

## Thousands of teachers strike in Brazil as government prepares attack on education

On September 22, thousands of teachers throughout Brazil took to the streets in defense of wages and working conditions and against education budget cuts being prepared by President Michel Temer of the PMDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party). It was the largest demonstration of workers since last month's impeachment of Workers Party (PT) president Dilma Rousseff.

The demonstrations were called by the National Confederation of Education Workers (CNTE), which is affiliated to the CUT, Brazil's largest trade union federation. Also joining the call for strike action by the CNTE were unions representing teachers and workers at federal universities, which led to a one-day strike on some campuses.

As part of a broader program of attacks on the Brazilian working class, President Temer expects to win approval in the National Congress, by the end of this year, of two proposed constitutional amendments that would have drastic effects on education. The first, initially proposed by ousted PT president Rousseff, freezes the wages of existing public employees and prevents the hiring of new ones for the next two years.

The other one, authored by president Temer, limits social spending to the level of the previous year's inflation for the next 20 years. Economists estimate that it would slash education spending by 60 billion reais (almost US\$19 billion) over the next 10 years, which would make the goals of Brazil's National Education Plan unviable.

In addition to cuts in the education budget, teachers protested against Temer's proposals for pension "reform," which would increase the retirement age to 65, and a labor reform, which includes the possibility of employment contracts being tied to hours worked and productivity, and also would increase the working day to 12 hours. Temer's labor reform also proposes that direct negotiations between employees and employers take precedence over collective agreements.

These "reform" proposals are being advanced in the context of the worst economic crisis in Brazil since the Great Depression, with economic contraction for a second consecutive year, rising inflation and the unemployment rate above 11 percent.

Cuts in real wages and precarious working conditions especially affect teachers, the sector with the highest education levels in Brazil, and the lowest wages. The report "Education at a Glance 2016," published by the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on September 16, showed that Brazilian teachers receive 39 percent of the average income of teachers from 41 countries, ahead only of Colombian and Indonesian teachers. It also showed that Brazilian teachers work the longest of all the surveyed countries, with two weeks per year more than the average.

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