Strikes continue in Brazil after Lula's reelection

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The strikes that marked the pre-election period in Brazil continued after the first round of the general elections, on October 4. In recent weeks, various sections of workers have continued walkouts in defense of their working and living conditions, often confronting not only the companies and the governments, but also the unions that claim to represent the workers.

Meanwhile, the reelected government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (PT) and other representatives of the Brazilian ruling elite are preparing to deepen the austerity of the past four years. Their turn to the right will take place in a global context of deepening economic crisis, dominated by wars and the impacts of El Niño—with the prospect of rising inflation, a crisis of public debts, declining economic growth and a possible recession.

More significant, however, is that these developments are taking place amid an escalation of the class struggle around the world—centered now in France and Europe in general—against austerity, the rising cost of living and the imperialist wars.

Delivery workers and the struggle against the "gig economy"

The logistics, e-commerce and app-based delivery sector in Brazil is facing a period of intense worker mobilization in 2026. On November 4, Shopee's partner delivery workers in the metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro began an indefinite strike. It follows a joint stoppage carried out in mid-June by Shopee delivery workers in Bahia together with those of the Argentine giant Mercado Livre.

The latest movement gained strength at the cargo terminal of Galeão Airport, on Ilha do Governador, one of Shopee's main sorting hubs in Rio. The workers are fighting against the lack of transparency in disciplinary actions and delivery logistics, with routes often far apart and excessive wait times for loading vehicles at the warehouses.

Between September 10 and 25, Brazil's postal workers went on strike after an impasse in negotiations, with the main points of contention being the funding of the health plan and the wage adjustment. They are also fighting against a "restructuring plan" announced last year by the Lula government that opens the way to the privatization of the postal service in Brazil.

Earlier, on September 1, motorcycle and bicycle couriers on platforms such as iFood carried out the so-called "General App Strike" ("Breque Geral dos Apps"), demanding better pay rates, an end to the system of mandatory shifts, and action against the blocking of accounts and the lack of transparency in the algorithms that distribute deliveries.

It was the second "App Strike" of the year, the first having taken place on March 31 and April 1. In addition to protesting against rising fuel prices and demanding a larger share from the companies, the workers protested against a bill in the Brazilian Congress to regulate app-based work. The bill, backed by the app companies, maintains workers as "platformized self-employed"—without an employment relationship with the companies. In 2024, the Lula government had defended a similar bill, which was also widely rejected by app workers.

The spread of delivery workers' strikes is inseparable from the pandemic, which massively expanded e-commerce and, with it, the army of precarious workers who sustain it. The strikes of delivery workers are not just a Brazilian phenomenon. The "gig economy" is the most advanced form of capitalist precarization: it strips workers of every right, every protection and every stable wage, while concentrating colossal profits in the hands of a handful of transnational platforms.

Strikes grow in public transportation

Throughout 2026, strikes by bus drivers and fare collectors erupted in capitals and major cities across Brazil. Virtually all bus transportation in the country, largely the responsibility of municipal governments, is operated by private concessionary companies, which have sought to place on the backs of workers the rising cost of diesel fuel and other costs that are climbing far above average inflation.

In this scenario, the delayed payment of wages and benefits—meal vouchers, vacation pay—has become common amid the growing deterioration of working conditions. Drivers are subjected to increased workloads—driving and collecting fares, intense heat inside the buses, workdays that exceed 12 to 14 hours because of traffic—and an alarming rate of burnout and psychiatric leave.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, transportation was declared an "essential service," making its workers among the groups with the highest mortality rates in Brazil. In response, hundreds of strikes spread across the country, in a movement that continues to this day.

The most recent strike has broken out in Manaus, capital of Amazonas. In the sixth stoppage this year, the Manaus bus workers walked out on November 9 due to the non-payment of October wages.

