

New York transit union calls off strike on commuter bus line

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During last week's one-day strike by bus drivers and mechanics at Liberty Lines in Westchester County, north of New York City, the newly elected leadership of Transport Workers Union Local 100 in New York City demonstrated that it is just as unwilling and incapable of defending workers' interests as the previous occupants at TWU Local 100 headquarters. More than 700 workers struck the commuter bus line when the contract expired last Thursday, March 1, effectively shutting down its operations, but the TWU called off the walkout before the company agreed to a contract.

The TWU announced on Saturday morning that it had reached an agreement, but would not reveal the terms of the contract. The major demand of the workers was wage parity with the public bus workers in New York City, who make about two to three dollars more per hour and are represented by the same local. In an effort to achieve this, the Liberty bus workers were demanding an 8 percent pay increase over 22 months. The company was offering only a 2.5 percent wage hike per year. Liberty workers make, at top pay for their job title, anywhere from \$14 per hour for cleaners to about \$21 per hour for mechanics. In addition, Liberty Lines drivers and mechanics complained that management gave them no sick days.

Westchester County Executive Andrew J. Spano denounced the workers for "making unreasonable demands" and said Liberty's offer was fair. Spano also arranged for the Metro-North commuter railroad to make extra stops, and to have additional car and limousine services available in preparation for a strike.

Shortly after Spano's remarks the TWU leadership called off the strike and the membership returned to work on Friday as negotiations continued. The workers were told to end their work stoppage despite the fact

that they expressed a strong determination to stay on the picket line for as long as it took to win their demands.

Liberty Lines is a private company that runs both the Bee-Line transit system and Express commuter buses. The company has a contract with Westchester County that enables it to service about 55,000 commuters who travel every weekday to New York City to schools and workplaces. The strike forced passengers to take commuter trains, cabs and carpools to the city subway, or simply stay home.

TWU Local 100 is now run by Roger Toussaint, whose New Directions slate won control of the union January 1 after promising it would take a more militant stance against management.



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