

Food delivery workers call for a national strike in Brazil

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Since April, workers for food delivery apps controlled by large transnational companies have engaged in a series of strikes and job actions in a number of countries including Brazil, Spain, Ecuador and Argentina. Their demands are the same: better delivery rates, safer working conditions and for the multimillion-dollar companies to supply essential protective equipment that has been paid for by the workers themselves.

In Brazil, these mobilizations are deeply connected to the strikes by other workers, such as call center operators and health professionals, whose jobs have been decreed essential services during the coronavirus pandemic but have been denied safe working conditions.

The job actions have not stopped. On May 14, food delivery workers in Vitória, the capital of Espírito Santo, organized a protest shutting down the iFood application for two hours.

In Jundiaí, in the interior of the state of São Paulo, workers are calling on their colleagues all over Brazil to join in a strike on May 30. Since April, workers have made plans to carry out a unified strike nationally and internationally, confronting the food delivery corporations.

“The delivery workers here are talking and everyone is uniting. This time we are announcing the strike a month in advance. ... Let’s stop, people, let’s make it happen because nothing can be achieved if you just wait, you only achieve if you fight,” food delivery worker Carlos Alberto stated in a video posted on the Facebook page *Motoboy de Jundiaí*.

The WSWs spoke to Carlos Alberto, who is one of the organizers of the movement and has been a food delivery worker for nine years. According to him, the call for the strike was influenced by the stoppages

carried out by food delivery workers in the capital of São Paulo, who have become an example for workers in other regions. “The idea is that we gain strength and claim our rights. We can’t continue like this,” he said.

During the COVID-19 crisis, their working conditions, which were already fundamentally precarious, have worsened. The dismissal of workers without justification and the lack of communication with the companies are common.

“There are many of our colleagues being banned for nothing, their accounts are blocked without any explanation. No e-mail arrives, no SMS, no WhatsApp. It’s very sad to see something like this happening with our colleagues,” he said. “Tell me, how much are they spending? Nothing! They have a system, this system has a server and few people behind it.”

With the coronavirus quarantines, the purchase of meals online has increased, as have the unemployment rates. Being a deliveryman has become one of the few job options available, as it is one of the few labor markets that is currently growing. In March alone, the iFood application received 175,000 job applications, twice as many as in February.

The financial director of iFood, Diego Barreto, told *Exame* magazine that: “This strong activity still continues, it has an almost proportional correlation, almost one to one, with what is happening in the economy. As people lose their jobs, they start looking for alternatives.”

Cynically, he acknowledges that “Most companies are not hiring. It’s natural for people to migrate, so we expect that number to remain strong, to continue growing both this May and June.”

iFood has promised to provide assistance to workers in a so-called “risk group” who have had their registrations deleted by the company. However, the

workers were not informed of the conditions for receiving this benefit, and nothing indicates that any of them are being paid.

The real response of the food delivery corporations to the conditions imposed by the coronavirus crisis has been to use the increase in the number of available workers to lower their payments. Offering longer and longer runs and lowering the percentage gained per run, they force the workers to spend more time each day “logged in,” struggling for a slightly better income.

Carlos Alberto said, “The number of deliverymen has increased, yes. But here’s the thing, why did they change the rate and decrease it? What is the matter if there are many delivery workers in the street, right? They messed with our money, but nobody messed with theirs, nobody took anything. ... The fee, the client pays 15 reais, 12 reais for iFood. And iFood passes on seven reais, eight reais to us, the rest goes to them. The workers have to support each other, because the applications are taking advantage.”

Safe working conditions are also an urgent demand of the workers, who are being forced to pay out of their own pockets for personal protective equipment. “We are afraid to get [the coronavirus] and take it home. As you can see, I have a daughter,” Carlos said. “There are delivery workers here in Jundiaí who are sick and in quarantine.

“Right now we are getting in touch with the delivery workers from other states of Brazil to make a national strike, to strengthen ourselves from cell to cell. So that on the day we say ‘we will stop,’ several states will stop consecutively.”

The movement of delivery workers expresses the willingness of broad sectors of the working class to resist the conditions imposed by capitalism, which proves to be incapable of organizing society. And it points to the need for a unified political orientation to combat transnational companies that exploit workers globally. The urgent task is to build revolutionary working-class parties in every country.



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