

Bronx produce workers fight for justice

written by Stephen Millies
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Photo: Teamster Joint Council 16

Bulletin: Because of the courage of the striking workers, and the support given to them by the community, a tentative agreement was reached Jan. 22.

The 8.6 million people living in the Big Apple eat a lot of apples. Most of them come through the Hunts Point Produce Market in the Bronx. So does a majority of New York City's other fruits and vegetables.

A thousand workers, members of Teamsters Local 202, have gone on strike there. They're asking for a mere \$1 per hour wage increase.

They are all essential workers who've kept feeding New Yorkers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Six of the Teamsters have died of the coronavirus doing so. Another 300 have fallen ill from it.

"Don't say we should be lucky to have a job," [said one of the strikers](#), Hiram Montalvo, who unloads trucks. "Say thank you that we're actually coming to work and risking our lives so that they can take care of their families as well."

New York City is awfully expensive. It's hard to find a one-bedroom apartment that rents for less than \$1,600 per month. Asking for a dollar more an hour is modest and necessary.

The response of the bosses has been to bring in the police. Three hundred police in riot gear attacked the picket lines after midnight on Jan. 19. Six strikers were arrested.

This is the same police force that's arrested thousands for asserting that Black lives matter. Now they're attacking workers on strike, most of whom are Black or Brown. That's another reason to expel police organizations from the AFL-CIO.

Union leaders made the connection. Teamster Joint Council 16, which represents 120,000 workers, tweeted: "Hands up! Don't shoot! We condemn the arrests of several peaceful strikers on the Teamsters picket line tonight at Hunts Point Market. These essential workers deserve their \$1 raise."

People have already come to Hunts Point to show solidarity. Congressperson Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez skipped the presidential inauguration to join the picket line. AOC was targeted for assassination by the fascist mob that was allowed to enter the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6.

More important were the CSX workers who refused to deliver 21 railroad cars to the market on Jan. 20. As the locomotive engineer, a member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, declared, "We're Teamsters too!"

The produce bosses have to be made to come to the bargaining table. Behind them are banksters and other big capitalists who are trying to break the strike of 1,800 Spectrum cable workers. The 1,800 members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 3 have been striking for nearly four years.

New York City power brokers want to give the same punishment to Teamster produce workers in the Bronx. But the rich and greedy don't seem to be winning.

As [one Teamster said](#) after the CSX train reversed direction: "Another victory. Another day longer. Another day stronger. We're going to get this contract come hell or high water!"

The writer is a retired Amtrak worker and member of the American Train Dispatchers' Association and the Transportation Communication International Union.

