

Oil and postal workers strike across Brazil

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Brazilian postal and oil workers began indefinite strikes this week after rejecting 2026 Collective Bargaining Agreements proposed by two of Brazil's largest state-controlled companies, Correios and Petrobras respectively.

As part of a growing uprising of workers around the world, these strikes are a continuation of a movement by federal workers in defense of their wages and working conditions since Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Workers Party – PT) returned to power in 2023.

Among the complaints that Petrobras and Correios workers are making about the Lula administration are its unfulfilled promises to reverse the deep attacks of former fascist president Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022). On the contrary, it is continuing these attacks, including escalating threats to privatize these companies.

In 2020, during the second year of Bolsonaro's administration, Correios and Petrobras workers had already staged the largest strikes since 1995, when they fought against sweeping neoliberal measures of privatization and attacks on public workers under President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002).

Beginning on December 15, the strike at Petrobras started with as much support as the one in 2020 and has grown since then. On Thursday, it fully affected nine refineries, 28 offshore platforms, and 13 units of Transpetro, responsible for the transportation and storage of fuels, among other units.

Petrobras has around 50,000 public employees and more than 100,000 employees from outsourced companies. Throughout this year, both have already carried out numerous work stoppages and strikes. Regular protests by retirees have also taken place against pension cuts.

Petrobras workers are demanding a 9.8 percent wage increase to compensate for years of wage freezes. The company offered 5.66 percent, which, after discounting last year's inflation, represents a real gain of only 0.5 percent.

In contrast to this meager proposal, workers are pointing to the company's net profit of R\$94 billion (US\$17 billion) and the R\$37.3 billion in dividends that it distributed to Petrobras shareholders up to the third quarter of this year.

This complaint becomes even more significant given that the Lula administration maintained the policy of paying extraordinary dividends even without accounting for profits, a policy that was initiated in 2020 under Bolsonaro. It only reduced the mandatory distribution percentage from 60 percent to 45 percent of net profits, on the pretext of prioritizing investments in energy transition and in new oil and gas exploration projects.

The strike was met with severe repression by Petrobras and the state. The FUP union federation, affiliated with the PT-controlled

CUT, reported that on December 15, "there was direct interference by Petrobras management to call in the Rio de Janeiro Military Police against the strike at Reduc [Duque de Caxias Refinery]." Two workers ended up being detained for a few hours. The FUP also denounced Petrobras for making it difficult "to release workers who joined the strike on platforms and refineries."

Since December 16, postal workers from 12 of the 36 regional unions, covering nine of Brazil's 26 states, have been on strike for better wages and working conditions and against a "restructuring plan" for the company presented by the Lula government in November that will accelerate privatization. On December 23, there will be assemblies by the other unions to decide on joining the strike.

Correios workers in Brazil's largest states, including São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais, are on strike. Showing growing determination to fight, workers in the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Rio de Janeiro voted unanimously to strike. In São Paulo, workers approved the strike against the union leadership's advice.

Negotiations between representatives of the two union federations and the Correios administration began in August, but have not progressed. On December 11, Correios appealed to the Superior Labor Court (TST) to mediate the Collective Bargaining Agreement negotiations after workers in São Paulo, Brazil's richest state and with its largest workforce, approved a strike vote.

At Tuesday's meeting mediated by the TST, Correios management withdrew its initial proposal of a zero wage increase and proposed increasing workers' wages in line with inflation. However, Correios maintained its proposal to implement the 12x36 work schedule (12 hours of work, 36 hours of rest) and refused to offer the Christmas bonus of R\$2,500, measures that only fueled postal workers' revolt.

The Lula administration's attacks contained in the "restructuring plan" against alleged growing deficits at Correios also remain in place. It calls for the closure of 1,000 post offices and the firing of 15,000 of the company's 83,000 employees through a Voluntary Dismissal Plan (PDV).

As part of this plan, five Brazilian banks, two of them controlled by the federal government, announced last week that they will grant a R\$12 billion loan to Correios, which will inevitably be offset by attacks on the wages, benefits and working conditions of postal workers.

