

New York City transit authority adds 500 police officers

Philip Guelpa
11 October 2019

Amidst crumbling infrastructure, deteriorating service, and repeated fare increases, the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) is hiring 500 new police officers to patrol the New York City transit system. This would increase the existing force by nearly two thirds and is in addition to the 2,500 New York Police Department (NYPD) police who regularly patrol the city's subways and busses. MTA police traditionally are assigned to the city's bridges and tunnels, along with the Long Island Railroad and Metro North commuter railroads.

According to the MTA, the new hires, who will replace officers temporarily reassigned from other city police agencies, are needed to address so-called "quality of life" issues, including the high rate of fare evaders on buses and subways, the increasing frequency of assaults on transit employees and riders, and the large number of homeless people who seek refuge underground in the subway system. The increased use of force represented by the enlarged complement of police is the ruling class's reaction to these manifestations of the city's deepening social and economic crisis.

Conditions in the city's transit system (NYCT), its buses and subways, have been worsening for decades due to a lack of investment in maintenance and upgrades, euphemistically referred to by the MTA as "deferred maintenance."

This neglect of essential infrastructure has taken place under both Democratic and Republican administrations in a city which, on the one hand, has the highest number of billionaires in the world, and, on the other, is marked by extreme economic inequality. Instead of taxing the city's elite to obtain the funds needed to maintain a system which is essential to the city's economy, necessary work was either not done or was

funded using borrowed money. Consequently, the system is carrying a huge debt load as well as providing poor service.

Faced with this crisis, the city and the MTA are identifying scapegoats and seeking to implement "solutions" which will increase the economic and social burden on the working class.

Fare evaders allegedly cost the MTA over \$100 million a year. Even if true, what is portrayed as "criminality" by the MTA is an expression of the poverty faced by many New Yorkers. With stagnant wages and the ever-rising cost of living, which are driving tens of thousands into homelessness, it is not surprising that increasing numbers of the city's working class find that the high cost of a subway or bus ride, essential to life in the city, has become an intolerable burden.

According to the New York State Comptroller, "Since 2007, the average subway and bus fare has grown by 62 percent, three times faster than inflation and the growth in wages in the metropolitan area." The already burdensome fare of \$2.75 will only increase in coming years. Fare rises of four percent are projected in 2021 and 2023.

Instead of addressing the real causes of decay in the transit system, earlier this year New York State's governor, Democrat Andrew Cuomo, sought to deflect discontent over the poor quality of service by blaming the homeless who seek shelter in the subways. He demagogically directed the MTA to "solve" the problem. The 500 new police are apparently part of the MTA's chosen solution.

Indeed, a 2019 survey reported a 23 percent increase in homeless people in the subways over the previous year. However, the governor's contention that the homeless are a major cause of poor subway service is a

gross exaggeration. According to the MTA's own figures, homeless people were responsible for 659 delays in all of 2018. During that year, the system averaged 57,774 weekday delays *per month*. Furthermore, NYPD data indicates that serious crime of all types in the subway decreased by 2.4 percent this year.

The contention that a crisis caused by homeless people exists in the subways and that it can be addressed by a substantial increase in the police force is a fraud. Nicole Gelinas, a senior fellow at the right-wing Manhattan Institute, even admitted in the *Gothamist*, "Crime on the subway is flat from the Bloomberg years [2002 to 2013]. Many of the problems people encounter—people with untreated mental illness, people essentially living on the subways with all of their belongings—aren't going to be solved by more aggressive policing."

The city's homeless shelters, housing roughly 60,000 a night, are full to capacity, with squalid conditions that prompt many homeless people to prefer living on the street rather than in these facilities. Mayor Bill De Blasio, a Democrat, who was elected on a pledge to address the city's stark inequality (the "Tale of Two Cities") has failed to make any significant dent in reducing the city's homeless population.

The augmented number of police is also being justified as a response to a reported increase in assaults on transit workers, which the Transport Workers Union Local 100 says have risen by 39 percent over last year.

However, the increase in police has more to do with the restlessness and discontent among transit workers, than concern for their safety. Transit workers have been without a contract since May. The MTA is determined to make them pay for the system's financial crisis by extracting significant contract concessions, which workers are in no mood to accept. An increased police presence will undoubtedly be used against transit workers in the event of a strike.

Earlier this year, Governor Cuomo, who has control over the MTA, launched a vindictive attack on transit workers, accusing them of overtime fraud, when in fact it is the MTA's own policy of short-staffing that forced workers to continue past their standard shifts in order to complete necessary tasks.

The hiring of 500 new officers will reportedly cost \$40 million over the first four years. Meanwhile, the

MTA is cutting subway car cleaner jobs, resulting in trains being pulled out of service and further subway delays. The agency has already warned of future budget deficits, likely resulting in further service reductions.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact