

Unions end Bay Area California transit strike without a contract

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After only four days, the strike of Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) workers in Northern California has been called off by the unions without any contract agreement, resuming service at the nation's fifth-largest public transportation system. The pickets ended and BART service resumed at 3:00 pm Friday afternoon.

Workers are returning to the job under a 30-day extension of the old contract as part of a calculated effort by the union leaders, BART management, and state politicians to enforce another concessions contract. The over 3,000 workers that were primarily members of two unions, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU).

An end to the strike came after the direct intervention of the administration of California's Democratic Party governor, Jerry Brown. California Labor Secretary Marty Morgenstern demanded a return to work Thursday night. A spokesman for Brown said, "The state's mediators—who were instrumental in brokering this deal—will continue to work with BART and its unions to reach an agreement that prevents any further service disruptions."

None of the reasons for workers overwhelmingly voting to strike have been resolved. BART is still demanding concessions on pay, pensions, and health care that will mean a significant decline in real wages.

At the same time that she announced the resumption of service, the BART General Manager Grace Crunican said "the issues that brought us here remain unresolved." SEIU and ATU negotiators agreed with that assessment.

Since before the strike even began the unions worked to isolate their own members and minimize the effect a strike would have on the employers.

The strike began on Monday, when the last contract, which froze workers wages four years ago and included \$100 million in concessions, expired. The week prior, workers voted for strike authorization by 98.5 percent in

the SEIU and 99.9 percent in the ATU locals.

Contracts for City of Oakland workers and AC Transit workers expired at the same time as BART workers. Despite the city workers being represented by the same SEIU local as the BART workers, they only struck on Monday and continued to work without a contract while BART was on strike.

The leadership of the ATU went even further and had their members in AC Transit, the bus system for the entire East Bay, work as effective strike breakers. While the BART strike was ongoing, AC Transit increased their service to mitigate the effects of the strike, and the ATU agreed to this intensification of work without a contract.

During the strike, workers were given no strike pay, pickets were only maintained at a handful of BART stations, and there was no effort to win over broader sections of the public. In short, the union leadership sought to ensure that the strike was as limited and ineffective as possible.

The economic cost of the strike for workers is significant. As part of the agreement ending the strike, workers will not receive pay for the duration that they were on strike. This was amplified by the fact that workers lost vacation pay by being on strike on the Fourth of July.

The SEIU and ATU returned to the bargaining table Tuesday after the direct intervention of Gavin Newsom, California's lieutenant governor and the former mayor of San Francisco.

Newsom and other state officials explicitly denounce the wage demands of the workers. In accepting renewed negotiations, the SEIU and ATU made no mention of wages, signaling their agreement with Newsom.

In agreeing to call off the strike without a new contract, the SEIU and ATU are following the same playbook as the Chicago Teachers union (CTU) and the Communications Workers of America (CWA).

In the Chicago teachers strike of September 2012, the CTU called a halt after nine days and forced their members to work for three weeks before they could even vote on whether to accept the proposed concessions contract. The CTU was terrified that the militancy of their members and the broad support among Chicagoans for the teachers would embarrass Obama's reelection campaign.

In August 2011 the CWA and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) called off a strike of 45,000 Verizon workers. At the time the union bureaucrats claimed that the two week strike had forced Verizon to “bargain seriously.” Instead Verizon workers were on the job four 14 months afterwards without a contract.

Like Verizon, with BART there is not a contract on the table, or even a tentative agreement, and the strike is called off behind the backs of the workers.

The unions, in close political alliance with the Democratic Party, function to contain and smother working class struggle. When strikes do erupt, the aim of the unions is to demoralize workers and wear down opposition.

The cuts facing BART workers, Oakland city workers, and AC Transit workers are part of a broader program of austerity being carried out by both the Democrats and Republicans, throughout the state and across the country.

The same Democratic politicians that the unions have been financing like State Governor Jerry Brown, Mayor of Oakland Jean Quan, and Mayor of San Francisco Ed Lee, have been enforcing budget cuts and wage concessions on millions of workers.

Any serious struggle against concessions immediately becomes a struggle against the Democratic Party and its cronies in the trade unions.



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