

New York City workers respond to Mamdani's firing of Haitian workers

Our reporters
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In late July, the Trump administration terminated Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for some 350,000 Haitians, stripping them of work authorization and exposing them to arrest and deportation.

On August 7, New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America who campaigned as a champion of immigrants and an opponent of Trump, announced that Haitian city employees who lost their work authorization would be fired. He called no protest, mounted no legal challenge and appealed for no strike action. Instead, Mamdani urged the workers to appeal to the same administration that had stripped them of their status.

On Friday, *World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke to Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) workers between runs at a Brooklyn bus depot.

Marcus, a bus operator, spoke with the WSWs about the attack on democratic rights in the United States:

I agree that things need to change, but unity and solidarity are needed for that first.

If I was asked to go on strike for better wages, better conditions, and the defense of our immigrant colleagues, I would do it in a heartbeat. But I would need to know that we stand united and that we won't be betrayed by our leadership.

I don't like Mamdani, but that's because I don't like politicians and politics at all. All of them just say one thing, and then do another. It's like they say, "Oh, hey, listen, I wrote this song," but then when they get to playing it on the violin... something entirely different comes out.

So, yes, a big strike would be great. But because the whole system is set up a certain way, I agree, it would mean revolution. And I am for that. Revolution is necessary. But we really need to secure our unity and solidarity before we can make that attempt.

Jean, a Haitian MTA worker, expressed shock upon learning that Mamdani had fired Haitian city workers:

Is this even legal? How has this happened? We have to get all of them out of office, both Trump and Mamdani. I'm upset because I had originally thought he was going to do good things.

I have family and friends who were on TPS, and they are very, very nervous right now. Of course, Haiti is not a safe place. This was a lie that was brought before the Supreme Court.

Haiti is still paying for its democratic revolution that happened centuries ago. I know about the damage that the US has done to the country in subsequent history, with Citibank and everything.

And also France, they still want to punish Haiti for its rebellion.

I appreciate that you're out here building awareness. I want to do anything I can to help. I want to get involved.

Deirdre, a bus operator, opposed the Trump administration's termination of TPS for Haitians and Syrians. She spoke about the need for rank-and-file action from below, in opposition to working within the existing political system.

"It is disgusting what is going on. I'm not Haitian or Syrian, but I agree that anything that they would do to immigrants, they would also do it to everybody else if they could."

Deirdre pointed to the record of the Obama administration as an example of how establishment politicians invariably betray their progressive pretensions:

I think it's important to remember that change comes from below, from the people. Those at the top don't do anything. Even Obama, and with the killing of black people in the streets. Despite all the hype, those who made the real change... that came from us.

Going on strike to defend immigrant workers would be important, and it's clear how that would also be connected to getting us better working conditions. There's certainly much to be desired in that regard. For instance, our contract... That's not just for us, but all workers. My sister is a teacher, so I definitely understand the struggles that she goes through on a daily basis as well.

Thank you for being out here. I want to get involved in the fight.

Susan, a retired worker, gave a personal account of the effects of the TPS revocation and expressed her disgust with the entire political system:

I am so sick of all politicians, from Trump on down. I'm from Jamaica, originally. Sadly, I now feel that if I had the chance, I would go back there permanently.

I had heard of how they got rid of TPS for Haitians. My son told me that his workplace fired all of his Haitian colleagues from his job last week. They didn't even want to do it, but they said they had to. Now these people are refugees. They are fleeing to other countries, like Canada, just to be safe.

The United States is supposed to be a place where everybody can go. We are all here for a reason. We just want to survive. We should be allowed to just go about our business and feed our families.

Mike, a bus driver, was also shocked to learn of the firings. He compared the political trajectory of the Mamdani administration to that of the Obama presidency:

That is terrible news that I am hearing, that Mamdani is removing Haitian TPS city workers. Mamdani has to answer to the people. It reminds me of when Obama came in. He didn't really do anything. They do the leg work to get there, and then don't. Everything is being changed, not necessarily for the good.

Another worker commented on the significance of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and connected the fight for broader political change with industrial action:

"The American Revolution is 250 years old now, and they are firing and revoking peoples' rights...they want to make people pay for problems they don't create. [Mamdani says that] they have to go according the law...well, then they should update the law to change that."