President Lula's claim that his government is against the privatization of the postal service is a fraud. On Thursday, he declared that, in light of the financial crisis facing Correios, "It may be a mixed economy, but privatization, no." This, in turn, would mean that employees' wages and working conditions would

be even more determined by shareholders' demands for profits, as is already the case at Petrobras.

The Brazilian president went on to explain: "What we can do is build partnerships with companies. I know that there are Italian companies that want to come here and discuss with Correios."

Against the nationalist and pro-corporate perspective of the unions, build independent rank-and-file committees!

For years, Correios and Petrobras workers have not only faced attacks from successive Brazilian governments, but also repeated betrayals by the two union federations in each of the sectors controlled by the PT and its pseudo-left satellites.

The union federations of Correios and Petrobras workers have a record of sowing division among workers within their own sectors and dividing their struggles from those of other federal workers, while diverting their struggles into the courts and appeals to the various levels of the capitalist state. With Lula's return to power, they are still calling in vain for his government to resolve the impasse of the strike, covering up its attacks on the workers of these companies.

This record is based on the nationalist and pro-corporate perspective of these union federations. While the Correios unions federations are calling on "Lula to save" the company in the name of "national sovereignty," they are advocating a "serious business plan" for it to compete with its international rivals in the delivery sector, which will further increase the level of exploitation of employees.

In an interview with TVGGN on Thursday, Deyvid Bacelar, general coordinator of the FUP union federation, affiliated with the PT-controlled CUT, put forward a no less reactionary perspective. Denouncing the workers' situation as "serious" after more than three months of fruitless negotiations with Petrobras, he defended a fraudulent "principle of union independence and autonomy from governments and bosses."

Bacelar, who is also a national leader of the PT, added that, "in this way, we are also helping our comrade, our dear president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, to govern... we need to push it to the left."

The Lula administration, however, cannot be "pushed to the left" due to its clear class character: it is a faithful representative of a sector of national and international capital seeking to satisfy its interests in a world increasingly threatened by trade wars and the militaristic agenda behind it.

In the interview, Bacelar also said that one of the main points of the strike is the implementation of the points listed in a document titled "Pauta Brasil Soberano" (Sovereign Brazil Agenda) published by the FUP in October of this year. In it, the FUP argues that Petrobras should guarantee the "development of national industry and the creation of more and better jobs in our country" and advance a "fair energy transition."

This document, in turn, is in line with the nationalist and pro-corporate stance that Lula's government itself proposed in August when it launched the "Sovereign Brazil Plan" in response to the abusive 50 percent tariffs that US President Donald Trump's administration had initially imposed on the country. With a billion-dollar credit line, the alleged goal of this plan is to protect companies and jobs in Brazil amid Trump's trade war.

What Correios and Petrobras workers need is another political

perspective. In its perspective on layoffs in the US auto industry, the *World Socialist Web Site* outlined the principles of that perspective, which are equally valid for Brazilian workers.

Given the global assault by the ruling elites on jobs and working conditions as they turn to war and dictatorship, the struggle must be international, rejecting nationalist slogans such as Trump's "America First" and Lula's "Brazil belongs to Brazilians," which serve "only corporate interests."

Exposing the promotion by the unions in the US of this nationalist slogan, which can also be said of Brazilian unions, the perspective stated that the fight against layoffs must "be inextricably linked to the struggle against union bureaucracy."

This can only happen through the creation of independent rank-and-file committees that are democratically controlled by the workers themselves to unite their struggles with those of workers in other sectors in Brazil and internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RC).

No less important, since December 12, the struggle of the international working class has gained a powerful new tool to assist it: Socialism AI, a chatbot developed by the WSWs that is based both on the historical works of Marxism and on decades of WSWs coverage of workers' struggles around the world, including in Brazil and in the Portuguese language.

As a postal worker in Australia stated yesterday, Socialism AI "offers postal workers something the unions and management never will: clear, accessible political education rooted in Marxist theory, combined with practical guidance for organizing," serving as "a guide for the building and expansion of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees."

We call on Brazilian workers to create rank-and-file committees, adopt an internationalist perspective, and use Socialism AI to educate themselves, organize, and unite their struggles against the coordinated attacks of corporate management, capitalist governments, and nationalist and pro-corporate unions. Above all, this perspective must target the root cause of these attacks: the capitalist system.



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