

Thousands of delivery workers strike across Brazil and other Latin American countries

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Thousands of delivery workers have engaged in a strike on Wednesday demanding better working conditions in more than 10 Brazilian capitals, as well as in cities in Argentina and Mexico. It was an important demonstration of the strength of the delivery workers' struggle, which has been intensifying in Latin America since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic.

The workers organized themselves outside the unions with broad popular support as they spread their movement through the internet using the hashtags #BrequeDosApps (brake the apps) and #YoNoReparto (I won't deliver). The international action was called soon after a strike of delivery workers working for the delivery app Loggi in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, on June 9 and 10.

Carlos Alberto, a delivery worker from Jundiaí, in the interior of São Paulo, is one of the workers who took part in organizing the strike. "We came into contact with the delivery workers from other countries through internet pages. Nowadays, in social media, we can easily communicate. We got their names, their Whatsapp contacts, and added them to our strike group. And we unified with them so they would stop too."

The strike on July 1 was strongest in São Paulo, Brazil's biggest city. The protests began in the morning, with the workers blocking access to shopping malls, restaurant chains and warehouses of the Loggi corporation. Later, around 5,000 delivery workers gathered in one of the main avenues of the city.

"We're inside this coronavirus crisis, clashing directly with COVID-19," said Carlos Alberto. "Several colleagues were hospitalized and for iFood to release [security benefits] money is a nuisance. I've already talked to comrades who ran after it, you know? It's a lot of bureaucracy. We want improvements. We want to have a place in the city where we can recharge our mobile phones, with a bathroom, with drinking water, with a table to eat a meal. We don't want too much. We want

our rights, we want insurance against accidents, against the theft of our bikes. Today they say they give an insurance, but they don't."

Besides the risk of being exposed to the virus, workers report long working hours—often more than 14 hours a day—for increasingly low pay, without health insurance or labor rights. During the strike, a group of workers summarized their over-exploitation in a chant: "It's not fair!" Workers' demands include higher pay, more safety at work and an end to punitive bans.

In an effort to break the workers' organization, iFood—Latin America's largest food delivery startup—tried to hire scabs. On the day of the stoppage, it was offering a bonus of 30 reais (around US\$5.50) per delivery for those who worked. Similar measures were taken by the other companies in the business—Rappi, Loggi and Uber Eats. Some the scabs were stopped by the strikers and forced to return home. Others were convinced to join with the majority of their colleagues.

As avenues around the country were being taken over by demonstrators honking their bike horns, iFood's vice president of strategy and finance, Diego Barreto, gave an interview to CNN Brasil claiming that "most of the demands have already been met" by the company, adding that delivery workers earn more than the minimum wage established in Brazil. What the executive does not say is that, in order to achieve this "minimum wage," the hours worked by the vast majority of delivery workers are far above the legally established working day.

Barreto also tried to shift responsibility for workers' conditions away from the company, justifying them in the name of the "sharing economy" concept, as if workers chose their own exploitation as part of an "entrepreneurship" deal. But behind the false promises of a "shared" economy these corporations in fact promote a huge concentration of wealth in the hands of their billionaire shareholders, while millions of workers are

exploited and discarded.

Any increase in workers' income directly threatens the greedy interests of these powerful shareholders. The iFood corporation, based in São Paulo and with operations all over Latin America, is controlled by billionaires like Jorge Paulo Lemann, the wealthiest man in Brazil. Rappi, based in Colombia, last year received an investment of US\$1 billion from the Japanese conglomerate SoftBank.

These capitalists are ready to employ their entire arsenal against workers to protect their fortunes. In addition to the punishments already practiced, like the policy of scores and bans (equivalent to, respectively, "warnings" and "dismissals" for contracted workers), the companies also rely on the state and on the pseudo-left organizations and the trade unions to divert the workers' struggle.

The Facebook page "Treta no Trampo"—set up by a group of activists who promoted the strike—shared, a few days before the strike, a video of three delivery workers stating that their movement "has no political link to anyone" and defending independence from the union. One of the workers also warned the political organizations not to interfere in the strike, saying: "if flags [of parties or unions] are raised, they will be lowered."

This and similar statements express the workers' response to having seen the actions of the unions and so called "left" governments led by the Workers Party (PT) favoring the interests of big corporations, while their living conditions worsened.

But in spite of the declarations of these workers, the Union of Motorcycle Workers of São Paulo (Sindimoto), affiliated to the reactionary General Workers Union (UGT), joined the demonstrations with sound trucks and their flags. They were responsible for concentrating a significant number of the strikers around them.

One of those present was the president of the UGT, Ricardo Patah, who is also president of the Commercial Workers Union, the same one which signed an agreement with city hall for the criminal reopening of commerce in São Paulo, the city with the highest number of COVID-19 cases and where the pandemic is far from controlled.

The reactionary intervention of figures like Patah into the delivery workers' struggle underscores the political dimensions of the strike, which went well beyond the particular interests of delivery workers. The workers' repudiation of the unions and pseudo-left parties is not sufficient to overcome the attempts of these forces to divert and contain their struggle. What is required is a conscious fight for the independent political mobilization of the working class as a whole.

The potential for such a struggle was highlighted by a threat of a strike by São Paulo's subway workers, which was announced for the same day as the delivery workers' strike, after a massive vote in favor of a walkout, but was "postponed" by the trade union. The city's school transportation drivers, on the other hand, held a protest on the same day in support of the delivery workers, demanding government assistance, as they have lost their income since the beginning of the pandemic.

In addition to transportation workers, health professionals, call center operators, autoworkers and other sections of the working class around the world are rising in opposition to the ruling class response to the pandemic and the protracted worsening of their living conditions.

The struggle of the delivery workers emerges from the profound contradictions of the capitalist system, which uses every technological advance to increase the exploitation of the working class, while relying on growing unemployment to drive down wages and conditions.

As workers' demands have not been met by the companies, they are calling for a new strike on July 12. It is urgent that delivery workers take the struggle into their own hands, building new democratic organizations, rank-and-file committees independent of the unions.

When asked by the *World Socialist Web Site* what he had to say to his international colleagues, Carlos Alberto declared: "You should stand up, because with the internet tools that you have, you can join forces. Don't wait for the unions, because the unions have abandoned everyone, everything is abandoned to the moths. There is no deputy, no union, no governor, no president, there is no one in favor of us... It is we ourselves who have to make it happen."



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