Strikes for similar reasons—particularly the delayed payment of basic benefits such as meal vouchers—took place on October 27 in Guarujá, a city on the São Paulo coast near Santos, which is home to the largest port in Latin America, and between October 14 and 21 in Macapá, capital of Amapá. In Belém, capital of Pará, workers on three bus lines have been on strike since October 25, with some of them with up to three months of unpaid wages and meal vouchers, while vacation pay is some six months in arrears.

In Palmas, capital of Tocantins, bus workers walked out on November 3. The strike was suspended the following day, after the company promised not to deduct the days of stoppage and to present a proposal by November 11. The workers are demanding a wage increase, as well as bathrooms and

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drinking fountains at the terminal points and stations—a demand that exposes the degree of degradation to which the bus workers have been subjected.

Many of the most recent strikes have placed workers in conflict not only with the companies and municipal governments, but also with the unions. On October 19, in the Southern Zone of São Paulo, the crisis on the lines of the Transwolff company—under municipal intervention following money-laundering investigations—left workers without payment of their FGTS severance fund and INSS social security contributions. The stoppage that followed was a wildcat strike: drivers and fare collectors acted outside the official union, organizing autonomously in the garages.

In the first half of the year, the city of Rio de Janeiro was the scene of the main strike of the bus workers. Over three days between June and July, the strike, demanding better wages and working conditions and the end of the 6x1 work schedule, paralyzed the state capital. The decisive moment of the strike was an assembly in which the rank and file defeated the union leadership. After the conciliation hearing at the TRT-1 labor court, at which the companies presented no proposal, the union leadership attempted to suspend the movement, approving a “state of strike” to accept the “truce” suggested by the court. The bus workers rejected this maneuver, voted to maintain the strike and marched through the streets of downtown Rio.

The strikes of bus workers express a growing crisis of public transportation in Brazil, one that is also felt by millions of workers and young people who spend an average of 2 hours and 17 minutes a day commuting through the streets—in São Paulo, 2 hours and 47 minutes.

The weight of this crisis falls on both sides of the turnstile: on the bus workers, with delayed wages and exhausting workdays, and on the passengers, with fare increases that are normally above inflation. Protests against the state of public transportation and fare hikes have marked the recent period across Latin America, serving as triggers for the explosion of social anger among young people and workers—from Brazil in 2013, through Chile in 2019, to the most recent uprisings in Argentina and Ecuador.

Urban sanitation: the street cleaners remain in struggle

As with bus transportation, the immense majority of Brazilian municipalities have handed over urban sanitation and solid waste management to private concessionary companies. The working conditions of this sector are marked by the same features: low wages, degrading working conditions and exposure to physical and biological risks without adequate protection.

After seven fruitless rounds of negotiations, workers at Limpurb, in Salvador, capital of Bahia, threatened to strike on November 1. They were demanding the definition of the base date, an adequate wage adjustment and guarantees regarding hazard pay. The stoppage was suspended at the last minute by the Sindilimp-BA union, affiliated with the CUT, the trade union federation controlled by the PT. The decision provoked outrage among the rank-and-file street cleaners, a section of workers that, like the bus workers, has carried out numerous stoppages throughout this year across Brazil.

This is the second strike of street cleaners in Salvador this year. The two days of stoppage at the end of June were part of a national mobilization of street cleaners for the approval of a bill establishing a national wage floor of around R$3,000, hazard pay of 40 percent, special retirement after 25 years of contributions, due to the physical and biological risks of the job, a reduction of the workweek from 44 to 40 hours, and the guarantee of rights such as meal vouchers, basic food baskets and health plans.

The parallel between the struggles of the bus workers and the street cleaners is also seen in the confrontation between the workers and the unions. This emerged clearly on the eve of Carnival in 2014, when, on the night of February 28, the street cleaners of Rio de Janeiro stopped work in defiance of the official union, ignoring an agreement signed by the union leadership. They were demanding significant raises of around 49 percent, and dignified working conditions. With tons of garbage accumulated in the streets and tourist spots during the festivities, the movement had national and international repercussions.

