
”Breaking the apps” once again: An analysis of the 2020 and 2025 food delivery workers’ strikes in Brazil

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Abstract

This presentation analyses the two most significant strikes organised by food couriers in Brazil, known as ”Breque dos Apps”: the first on 1 July 2020, and the second on 31 March and 1 April 2025. It explores the structural and social conditions that enabled food couriers to coordinate collective action on such a large scale, without participation of traditional union. Although a number of small attempts have taken place in the sector over the past five years, these two actions stood out due to their reach and level of participation. This analysis focuses specifically on the motivations and organisational dynamics of these events, addressing the following questions: What compelled couriers to organise independently of established unions? What role did the structure of app-based delivery play in the construction of the strikes? And in what ways did the 2025 strike diverge from the precedent set in 2020? The research is based on fifteen semi-structured interviews with couriers actively involved in both strikes-nine conducted in 2021 and six in 2025. The findings indicate that the 2020 strike was driven by four key elements: the health crisis and corporate neglect during the COVID-19 pandemic; an existing tradition of mobilisation among couriers; the solidarity cultivated at physical ”waiting points”; and the use of social media as a communication tool. In contrast, the 2025 strike was shaped by additional factors: the growing influence of courier YouTubers in disseminating demands, heightened economic pressures in early 2025, and the cumulative experience from smaller-scale actions. This presentation underscores how food couriers are collectively organising in resistance to the increasing precariousness brought about by the platformisation of the delivery sector. Special attention is given to the role of new information and communication technologies in shaping social interactions and enabling collective struggle. Grounded in the concept of ”getting by” (Abílio, 2020) and drawing upon the labour powers approach, the study also situates these mobilisations within the broader context of precarious work in Brazil. By engaging with the expanding body of literature on platform labour and worker resistance, this research offers a temporal comparison of these two moments. Its contribution lies in tracing how these socio-technical dynamics have evolved over a five-year period, providing insight into the continuities and transformations within this emergent field of labour studies.

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