

Corporate media expresses fear over public response to murder of UnitedHealthcare CEO Thompson

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On Sunday, New York City police released two new photos of the man believed to have shot and killed Brian Thompson, chief executive officer of UnitedHealthcare, early Wednesday morning as he walked to an investor conference at the Hilton Midtown Hotel.

The images apparently show the unidentified gunman in the back seat of a taxi in Manhattan on his way out of the city approximately 15 minutes after he shot Thompson. The New York City Police Department said the suspect took a cab uptown to a bus terminal near the George Washington Bridge, “where he may have caught a bus out of the state.”

The manhunt for the shooter, the subject of nonstop coverage on US news networks for the past five days, is one aspect of the response of the ruling establishment to the murder of Thompson, the highly compensated 50-year-old CEO of the spectacularly profitable health insurance giant worth a reported \$560 billion.

The near-constant reportage of the investigation and search for the shooter has proceeded alongside recognition by the corporate media of the public reaction to the shooting, which has expressed little sympathy for Thompson. Much of it, on social media in particular, has been scathing of UnitedHealthcare and the healthcare insurance industry in general.

The *Hill*, for example, wrote on Friday:

Some people began posting testimonials about their experiences with UnitedHealthcare and how badly they felt they had been mistreated. There were stories of losing loved ones because they were denied a claim, families suffering

financial strain or ruin and people whose pain and suffering were drawn out not by the affliction or disease they had, but by the insurance company from which they were supposed to be getting service.

The *Hill* report continued:

Many people seem to think that Brian Thompson deserved to die. On social media, these have been celebrating the death of the victim and proclaiming the alleged killer as a “hero.” Some have dubbed the unnamed suspect “Robin Hoodie,” among other aliases.

While the specific motive behind the murder of Thompson remains unknown, it must be stated that there is nothing progressive in the gunning down of Thompson. The apparent connection between the shooting and the claims policies of UnitedHealthcare—as indicated by the handwritten words “delay” and “deny” on shell casings found at the scene—do not in any way point in the direction of a solution to problems facing millions of people that are rooted in the profit system.

If anything, acts of individual violence against individual representatives of the corporate and financial elite provide the ruling class with the opportunity to carry out attacks on the basic democratic rights of the working class and strengthen the repressive apparatus of the state against the mass struggles required to put an

end to capitalism.

In the aftermath of the shooting and public response to it, the corporate media has suddenly discovered that UnitedHealthcare is notorious for denying health insurance claims and mistreating the insured. According to a column by Robin Abcarian in the *Los Angeles Times*, the popular response illustrates “the hatred so many Americans feel toward for-profit health insurance companies, which too often make money for stockholders by withholding care from sick people.”

At the same time, the mouthpieces for the financial interests behind the healthcare and health insurance industries have reacted with fear to both the shooting and the public’s response to it.

An Editorial Board statement published on Saturday by the *Washington Post*—owned by the second wealthiest man in the world, Jeff Bezos, with a net worth of \$246 billion—had the headline, “A sickness in the wake of a health insurance CEO’s slaying: There is no excuse for the killing of Brian Thompson or celebrating his death.”

The statement justified the profits made by the insurance industry and said, “Of necessity, corporate chieftains are already reacting by fortifying their personal security, in case the shooting inspires copycat violence. Other insurers are deleting images of their leaders or removing webpages that list their executives.”

The *New York Post*, which is part of the media empire owned by Rupert Murdoch, who has a net worth of \$22 billion, published an opinion piece by Nicole Gelinas that said:

There’s another reason why the Thompson killing is a bad sign for New York: The open-air execution of a top executive has spurred the finance and business world to beef up security. ... If the level of security you need dictates that you never enter a crowded, or even uncrowded, space with any strangers—that you literally cannot cross the street from one hotel sidewalk to another without risking your life—then New York is not the place for you.

pointed to “the fraying of the social contract” and complained that “Americans express less and less trust in many institutions.” It continued:

Corporate executives are already reportedly beefing up their security. I expect more of them to move to gated communities, entrenched beyond even higher walls, protected by people with even bigger guns.

The *New York Post* also reported that Allied Universal, a private security firm that provides security services to 80 percent of Fortune 500 companies, has had its phones “ringing off the hook” since the murder of Thompson on Wednesday. The *Post* report said a full-time security contract for a chief executive costs approximately \$250,000.

The *Post* report continued:

The vast increase in calls to the firm comes as dozens of Fortune 1000 chiefs will descend on Manhattan to attend a summit at Midtown’s Ziegfeld on 54th Street, not far from where Thompson was gunned down by a masked gunman outside the Hilton hotel.

While the murder of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson has produced nonstop coverage on the cable news and corporate media outlets, devoted largely to the manhunt for his killer, the brutal murder of a migrant teen in New York City a day later has been barely reported. The apparent hate crime, in which 17-year-old Yeremi Colino was stabbed in the chest with a screw-driver after he replied “No” when asked if he spoke English, has elicited no police dragnet or manhunt for the suspect.



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An op-ed in the *New York Times* by Zeynep Tufekci