Transit workers voice anger

A reporting team
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A WSWS reporting team interviewed transit workers at the Stilwell train station in Brooklyn, the largest one in the New York City system.

While the reporters found a variety of opinions, there was a significant degree of disgust with the situation confronting transit workers and the working class as a whole.

A typical reaction was that of one worker, who when asked about the contract shouted out, “We need to strike. They won’t listen”, and then stormed off too angry to talk.

Russell Lerner, a station cleaner told the WSWS, “I don’t think we should be working without a contract. Historically, the transit workers never worked without a contract. And no one is saying anything about it. The union has gone quiet, and workers are not discussing it very much.

“We all deserve a raise because the cost of living is going up, and everybody knows it. This year we have no raise because we have no contract.

“I don’t want the health care costs we have to pay to increase. What good is getting a wage increase when your health care costs are going up? It is like getting no raise at all.

“I don’t think they have hired new station cleaners in a while since they stopped giving the test in 1997.

“I don’t hear anything about striking. This may be because the last time we struck, I lost $600 and got nothing for it. This was the strike Toussaint called.

“Over its history, transit workers did not work without a contract. But people are mad about what happened in the last strike. This is why they are reluctant to strike now. Look at what happened when we struck. They took away the automatic dues payment to the union, and people refused to pay their dues. They still don’t pay. They ask ‘what is the union doing?’ I don’t hear any talk about a strike or the contract. I think people are disgusted.”

Johnny, a transit worker said, “We have been stonewalled on this contract. If you are in the top one percent, you can get more money with no problem.

“The union leaders are becoming like politicians today. They want to be part of the one percent. There are people in the leadership of transit who are compromising people’s rights because they have their own deals with management, and they are making deals for themselves by selling us out.

“I think there needs to be an honest, uncompromising leadership.”

J. Oliver is a car cleaner with seven years of service. He stressed, “I don’t like not having a contract for almost nine months now. There is no pay increase, but my rent goes up every year. I think there should be a wage increase that is at least as much as the rise of the cost of living to keep us afloat.

“The main thing I am upset about is the rent, but food and transportation costs are going up as well. By next year, the MTA will raise its subway and train rates again. They are increasing the number of toll bridges around the city, and they are raising the amounts of tolls as well.

“The health care costs that we will have in the MTA contract proposal are going up, and I am not in favor of that.

“I was taking care of my father who passed away in 2009. He was getting Medicare part A and B. Where SSI fell short, his union pension helped. But I still ended up paying out of my pocket for some of his care.

“I think every person should have health care.

“I see sick people and homeless people regularly riding on the trains. What has happened to homes for the homeless? I see more of these people on the trains

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now. It is the right of people to have jobs and health care and homes.

"It is the working class that keeps the nation going. The rich take more than they give. The rich when they are making donations and especially when they are making political donations, they will get back more than they give.

"I think it would be great for the working class to have its own party. This would be a party to fight and have your voice heard. The working class has to stand up for its rights and a fair share of the national wealth to make a decent living."

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