

Berlin bus driver welcomes rank-and-file committee of New York City school bus workers

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On February 19, New York City school bus drivers and escorts decided to set up a rank-and-file committee after the betrayal of their month-long strike by the Amalgamated Transit Union and other city unions. (See [this column](#).) The committee was organized to fight plans by private school contractors—backed by the city’s billionaire mayor, Michael Bloomberg—to eliminate a third of the 9,000 student transportation jobs and slash the wages of remaining workers by 20 percent or more. Dear colleagues,

We send you our warmest greetings and welcome your decision to establish an independent rank-and-file committee. This is exactly what workers need all over the world. In your struggle you’ve learned the hard way that your campaign to defend wages and conditions confronted a hostile united front of employers, Mayor Bloomberg and the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU). Your principled stand to defend yourselves from the attempt to open up your field of work to free-market conditions through the elimination of the Employment Protection Provision, EPP, is not only in your own interest but also the interests of all New York workers who can be assured that their children are safe on the way to school.

Your decision is courageous and correct!

Bus drivers and other transport workers in Berlin face a similar united front of politicians and the unions and confront the same organizational and political issues. Over a period of more than 15 years we have been subject to wage cuts, the splitting of our colleagues into new hires and older employees, the fragmentation of transport workers into a specially created driver pool (Berlin Transports BT), plus worsening of working conditions. Responsibility rests with the Verdi union,

which has diffused workers anger with toothless protests aimed at convincing the Berlin Senate and the financial elite that they—the unions—are best placed to impose cuts in wages and working conditions.

Some colleagues have established a few new, small union factions, and left-talking radicals have sought to win influence amongst us. But nothing has changed for the better! It is constantly argued that we all have to make sacrifices, because money is scarce. I am sure you are very familiar with these arguments. And just like you we face a hostile media. They repeatedly report on contract disputes and strikes from the standpoint that our demands are unrealistic, we already earn enough and should be prepared to make concessions...

Your strike was blacked out by the German media, no doubt because they fear we could learn from your example. Only the *World Socialist Web Site* reported extensively on the dispute.

It is clear that we must stand resolutely side by side in our struggle—we in Berlin and you in New York City. What unites us is not only the fact that we are part of the same class, but also that we have the same enemies.

Your courageous struggle is an example for us all. In common with workers in Europe and all over the world we must fight to establish rank-and-file committees independently of the trade unions to tackle the political issues and tasks ahead.

We need a broader political perspective that expresses our interests as workers and enables us fight against the existing capitalist system and all its defenders.

The combination of wage dumping, the destruction of social and educational services and the criminalization of strikers and demonstrators are increasingly making life unbearable for workers. Europe is sitting on a

powder keg and while the political and economic elite enrich themselves without restraint, global wars are being fought over resources. Under these conditions the entire spectrum of political parties and the trade unions seek to play off workers against one another in the name of “job security”.

The only way to stop this disastrous development is to close ranks internationally against the ruling elites and conduct a joint political struggle. This requires the socialist perspective advocated by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Parties of the Fourth International!

It is very encouraging to hear that workers in the very heart of global finance capital are no longer prepared to be dictated to by the agents and lackeys of the rich.

For worker’s governments in the US and Europe!

A. N. bus driver in Berlin



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