Up to 20 arrests at Sysco picket line in Plympton, Massachusetts

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Sysco strikers: Tells us what you're fighting for and what conditions are like in your facility by filling out the form at the bottom of this article. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Police arrested up to 20 striking Sysco workers at the food supply company's facility in Plympton, Massachusetts, on Monday morning, October 17. More than 400 Teamsters union members arrived at New England's largest food distributor in the early morning hours in an effort to prevent scabs from leaving the facility.

The striking truckers used tractor-trailers to block the exits and slowed delivery trucks, stopping about 100 replacement workers from leaving the warehouse. Sysco normally sends out about 140 trucks a day from its Plympton facility for deliveries to restaurant and food service customers in Massachusetts and New England.

Teamsters members have also struck Sysco distribution centers in Syracuse, New York, and Phoenix, Arizona. The strike that began in Syracuse in late September was settled this week.

About 300 Sysco drivers, members of Teamsters Local 653, went on an Unfair Labor Practices (ULP) strike October 1. They are demanding wage increases, a revived pension plan and assurances that they can remain on the Teamsters local's health insurance plan.

Plympton police reportedly negotiated with pickets for two hours before making arrests. A video shot by WCVB showed Plympton and Marshfield police officers outside the warehouse and multiple people loaded into the back of a police van in the predawn hours. Teamsters organizer Bryan Voci told the *Boston Globe* that between 30 and 50 police officers have patrolled the picket line since the strike began.

Up to 20 strikers were arrested on charges including disorderly conduct and assault and battery, according to Plympton Police Chief Matthew Ahl. Additional charges are being considered, he said.

On September 9, police arrested five pickets in the long-running strike by Teamsters Local 251 at the DHL Express ServicePoint in Pawtucket in neighboring Rhode Island. About 70 delivery drivers struck in June against Northeast Transportation Services, a contracted provider of international logistics giant DHL. Pawtucket police pepper sprayed strikers in the face, and some were pushed to the ground.

Houston-based Sysco is the world's largest broadline food distributor, with more than 600,000 clients in a wide array of fields and revenues of over $60 billion in 2019. *Fortune* magazine has ranked Sysco the 204th largest company in the world based on sales volume. Customers include restaurants, the hospitality and health care industries, educational institutions, grocery chains and sporting venues. As of 2017, it had 69,000 employees worldwide.

The company handles large volumes of a broad range of products utilized by grocery stores and large retail food service chains and businesses. New England Sysco customers include Fenway Park, TD Garden and Gillette Stadium, along with convenience store and restaurant chains.

Sysco operates around 330 distribution facilities in over 90 countries. Since the 1980s, the company has gobbled up a host of its food service competitors in the US and internationally. In 2013, Sysco sought to buy up US Foods, the No. 2 US food distributor, for $3.5 billion. But a federal judge ruled in 2014 that a combined Sysco-US Foods would control 75 percent of the nation's food service industry. Sysco terminated its merger in 2015.

The company reported in 2021 that it had 172

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facilities and over 650,000 customer locations in the US. The International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) has 1.2 million members across the country. However, rather than having a national contract, the IBT has kept workers at the multiple locations divided and under separate contracts, with staggered expiration dates. This has allowed the giant company to keep its operations functioning in some capacity with strikebreakers and violence meted out by local police.

In Syracuse, more than 230 drivers and warehouse workers organized in Teamsters Local 317 began a ULP strike on September 27. Their contract expired August 19. Workers ended their strike last week after two weeks on strike. Details of the settlement were not immediately available, but demands included wages to keep pace with inflation and an end to excessive forced overtime of 14 to 16 hours per day, without a premium being paid after eight hours.

The contract for workers at United Parcel Service (UPS), the US-based multinational shipping company that employs more than half a million workers worldwide, expires in July 2023 for US workers. UPS had record profits of nearly $13 billion in 2021, and workers are also members of the Teamsters.

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