

New delivery workers demonstration in Brazil exposes unions and their allies

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Around 400 delivery workers staged a demonstration in São Paulo on Tuesday to demand a response from delivery app companies for better working conditions. The demonstration was called by the Motoboys Union of São Paulo (SindimotoSP), which is vying for the leadership of a growing movement among this section of Brazilian workers.

It is estimated that the number of workers for delivery app companies like Uber, Ifood and Rappi had tripled by June 2020 in Brazil, largely due to layoffs resulting from the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, almost 70 percent of those already working for these companies before the pandemic saw their earnings fall. More than one-third of the delivery workers earn no more than minimum wage (US\$200), while 62 percent work more than nine hours a day and are often forced to work 14-hour workdays. Among the demands of delivery workers are better delivery fees, improved safety conditions, including PPEs and the end of punitive scoring systems.

Despite having a completely peaceful character, the demonstration was constantly followed in an intimidating manner by the Military Police, and one of the workers participating in the protest, Jefferson André da Silva, 23, was brutally assaulted by the police. In a video of the assault, Silva is heard saying “I can’t breathe!”, after one of the soldiers placed him in a headlock, choking him.

The police claimed that Silva was covering his motorcycle plate and that he offered resistance. In an interview with the Ponte website, Silva reported that he had parked on a sidewalk to post a video of the demonstration and that he offered no resistance to the police.

In the same interview, he said that the cops continued to assault him even after he was already inside the police car, having surrendered. “The policewoman threatened me, wanted to take a picture of me to show me as a

bandit, a trophy. I didn’t let her. She pepper-sprayed me in the face,” he declared.

The police abuse of Silva exposes the routine harassment by the Military Police, which was one of the catalysts for the delivery workers strike movement.

The strike gained momentum after dozens of delivery workers joined the wave of demonstrations stemming from the murder of George Floyd and thousands of other victims of police brutality in Brazil and around the world. They later protested against the unjust arrest of a delivery worker—Emerson da Silva Muniz—who fled police because he was forced to work without proper documents and was framed for drug trafficking.

At the same time, the July 14 demonstration stood in stark contrast to the massive strikes that swept the entire country and other parts of Latin America on July 1, and which found widespread sympathy among the population. In addition to being called solely by the union, the latest action was virtually restricted to São Paulo. Its ostensible purpose was to apply pressure on the companies that own the delivery applications, like iFood, Uber and Rappi, in the context of a hearing at the Regional Labor Court, where demands would be presented by the SindimotoSP union.

Predictably, the meeting was interrupted after only an hour and a half, with the public justification that the judge in charge of mediating a deal between the union and the companies was having problems connecting to the internet.

The lack of results from the meeting only confirmed the mistrust of the vast majority of the delivery workers toward the union and its proposals.

This mistrust played a major role in the decision of most of the organizers of a second strike, originally scheduled for July 12, to change the date to July 25, in order to avoid any association between the strike and the hearing promoted by the union. This decision led to the low

turnout at Tuesday's demonstration.

While the union sought to divert the spontaneous movement of the delivery workers into the safe channels of appeals to the capitalist state with the labor court hearing, a similar effort has been mounted by the pseudo-left Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL) whose members in the House brought representatives of the delivery workers to an audience with House Speaker Rodrigo Maia. The PSOL's House leader, Fernanda Melchionna, claimed that this meeting resulted in "an accomplishment by the workers," supposedly securing from the corrupt and right-wing leader of the House a "commitment to mobilize the legislature to guarantee rights."

This stunt provoked an angry response from the SindimotoSP: "What the noble deputy of the PSOL seems not to know is that there are already three federal laws, statutes 12,009 (moto-freight regulations), 12,997 (mandating extra hazard pay for delivery workers) and 12,436 (prohibiting pressing or rewarding workers in deliveries to exceed targets)." In other words, the PSOL's spectacle in Congress was criticized by the union in the name of a struggle for laws that have been ignored for years, with their decisive collaboration, as well as that of the "left" parties such as PSOL.

The so-called "dismantling of labor laws," the recurrent theme sounded during working class upheavals by trade union bureaucrats like Ricardo Patah, leader of the UGT union federation, to which SindimotoSP is affiliated, has been led by the UGT itself.

Together with the CUT and other unions, it echoes the rhetoric of Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro that workers must choose between "many rights, but no jobs, or employment and fewer rights." For decades, the unions have imposed upon workers endless wage cuts and destruction of working conditions with the justification that companies would leave the country if concessions were not offered, resulting in the race to the bottom exposed by the delivery workers' strike.

From the beginning of the strike movement, workers have insisted that they have "no political links with anyone", expressing their thoroughly justified hostility to the existing unions and parties, among them those on the "left" and self-declared workers' representatives like the PSOL.

The mobilization of the delivery workers had originally emerged from an international wave of strikes that spread from country to country in the face of the widespread neglect of the COVID-19 pandemic by capitalist governments and that involved most of the sectors that did

not shut down during the quarantines: health care professionals, call center workers, automotive workers and finally the delivery workers who work for the multinational companies that control the apps.

This international character is precisely what the unions and petty bourgeois parties like the PSOL are determined to suppress. Internationally, all such parties and unions have promoted concessions as the only means of combatting unemployment. This is the essential motivation behind the union's attempt to direct workers to place their trust in moribund national labor laws and PSOL's promotion of Brazil's discredited bourgeois political establishment as their savior.

As the messages exchanged by delivery workers internationally prove, all over the world, regardless of national labor laws, all of them are subject to poverty, excessive working hours, devastating accidents and the risk of coronavirus.

At this crucial juncture of their movement, delivery workers face a fight for genuine political independence, which can be achieved only through the formation of new organizations of struggle formed in a conscious break with the unions and petty bourgeois nationalist forces such as the PSOL.

At the same time, it must be clear that this course of action is thoroughly opposed by the "autonomist" and anarchistic elements among the organizers of the protests, who invite the unions and pseudo-left parties' participation in an undercover manner, or with "banners lowered" in order not to provoke "divisions" among the workers. Their goal is to provide these unions and parties with a "left" cover for their maneuvers, thus avoiding a thorough examination of their role and a conscious political break with them.



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