

New York City transit worker speaks: “They’re churning up the next American revolution”

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The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with a New York City transit worker after the leadership of the Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100 called off the strike by 34,000 workers Thursday without attaining a contract.

On Thursday afternoon, TWU officials showed up on picket lines throughout the city and instructed workers to return to work, without any explanation of what had been accomplished. This generated considerable anger among many workers who had struck for three days and willingly accepted the loss of thousands of dollars in wages under the antiunion Taylor Law.

The sudden calling off of the strike was followed by a news blackout on ongoing negotiations between the TWU and the transit authority. It is being widely reported that the TWU has offered to impose greater out-of-pocket expenses for health care on their members in exchange for management curtailing or dropping its demand for the rolling back of pension protections.

Among many transit workers, there was not only a suspicion over the actions of the TWU leadership, but also a sense that continuing the strike on the present course was futile, particularly without the support of the rest of the New York City labor movement and a direct appeal to working people throughout the city. At the same time, workers felt they had taken a courageous stand and that future battles lay ahead.

In his comments, Horace, a bus mechanic from Brooklyn, discussed the calling off of the strike and what type of struggle is required to defend New York City transit workers and the working class as a whole.

“I understand what happened, and I’m not totally in agreement. The city and the state were refusing to

negotiate while the strike was going on. I think we should have stayed on strike at least two more days, though. Then our message would really have been well sent. We did send a strong message, however.

“The mayor is saying we backed down, but that is just happy talk to convince the public. If the talks fail, the logical thing would be for us to go back out. I don’t know if the union will do that, but we should. I don’t care what the mayor says, I want to win and defend our pensions and our rights.

Throughout the strike, we had no access to the media, which did nothing but attack us. Outside of your web site, our voices were stifled. But how many interviews on TV did you see from riders who supported us? None. People are starting to think, no matter what the media says. They know what time it is, and most were with us.

“They are churning up the next American revolution. We’re seeing the rise of an oligarchy and an attack on the entire working class. The MTA, Bloomberg and Pataki are continuing the work of Ronald Reagan. The working class needs to make a statement.”

Horace then commented on how the TWU International and the city unions sabotaged the strike. “The current trade unions have stopped being for the working class. The head of the TWU International, Michael O’Brien, makes \$225,000 a year, and that explains his position. If he didn’t agree with the strike, he should have just shut up.

“The other city unions—the teachers, the public employees, firefighters—they said they would support us. The heads of these unions spoke at our rallies and pledged to set up a strike fund. In the end, the labor leaders were only involved in a talk shop. The labor

officials think, ‘I’ve become successful,’ and they won’t do anything that threatens their positions.

“I’m from Jamaica, and people are thinking of third parties, too. The population is taught to vote against their own interests. The big business parties use ‘social’ issues, like abortion, the legislating of morality and intelligent design, to hide the basic economic interests they both defend.

“I don’t see myself in the middle class. I’m in the working class. The Wall Street guys are getting bonuses that are 10 times what I earn all year. The major corporations aren’t really losing any money, they just want to get fewer and fewer workers to produce more and more. I see what’s happening with Delphi and the auto companies in Detroit. It’s the same thing they’re doing to us.

“Korean automobiles used to be considered inferior. But they’ve reinvested their profits into research and development, and they are as good as anything put out by Detroit. In the US, all the profits they make they plow into compensation packages for the CEOs.

“Where are our pension funds going? They’re dependent on the vicissitudes of the stock market and being under-funded by the companies and the public employers. All of these things are under assault, and the working class is going to have to defend these gains.”



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