

Mobilize the working class behind Bay Area transit workers!

The Socialist Equality Party
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This statement is being distributed to striking Bay Area Rapid Transit workers and other workers in Northern California.

The strike by Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) workers is in danger of being quickly ended by the trade unions—the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU)—along the lines demanded by management.

In launching their struggle, the transit workers have taken a courageous stand against the unceasing attacks on wages, benefits and jobs. As corporate executives and hedge fund managers pull in record pay, and as hundreds of billions are spent on wars abroad and to spy on the population, the wealthy declare that working people must give up everything.

The BART workers are opposing management demands that they begin paying into their pensions funds, accept increased health care costs, and settle for raises below the rate of inflation. At the same time they are fighting for improved safety measures affecting both employees and passengers.

The average station agent or train operator makes just over \$60,000 a year. Given the high cost of living in the Bay Area, any drop in compensation would be devastating. For years, transit workers have had their pay frozen, and the union accepted \$100 million in concessions four years ago.

From the beginning of the strike, the major unions involved—the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU)—have been working to isolate the struggle and prepare its defeat. They have rejected any efforts to broaden the struggle and make an appeal to other sections of the working class, and even other transit workers.

After pressure from top Democratic Party officials, including Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom, negotiations have been resumed and are being carried out

behind the backs of the BART workers. In a letter demanding a return to discussions, the state officials denounced the wage demands of the workers.

BART workers must be warned: The unions are preparing to push through a sell-out agreement. The assault on workers must take a different form. A successful struggle requires that it be transformed into an offensive of all workers against the unceasing attacks of the corporate and financial elite on jobs, wages and benefits.

Unite the working class!

No expense is being spared by the BART system and capitalist press to vilify transit workers as selfish and greedy. BART management has cynically sought to argue that the attack on pensions and health care is required in order to make resources available to improve safety. The aim is to drive a wedge between those who rely on the transit system to commute and those fighting for a decent wage.

This is a fraud! The same conditions face every section of the working class. In justifying the demand that workers pay substantially more in health care and pensions, the political establishment points to the fact that many other sections of workers have fewer, if any, benefits. But it is not the BART workers who must give up their rights, but rather the right to a quality pension and health care must be extended to all sections of the working class!

All over the Bay Area sections of workers like nurses, teachers and public employees are facing the same conditions. They are understaffed, underpaid and overworked as part of a broader program of austerity

being carried out by Democrats and Republicans alike.

The California state budget has cut funding to the bone since 2008 under both former Republican Governor Schwarzenegger and current Democratic Governor Jerry Brown. Public employees have seen effective pay cuts of up to 25 percent due to furloughs, while funding for needed safety measures and BART maintenance has been delayed due to the same policies.

For independent organizations of struggle!

Workers can win their rights only through a struggle. But this requires a break with the unions, including the SEIU and ATU. The unions are dead set against a unified struggle because of their political alliance with the Democratic Party.

In Oakland, although the SEIU represents both city and BART workers, the city workers are continuing to work without a contract. The union organized a one-day strike to let off steam on Monday.

Meanwhile, AC Transit is not on strike even though the contract for these workers expired at the same time as for BART workers and both are represented by the ATU. As a result buses in the East Bay continue to operate, and indeed service has even increased to accommodate the increased traffic from the BART strike. Thus, the ATU is effectively organizing strikebreaking operations against the workers it claims to represent.

The ATU actually appealed to Governor Brown last weekend, asking him to enforce a 60-day “cooling off” period so that their membership would have to continue working without a contract.

The unions know that there is mass opposition to a concessions deal among workers. This was revealed in the overwhelming strike authorization votes preceding the strike—98.5 percent for SEIU workers and 99.9 percent for ATU workers. The aim of the unions is to wear down this opposition, send the workers back to work and get a contract pushed through after workers lose the initiative.

The SEP calls for the formation of new organizations of struggle to mobilize broader support. An immediate appeal must be made to bus workers, who are being prevented from participating in a joint struggle by the actions of the unions. An open letter should be written to all members of the working class, explaining that the interests of the striking workers and the interests of the

riding public are fundamentally united.

A political fight!

This struggle 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.

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 universal claim is that there is “no money,” but this is a lie. Corporations are sitting on a multitrillion-dollar cash hoard and the stock market is soaring, due in large part to the infusion of \$85 billion a month into the financial institutions from the Federal Reserve. Yet there is supposedly no money to ensure the right to public transportation, jobs, health care and pensions for all workers.

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.

The BART strike can only move forward by appealing to the broadest sections of workers on this basis.

The Socialist Equality Party is organizing a counteroffensive, throughout the Bay Area and across the county. Contact the Socialist Equality Party today.



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