He continued:

"We, transit workers, need change, too. When there was the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) strike, I supported them. They showed they were serious. This has been going on a long time, that they keep us without a contract...For the riders, too. Mamdani talks a lot about what people want to hear, like free buses. But does not do it."

On Tuesday, WWSW reporters spoke to workers on a public sidewalk in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Little Haiti. Sarah, a New York City public school teacher, strongly opposed the attacks on immigrant workers. She drew a strong connection between the victimization of the most vulnerable sections of the working class and the conditions that all employees face in the workplace.

Well, in this community that we're standing in, we would miss these Haitian workers a lot. They work hard. Many of them are in the healthcare industry. All the fields where poor people would benefit, many of them they work there...Who's going to replace them?

I don't have a lot of Haitian students where I work. But we're still going to feel the effects. They're in every aspect of our community life in this neighborhood.

The US is supposed to be the most democratic country in the world, but come on now, it's not. It has not been for a while. It's not democratic. Hey, don't you see autocrats coming in? And nothing is wrong in their eyes...

They claim that TPS was a temporary status and it's run its course. That is what we're hearing from the government. ...But what are these people going back to? Most of them have zero to go back to... If you have a heart, you have to feel badly for them.

If they can get rid of 350,000 Haitians...you're going to trample on everybody sooner or later.

If you were working in a place with, say, three Haitians, and then they're gone...you're going to have to work harder. More work for everybody, and you're not getting any increase in salary.

Sarah spoke about the power workers could wield through organization independent of the trade union bureaucracy:

[The teachers union] is a big force, but, you know, everybody's afraid... if you open your mouth... they're going to come at you.

That's why people are scared to be very vocal and take steps... But if you can unite everybody, we'd have a lot of clout.

I agree, we should organize rank-and-file committees independently of the union. If we do that, we'll have a lot of clout. Somebody will listen to what we have to say. We have so much power, and we know that. Our administrators are scared of us when we talk to each other. But like I say, though, if we unite, there's nothing they can do about it. We just need to come in as one, shut it down a day or two.

I would go for a general strike. Then they'll take notice. Desperate times means desperate measures.

Del, a dietary worker in his 50s at a Manhattan hospital who lives in the neighborhood, spoke about the global crisis underlying the attack on democratic rights in the United States:

I heard about how they got rid of TPS for Haitians, and how Mamdani fired the city workers. I've been following it closely.

I'm a naturalized citizen. I was born in Jamaica and I've been living and working here since 1989. My kids were born and raised here. I may need to go back to Jamaica. It may be the best choice for me and my family.

I'm telling you, there is a real crisis in American society. Nobody can afford anything; wages are down. Prices are up. You can't afford to retire, and your entire paycheck is taken up by your rent. Social Security is under attack. You can't qualify for assistance programs if you're working, but you also can't afford to pay your bills if you are working. There is no more social safety net.

You know, I think that democracy is in real danger in the United States right now. There is no more American dream. You can't make a living anymore, let alone do well for yourself. And I think that ICE and the attack on immigrants are very related to this. They want to blame immigrants and blame minorities. They want to divide us. That way nobody ever can get a raise, and they can keep everybody oppressed.

When I came to this country, I was escaping a place where elections are held at gunpoint. Now, it's gonna be the same thing here.

How could this happen in the richest country in the world? Even the Supreme Court has been corrupted, as you can see by this TPS ruling. And also, Trump is now trying to get rid of birthright citizenship.

There is always money for war, money for destruction. Trillions of dollars. But the people at home are unable to afford to live. How many billions did we give to Ukraine? And for what? We are definitely not spreading "democracy" there.

What the US and its allies are doing is colonialism. They want to conquer everywhere. I'm very familiar with the role of colonialism in Jamaica. Jamaica has been caught in the crosshairs between the US and is also under the influence of Cuba and China. The US buys out corrupt politicians and promotes them, and the CIA tries to assassinate political opposition. On the other hand, China is building infrastructure and roads in the country. I think that you will see revolution in Jamaica very soon. People are very oppressed there.

Del concluded by discussing the prospect of revolution and the conditions driving workers toward a struggle against the existing social

order:

“The idea of revolution scares me. But I also think that it is inevitability. If peoples’ backs are against the wall, then they will have to fight back. People are going to retaliate. If they’re spending three quarters of their income on rent and can’t afford food, then something has to break.”



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