

AOC Spent Inauguration Day with Striking Produce Workers in New York City. Here's What to Know.

Via [Harper's Bazaar](#)

For the first time in 35 years, workers at New York City's Hunts Point Market are on strike.

About 1,400 produce workers part of the Teamsters Local 202 union unanimously voted to strike on Sunday, January 17, after contract negotiations broke down when management countered appeals for a \$1 hourly raise with an offer of a \$0.32 hourly raise. These workers—who have continued working throughout the devastating COVID-19 pandemic—are responsible for supplying [60 percent](#) of the produce in New York City.

On Wednesday, Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez helped draw some spotlight on the movement by skipping the [estimated \\$200 million inaugural festivities](#) to join union members on the picket line calling for the \$1 wage increase.

“The more we talk about this, the more everybody can put on the pressure,” the congresswoman said in a video captured by [The City](#) reporter Claudia Irizarry Aponte. “So that we not just get a buck, but that we change lives for people across this country.” This content is imported from Twitter. You may be able to find the same content in another format, or you may be able to find more information, at their web site.

Ahead, everything you need to know about the Hunts Point Market strike.

Who is striking?

Warehouse workers, drivers, and various other union members that keep the city's produce flowing are leading the fight on the picket line, according to a Teamsters [press release](#).

The Hunts Point Produce Market, the world's biggest wholesale produce market per [Grub Street](#), relies on these hundreds of workers to distribute and handle the 210 million packages of fresh fruit and produce that annually pass through the hub. This produce is then provided to 23,000 restaurants and 2,500 greengrocers throughout the city—meaning that a strike could potentially have a “ripple effect” in New York, according to [WNYC](#). This content is imported from Instagram. You may be able to find the same content in another format, or you may be able to find more information, at their web site.

What are their demands?

In addition to a \$1 hourly raise, the union is asking for greater health care coverage, per [Gothamist](#).

Currently, the majority of the workers have an average base salary between \$18 and \$21 an hour, per a [press release](#). The Teamsters have also noted that the Hunts Point Market employers annually receive billions of dollars in sales and have recently accepted more than \$15 million in forgivable PPP loans during the pandemic.

What's happened since the strike started?

Teamsters and supporters have been holding a 24/7 picket line outside the main entrance to the Bronx Hunts Point Market since Sunday, January 17.

Early on Tuesday morning, police arrested half a dozen of the

picketers, reported the [Daily News](#). Videos from the scene show picketers in the roadway with their arms raised over their heads as a swarm of officers, some decked out in riot gear, charge towards the group. In the background, an NYPD recording declares, "You are unlawfully in the roadway and obstructing vehicular traffic. You are ordered to leave the roadway and utilize the available sidewalk. If you do so voluntarily, no charges will be placed against you. If you remain in the roadway and refuse to use the sidewalk, you will be placed under arrest and charged with disorderly conduct."

In response, some picketers can be heard chanting, "Hands up, don't shoot," per *Daily News*. The phrase is commonly recited at Black Lives Matter protests. This content is imported from Twitter. You may be able to find the same content in another format, or you may be able to find more information, at their web site.

"It is outrageous that after being called essential heroes for months, several of our members were arrested while peacefully protesting for a raise today," local president Daniel Kane Jr. said in a [statement](#). "These are the essential workers who went to work every day through the worst of the pandemic to feed New York. All they are asking for is a dollar-an-hour raise so they can feed their families too. The fact that they were arrested on Martin Luther King Day reminds us what side of history we are on."

It is not yet known whether or not the arrested picketers have been charged.

"They can use riot cops to get trucks into the market, but the workers they need to unload the trucks are still on the picket line," Kane said. "We will stay on strike until these employers pay their workers the essential wage they deserve."

On Wednesday, the union's Twitter account reported that 21 train cars full of merchandise were turned back at the picket

line. “The locomotive engineer came out, saw them, said, ‘We’re Teamsters, too,’ turned the freight car around, and headed back to Ohio,” a union member said in a video.

In addition to AOC, several politicians have publicly backed the strike, including mayoral hopefuls Maya Wiley and Andrew Yang, as well as New York Representative Ritchie Torres.

What’s the bigger picture here?

Though strikes have long been on the decline in the United States, the Hunts Point Market strike is part of a resurgence of collective labor activity blooming across the country, especially as workers continue to speak out against working conditions under the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before the pandemic, the Bureau of Labor Statistics already saw an upsurge in major strike activity in the years 2018-2019, according to the [Economic Policy Institute](#), with an average of 455,400 workers nationwide being involved in major work stoppages.

The Economic Policy Institute also notes that [strikes have continued](#) in spite of the pandemic, triggered by poor pay and protections against the deadly COVID-19 virus. Work stoppages have occurred in industries covering retail, manufacturing, healthcare, and food service, as workers make demands for things like better wages or a sufficient supply of personal protective equipment.

What can I do to help?

If you’re in New York City, the Teamsters are actively looking for people to join them at the picket line all day at 772 Edgewater Road in the Bronx. You can also plug in with local neighborhood organizations, like the Democratic Socialists of America’s New York City branch, who may be taking donations

for food and supplies.

If you're outside of New York, you can still support the action by speaking out, sharing information, and following the progression of the Teamsters strike at their [Twitter](#) or [Instagram](#) account or at the hashtag [#HuntsPointStrike](#).