

New York City transit workers ratify contract

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New York City transit workers accepted a contract that was negotiated by the leadership of Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100 with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA).

According to the American Arbitration Association, which conducted the count, 11,516 voted for the settlement and 7,100 voted against. In percentage terms, about 62 percent of the 18,616 who returned ballots voted yes, while 38 percent voted no. This means only 61 percent of the 33,000 members of the union eligible to vote returned their ballots. According to union spokesmen, however, this is the highest rate of participation in a ratification vote in 20 years.

Two divisions voted against the contract—TA Surface Maintenance and the Train Operators. Surface Maintenance, which repairs and maintains buses, voted no by an overwhelming 3 to 1 ratio because it is one of two divisions earmarked for job title broadbanding in the new contract. The other division slated to have job titles broadbanded is Car Equipment, which is responsible for the repair and maintenance of train cars. However, 70 percent of these workers voted to accept the settlement because they were offered a dollar an hour more in return for increased productivity.

The train operators, who have, historically, been the center of opposition to the union bureaucracy, rejected the contract by a mere 20 votes. There were a number of divisions that accepted the settlement by narrow margins, while a number of other divisions voted to accept with 60 to 70 percent “yes” votes. The non-civil service bus division, which has historically been the center of support for the union leadership, voted overwhelmingly to accept the contract. Nevertheless, the non-civil service maintenance workers voted “yes” by a smaller margin than the bus operators.

The vote for the contract does not reflect either enthusiasm for the agreement or support for the union leadership. Most workers voted yes because they saw

no alternative.

The TWU leadership reached a settlement on December 15, 1999, only hours after Mayor Rudolph Giuliani obtained a court injunction calling for astronomical fines if transit workers struck, or even talked of a strike. Many workers have since concluded that the union wanted the injunction in order to hold back a militant workforce.

At the same time, the MTA made a wage somewhat higher than that obtained by other public and private unions in the city. Productivity provisions in the contract, however, provide the basis for the MTA to more than pay for the cost of the contract.



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