

Mobilize the working class to support New York's school bus drivers!

**The Socialist Equality Party
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The Socialist Equality Party calls on workers throughout New York City to support the nearly 9,000 school bus drivers, matrons/attendants and mechanics who have called a strike to defend their right to decent jobs and safe service for children against the dictates of the city's multibillionaire mayor, Michael Bloomberg.

The bus drivers, part of the Amalgamated Transit Union, are seeking to oppose efforts by the city to cut costs by accepting contracts from the "lowest responsible bidder" when current contracts with private bus companies expire in July. The city will accept bids for 1,100 of its routes, about one sixth of the total.

The new bids do not require companies picked to observe seniority provisions or pay rates that workers now receive. These rights, which date back to 1965 and which were defended by workers in a 16-week strike in 1979, are known as the Employee Protection Provision (EPP).

Bus companies that pay poverty wages to their drivers will be able to outbid the companies now holding contracts. Senior drivers will either lose their jobs or be forced to accept drastically lower wages. Competitive bidding will inevitably jeopardize children's safety, as more experienced workers are forced out and bus companies that cut corners the most win the contracts.

The mayor and Schools Chancellor Dennis Walcott claim that a court ruling has prevented them from keeping the EPP in place. This is a cynical fraud. In July 2011, the city successfully pressed Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo to veto legislation that would have guaranteed workers the EPP in future contracts with the city.

Now they are forcing a strike. That school children and working parents throughout the city will have their lives thrown into crisis is for them just a minor cost of

doing business, as is the inevitable deterioration of safety and service should they succeed in imposing a new system in which the experience of bus workers is sacrificed to cost-cutting.

As always, certain premises are universally accepted by the corporate, political and media establishment, above all that there is "no money" for ensuring that bus drivers and other workers have decent wages and benefits. This in the city that is home to Wall Street, where executives and hedge fund managers routinely "earn" hundreds of millions, even billions of dollars a year!

The attack on bus drivers is part of a bipartisan assault against the working class as a whole, in New York City and throughout the country. Bloomberg's provocations are part of a well-planned and deliberate effort by the ruling class and its political representatives to make working people—and in this case hundreds of thousands of school children and their parents—pay for the economic crisis.

Everywhere the refrain is the same. Workers are told that they must accept drastic wage and benefit cuts if they are to keep their jobs. In the New York area, nearly 30,000 transit workers in the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) have been without a contract for a year. The MTA is demanding cuts to jobs, services and resources for mass transit in order to meet debt payments to the banks.

Teachers are also under assault by the city, which aims to tie their performance to test scores, and, as with the school bus drivers, to eliminate the most senior and experienced teachers and replace them with younger, underpaid teachers. The aim is to cut costs and, ultimately, dismantle public education.

Nationwide, the share of income going to the working class is at its lowest in decades. Schools are being shut

down throughout the country, and hundreds of thousands of teachers have already lost their jobs. The so-called “recovery” touted by the Obama administration is a recovery only for corporate profits and stocks traded on Wall Street.

The trade unions have proven incapable and unwilling to oppose this attack. This is because they are absolutely committed to their political alliance with the Democratic Party and their support for the capitalist system. Instead, concessions contract after concessions contract has been pushed through. When strikes erupt—such as the Chicago teachers strike last year—they are isolated and quickly shut down to prevent them from developing into a political struggle.

Bus drivers must be conscious that the Amalgamated Transit Union has its own interests, which are distinct from those of the workers. To secure its dues base, the union would be perfectly willing to sell out the workers. And the unions reject any effort to mobilize the working class in a united struggle.

If it is to be successful, the bus drivers’ strike must become the starting point for a broader industrial and political offensive of the working class. This requires that the conduct of the strike be taken out of the hands of the union through the formation of independent rank-and-file committees.

Bus drivers cannot fight this struggle alone. The provocative actions and statements of Bloomberg and leading Democratic Party politicians—including blaming bus drivers for endangering students!—make clear that they are not going to back down. And behind Bloomberg stands the corporate and financial elite. An immediate appeal must be made to workers throughout the city, including transit workers and teachers, for joint action to defend jobs, wages and public education.

The struggle of bus drivers and other workers against this assault is above all a political fight. Since the economic crisis first erupted in 2008, the Democrats and Republicans have launched a coordinated effort to force the working class to pay for the crisis. Trillions of dollars were funneled into the banks by Bush and then by Obama, followed by budget-cutting at the local, state and national levels.

Four-and-half years into the crisis, Republicans and Democrats have agreed to massive federal spending cuts that will be worked out in detail during the bipartisan talks on the debit limit next month. Social

Security and Medicare, as well as discretionary spending on education and transportation, will be drastically cut.

These attacks are not limited to the United States. Workers everywhere are being told to live with less and less while the bankers make record profits. Austerity measures in Greece and Spain have slashed social spending and raised the level of unemployment to nearly a quarter of the workforce. Unemployment in Europe is at its highest levels since the Great Depression.

The answer to unending austerity and corporate dictatorship is socialism. Workers can defend their interests only through a direct attack on the wealth and privileges of the bankers and corporate executives who control the economy. The giant corporations that dominate society must be nationalized under democratic control and trillions of dollars must be made available for decent jobs, education, and health care.

Contact the Socialist Equality Party today. Visit www.socialequality.com, write to sep@socialistequality.com or call (313)-409-8083.



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