

Food delivery workers in Brazil join international strikes against unsafe conditions

By Tomas Castanheira
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Over the past few days, food delivery workers have carried out strikes in several countries demanding safe working conditions in the face of the coronavirus pandemic and an increase in delivery rates to ensure the workers a livable income.

In São Paulo, the largest city in Brazil, workers went on strike last Friday, April 17, and resumed their action on Monday. Also on April 17, hundreds of delivery workers in Teresina, Piauí, in the northeast of the country, protested for security—against the constant robberies they suffer during work, for which they receive no compensation from companies.

These actions took place just one day after the workers protested in Spain, denouncing the same precarious conditions faced by Brazilians. Like the Spanish, Brazilian workers drove down the main avenues of their cities, honking the horns of their motorcycles.

On Wednesday, new demonstrations took place in other countries, after an international delivery workers' strike call was circulated. In Argentina there were protests in Buenos Aires and Cordoba. In Quito, Ecuador, dozens of employees of Glovo demonstrated in the streets and in front of the office of the Spain-based company.

Everywhere these workers are subjected to brutal exploitation by the same transnational companies, such as Uber, Rappi, iFood and Glovo. Governments of several countries have defined their work as an essential service during the pandemic, without the companies, however, being forced to provide the basic conditions for the preservation of workers' health.

Workers protesting on Paulista Avenue, in downtown São Paulo, denounced the conditions that they confront: “We are in the front line and we don't have the support of even a hand sanitizer, we don't receive a

mask, we don't receive anything,” said one of them.

Another declared: “Nobody takes a stand in the media. iFood does not take a stand... There is no representative from our class. We are here, working hard every day and if a biker falls, he is on his own. We want a stand [from the company].”

The workers say that the delivery rates given by the companies are getting lower and lower. “I risk my life to earn 2, 3, 4 reais (less than one dollar). It becomes impossible to work like this,” said a handicapped worker, who delivers food on his wheelchair.

While workers have their income increasingly squeezed and are forced to work endless hours to guarantee starvation wages, the transnational corporations are fiercely competing among themselves, eager for ever larger slices of the global market.

The São Paulo-based iFood, with operations in other Latin American countries, announced this month that it will merge with Domicilios.com to create one of the largest delivery companies in Colombia. Controlled by shareholders such as Jorge Paulo Lemann, the wealthiest man in Brazil, iFood is fighting for the Latin American market directly against Rappi, which is based in Colombia and last year received an investment of US\$1 billion from the Japanese conglomerate SoftBank.

In the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, the number of orders for the food delivery Apps has increased in Brazil, as restaurants have been closed in the country's main cities. But the number of delivery workers has grown even more steeply. Rappi registered a 300 percent growth in the number of registrations. And iFood received 175,000 new registrations in March, compared to 85,000 in February.

Behind this explosion in the number of delivery workers is the growing social desperation of the masses

of unemployed and underemployed people in Brazil, as well as those who had their wages cut or were laid off during the pandemic. Most of these workers are not able to access the meagre R\$ 600, about half a minimum wage, decreed as emergency aid by the Brazilian government.

Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil's far-right president, is carrying out a campaign to sabotage any measures to contain the coronavirus, and has announced that he will reopen his civic-military schools early next week, as a means of forcing general reopening of schools and workplaces in the country. Asked about the explosion of deaths from COVID-19 in Brazil, he answered, "I am not a gravedigger."

With the same indifference to the piling up of corpses, the heads of Brazilian states and municipalities are already announcing a reopening of the economy. The state of São Paulo is the main epicenter of the disease in the country, accounting for more than a third of all deaths and with an increasing mortality rate. Despite this, Governor João Doria of the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB), who has been exalted by the media and the pseudo-left as a "reasonable" politician in comparison to Bolsonaro, announced that a "gradual" resumption of activities in the state will start on May 11.

Brazilian politicians are pursuing the same course as bourgeois governments across the planet, forcing a premature return to work in order to guarantee the flows of profits to the capitalist oligarchy.

The food delivery workers' strikes, on the other hand, express the growing resistance of the world working class to the capitalist class's response to the coronavirus pandemic. In Brazil, they join a wave of strikes and protests against unsafe working conditions, from the March call center workers' rebellion to the recent nurses' strikes and protests, which began last week.

This movement must develop an ever-closer coordination between the struggles of workers from different countries, adopting a socialist and internationalist program. The fortunes of transnational corporations and their shareholders must be expropriated and redirected to benefit the interests of the majority of the world's population, first and foremost to combat the pandemic, guarantee the incomes of the working class and save lives.

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