

New York City police attack striking Hunts Point warehouse workers

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Scores of New York Police Department (NYPD) officers attacked a picket line of striking Hunts Point Produce Market workers early Tuesday morning, arresting five workers. Video footage, which has spread rapidly on social media, shows the cops, equipped with riot gear, outnumbering pickets by two to one.

The violent provocation comes as 1,400 workers entered the third day of their strike at the world's largest produce wholesaler. The striking workers, who receive poverty-level wages of \$18-\$20 an hour, are demanding a modest wage increase of a dollar an hour.

The mobilization of police under the Democratic administration of Bill de Blasio against workers demanding a few crumbs contrasts sharply to the treatment of the fascist mob that was allowed to storm the US Capitol on January 6. As far as the ruling class is concerned, the main danger is not an open assault on democratic forms of rule, but rather the resurgence of working class struggle.

The immediate aim of the NYPD's show of force was to break up attempts by strikers to block trucks from accessing the market, ensuring that the scabbing operation remains in place. The strike has the potential to cripple food distribution throughout the entire region. The NYPD kept a heavy presence of officers outside the gates of the market throughout the day Tuesday.

But there are far broader concerns as well. After a year of mass death from the pandemic and economic hardship not seen in at least 80 years, social tensions are reaching a boiling point. The Hunts Point struggle signifies that a new period of open struggle is emerging, not just in New York City but around the country and internationally.

"It's like we're in war," David, a porter, told the WSWS on the picket line Tuesday. "We're not getting

shot but we're dying of other things." David was forced to take time off after the first wave of COVID-19 hit last spring, to avoid risking his grandmother's life, but is now back on the job.

Jason Ruiz has worked at Hunts Point for 18 years, including throughout the pandemic, which has claimed the lives of at least six of his co-workers, but still struggles with basic necessities. "I can't afford a car. I got my own apartment and I'm backed up three months' rent because my wife lost her job during the pandemic," he said Tuesday.

Jason contrasted the federal bailout of the companies at Hunts Point, as well as the trillions funneled to Wall Street, with the situation for workers. "All the money goes from the bottom to the few at the top. There already is socialism, but in reverse."

Over the past year, his company has added heavy labor to his job duties, loading 50-pound pallets of produce from freight trains without any additional pay. "It's like slave labor," he said.

David, Jason and others all along the picket line expressed outrage at the intransigence of the companies in rejecting their demand for an extra dollar an hour. "It'll cover the cost of my Metrocard, that's all I'm asking for," Jason remarked. "They say we should be happy just to have a job. It's disrespectful. We're sacrificing ourselves to have this job," David said.

The companies, meanwhile, are sparing no expense to break the resistance of workers. In a statement Monday, they touted the hiring of a private security firm and coordination with the NYPD just hours ahead of the assault. The companies have also hired the notorious anti-worker Jones Day law firm, which has close ties to the Trump administration. Jones Day was centrally involved in the conspiracy by then-Michigan Governor Rick Snyder and local Democrats to engineer the

bankruptcy of Detroit, loot municipal pensions and privatize city services, and is also representing wealthy bondholders seeking to do the same in Puerto Rico.

Some of the companies have threatened foremen with immediate firing if they refuse to cross the picket line. They're deploying their sales force and others to scab on the striking workers.

In the face of the companies' vicious attacks, backed by the de Blasio administration's NYPD, the Teamsters union's response has been to keep the striking workers isolated and uninformed. Local 202, which called the strike only because of the demands of workers, has not even called out its members at adjacent Hunts Point food markets to join the strike, let alone made any appeal to other sections of workers to participate in a common struggle. Instead, the Teamsters have rolled out the red carpet for Democratic mayoral hopefuls like multi-millionaire Andrew Yang, who held a photo op on the picket line Monday even as his party was preparing to send the cops to protect strikebreakers and arrest workers.

The Democrats have presided over a catastrophic outbreak of the coronavirus in New York City. In the world's wealthiest city and the center of the global financial system, more than 26,000 people have died of COVID-19, and health care workers have been forced to wear garbage bags in place of proper PPE. In order to get parents back to work, Mayor de Blasio is spearheading the nationwide rush to reopen schools, with the assistance of the United Federation of Teachers, and Governor Andrew Cuomo rejects any shutdown of nonessential production as being "too costly."

The Hunts Point struggle can and must be the beginning of a counteroffensive by the working class against the whole "herd immunity" policy of the ruling class, which has sacrificed the lives of more than 400,000 people in the US for corporate profit. The first step is for workers to form a rank-and-file strike committee, which is not under the control of the unions and big business politicians, to fight for collective action by workers throughout the city to protect lives and livelihoods.

This committee should issue a call to teachers, transit and other city workers, and workers in the logistics, manufacturing, telecommunications, service and other industries to prepare a general strike to demand the

closure of schools and nonessential businesses, with full income to displaced workers, along with full protection and good wages for essential workers.

Millions of workers around the world have gone through the experience of the pandemic, witnessing governments hand over trillions from the national treasuries to ensure the rich get richer while workers struggle for bare necessities. The Hunts Point strike is a sign of the growing mood of resistance. These workers must not fight this battle alone.



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