachers inside deadly classrooms for weeks, even with coronavirus outbreaks being reported in dozens of schools, before calling a meeting that voted in favor of a strike. But only a few days later, SINTEAM buried the strike arguing that the government could legitimately cut the strikers' salaries and the courts could fine the union.

After the union's betrayal, the governor of Amazonas, Wilson Lima of the Christian Social Party (PSC), announced this week the expansion of the reopening of schools, even in the face of increased COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations, which he hypocritically attributes only to crowds in bars, and not to hundreds of thousands of students in classrooms.

In Paraná, the government of Ratinho Junior of the Social Democratic Party (PSD), seeking to pave the

way for the reopening of schools, announced on Thursday that teachers will receive absences and cuts in their salaries if students do not attend their online classes at Google Meet. The government has provided neither computers nor internet to students and teachers. Outraged, the educators demanded on the social media that the strike start immediately, and not wait for a government decree to reopen classrooms.

On Wednesday, the government of Minas Gerais authorized the resumption of in-person classes from October 5 in private and municipal schools throughout the state. On the same day, Minas registered 133 COVID-19 deaths, more than three times the previous day's toll. Teachers on social media denounced the United Education Workers of Minas Gerais (Sind-UTE/MG) union for blocking a meeting to take a strike vote and for directing educators to trust in the courts to block the government's decision.

Brazilian educators are demonstrating an immense willingness to fight against the homicidal campaign to reopen schools and are finding broad support among the working class as a whole. This is part of a global wave of resistance among educators and youth against these same policies being implemented by the ruling classes in all capitalist countries.

To advance this struggle, however, it is necessary to confront the reactionary structure of the unions that, in alliance with the governments, turn against the workers, seeking to isolate them locally and repress their strikes or lead them to defeat. Workers need to form new democratic organizations that are suited to the demands of the objective situation, a network of rank-and-file educators committees throughout Brazil and the world that allow the unification of these strikes to defend the lives of educators, students and their families and defeat the murderous policy being advanced in the interests of the capitalist oligarchy.

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