

Fast-Food Protesters Cuffed at Higher-Pay Rallies

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Police handcuff protesters blocking traffic on Mack Avenue in Detroit as part of a national protest to push fast-food chains to pay their employees at least \$15 an hour Thursday, Sept. 4, 2014. Hundreds of workers from McDonald's, Taco Bell, Wendy's and other fast-food chains are expected to walk off their jobs Thursday, according to labor organizers of the latest national protest to push the companies to pay their employees at least \$15 an hour. (AP Photo/Paul Sancya)

NEW YORK (AP) — Police handcuffed several protesters in New York and Detroit on Thursday as they blocked traffic in the latest attempt to escalate their efforts to get McDonald's, Burger King and other fast-food companies to pay their employees at least \$15 an hour.

The protests, which are planned by labor organizers for about 150 cities nationwide throughout Thursday, are part of the "Fight for \$15" campaign. Since the protests began in late 2012, organizers have switched up their tactics every few months.

Before Thursday's protests, organizers said they planned to engage in nonviolent civil disobedience to draw more attention to the cause. In the past, supporters have showed up at a McDonald's shareholder meeting and held strikes. The idea of civil disobedience arose in July when 1,300 workers held a convention in Chicago.

The movement, which is backed financially by the Service Employees International Union and others, has gained national attention at a time when the wage gap between the poor and the rich has become a hot political issue. Many fast-food workers do not make much more than the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour, which adds up to about \$15,000 a year for 40 hours a week.

President Barack Obama mentioned the campaign earlier this week at a Labor Day appearance in Milwaukee.

"There's a national movement going on made up of fast food workers organizing to lift wages so they can provide for their families with pride and dignity," Obama said,

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as he pushed Congress to raise the minimum wage. "If I were busting my butt in the service industry and wanted an honest day's pay for an honest day's work, I'd join a union."

The National Restaurant Association, on the other hand, said in a statement that the protests are an attempt by unions to "boost their dwindling membership." The industry lobbying group said it hopes organizers will be respectful to customers and workers during the protests.

Union organizers said they expected thousands to show up to Thursday's protests around the country. Previously, turnout has been fairly minimal in many places.

By late Thursday morning, protesters in some cities were standing in front of fast-food restaurants, chanting for higher pay and holding signs in both English and Spanish.

In New York, at least three people wearing McDonald's uniforms were hauled away by police officers after standing in the middle of a busy street near Times Square. About two dozen protesters were handcuffed in Detroit after they wouldn't move out of a street near a McDonald's restaurant. In Chicago, a couple of buses unloaded a group in front of a McDonald's restaurant, chanting "Stand up. Fight Back," while 100 people crowded on the sidewalk.

Prospero Sanchez, who was at the McDonald's in New York, said the \$11.50 per hour he earns making pizzas at a Domino's Pizza restaurant is not enough to support him, his wife and two kids. He started working at the same restaurant 14 years ago, when he made \$5 an hour.

He has asked his bosses for more money. "They said no," Sanchez, 32, said.

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