

Northern California bus workers reject sellout contract

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Over the weekend, workers at AC Transit, the public bus system in Northern California's East Bay, voted down the tentative agreement pushed by the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) leaders. The last contract expired at the beginning of July, simultaneously with Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) and Oakland city workers. AC Transit has a daily ridership of around 180,000 people.

The tentative agreement spelled out a three-year contract with a net compensation loss. Its centerpiece is an increase in health care costs to \$180 a month by the third year and an understanding that any future increases in health care costs would be borne by the workers.

At the same time workers would receive "raises" amounting to 9.5 percent by the end of the contract. Combined with the increased health care contribution and inflation these "raises" simply tread water. Other elements of the agreement include changing the method of assigning shifts from signups to choice slips.

The AC Transit workers voted down the agreement two-to-one insisting that they not repeat the last concessions contract which included a significant loss of their wages.

The ATU announced the tentative agreement on August 6 in order to curb their members' desire for a joint strike of AC Transit and BART workers, both represented by different locals of the ATU. Before the last contract expired, AC Transit workers voted 97.4 percent for strike authorization and many attended rallies with BART workers whose contract also expired.

Rather than go on strike with BART workers at the beginning of July the ATU agreed to increase the number of bus runs, effectively pushing one section of their membership to break the other's strike.

The union leaders called off the BART strike four days later with nothing to show for it and negotiations for both BART and AC Transit workers dragged on until the beginning of August. On August 4, the last night of BART's negotiation extension, Democratic Governor Jerry Brown, with active encouragement from the ATU, banned BART workers from striking.

The next day, August 5—now that they had removed the possibility of a joint strike—ATU local 192 announced that AC Transit workers would strike on August 7. On August 6, local 192 announced that there would be no strike because they had the tentative agreement. In short, every step of the way, ATU has been maneuvering to keep their members isolated and working without a contract.

Yvonne Williams, president of local 192, said in response to the no vote, "Our members spoke out, loud and clear." Williams has not presented the next step the union will take, but a former union official told workers not to be surprised if they are simply asked to vote again on the same proposal.

Workers expressed their outrage on social media showing a hostility to both AC Transit and ATU. One Facebook comment about the no vote read "I think it shows the Union and the district that we are standing United and we're not going to accept this contract so now that they know we're not going to take it let's start and move forward."

Another comment, in the lead-up to the vote warned workers about potential union ballot fraud saying "When you cast your votes, please take a picture of the ballot with your badge or ID next to it. This is to ensure that we have proof just in case it goes through like the assessment did."

One woman said in an interview by *Labor Video* "We're being sold out by our union, they're trying to

give the district everything.”

There is widespread outrage among workers over the years of concessions demanded of them and growing dissatisfaction with the unions that have insisted that the cuts are a “fair contract.”



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