Strikes and protests against the Lula government continue

The government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has faced strikes and protests from virtually every section of the federal public service since the first year of his term, in 2023. The strikes of Petrobras and postal workers at the end of last year, and the strike of Caixa Econômica federal bank workers in September, are among the largest stoppages of these sections of the workforce in 30 years. Repeated strikes were also carried out throughout this year among the roughly 130,000 outsourced Petrobras workers at oil refineries and platforms across Brazil.

Between October 26 and 30, workers and teachers at federal universities and institutes held days of struggle in Brasília. They are once again demanding the full implementation of the Terms of Agreement of the massive 2024 strike, which include better teaching conditions and a reduction in working hours for staff. In the first half of this year, workers had already carried out a 142-day strike, between February 23 and July 15, reaching more than 53 federal universities and institutes across the country, for the same reason.

The strikes of the federal public service against the Lula government have been harshly attacked. The federal agencies immediately resort to the courts to ensure a minimum level of service and end the stoppages—as occurred in the strikes of postal workers and university hospital workers this year. Other measures have also been implemented by the government to suppress the strike movement and punish workers.

On Thursday, the Brazilian press reported that workers at the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE)—responsible for the census and the official indices of the Brazilian economy—had their pay docked in full. The workers had carried out a strike between August and September, after the IBGE refused to negotiate the workers’ demands on three occasions. Since the beginning of the Lula government, workers have denounced the “autocratic and illegal” measures of the institute’s president, the economist Márcio Pochmann, appointed by the PT.

The relationship between the workers and the IBGE had already deteriorated with the creation of the IBGE+ foundation, denounced by workers for opening the way to the privatization of the institute’s services, and which led the workers to strike in 2024. At the beginning of this year, the Federal Court of Accounts and the Attorney General’s Office dissolved the foundation.

This is not the first time that IBGE workers have clashed with the PT. In 2006, the institute workers’ union disaffiliated from the CUT, the trade union federation controlled by the PT, in the face of the austerity measures of the first Lula government and the treacherous role played by the federation in covering up the government’s attacks.

Break with the PT, the pseudo-left and the unions and build rank-and-file committees

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While the ruling elites around the world are veering to the right—deepening austerity, preparing for war and marching toward dictatorship—the international working class and youth are moving to the left. The strikes in Brazil are not a national phenomenon. They are part of a global eruption of the class struggle, from the mass protests of students and workers against austerity, police repression and war in France and across Europe, to the “No Kings” protests in the United States, and the struggles of workers and youth in Africa and Latin America.

This is the world character of the struggle, in an economy that is ever more interconnected. The corporations the workers confront—the bus concessionaries, the delivery platforms, the oil companies—are transnational, and so is the crisis they impose. No national government, least of all the PT government of Lula, can resolve a crisis that is global in its roots.

In Brazil, the workers and youth who voted against fascism, in the hope of a government that would uphold their interests, will collide with the adjustment demanded by the markets and applied by Lula’s Broad Front. Sowing illusions in this government only serves to disarm the working class in the face of what is coming.

The strikes underway in Brazil and around the world show that the working class is already in motion, and that the struggle advances precisely when it breaks with the trade union bureaucracies and with the governments—that of the PT and of all the other parties of the bourgeois establishment. The wildcat strike of bus workers in São Paulo, the rebellion of the rank and file that defeated the union’s betrayal in Rio, the struggle of IBGE workers against the PT government, and countless others all point in the same direction.

The task is to transform this revolt into organization and to link the struggles against austerity, fascism and imperialist war in a single process. It requires a break with the PT, with the trade union federations and with the pseudo-left that orbit this bourgeois political force—and the construction of a revolutionary alternative of the working class, in unity with the workers of all countries, on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program. This will be achieved through the building of independent rank-and-file committees, outside and against the trade union bureaucracy, linked internationally by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

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