

Bay Area, California court imposes 60-day strike ban on bus workers

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At the request of Democratic Governor Jerry Brown, a Superior Court on Wednesday issued a 60-day injunction against a strike of AC Transit workers in Northern California.

AC Transit is the public bus system in the East San Francisco Bay Area, with nearly 175,000 daily riders. The injunction comes immediately after unions called off a four-day strike of Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) workers on Monday night.

The Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), which claims to represent around 1,600 bus workers in AC Transit as well as many of the BART workers, raised no objection to the injunction, saying that Brown was entitled to seek it. The union's attorney told reporters, "There's one more shot for the union and AC Transit to come to an agreement that the union members will ratify."

AC Transit workers have been without a contract since July 1st when their last contract expired at the same time as BART workers and Oakland city employees. Brown began the proceedings to issue the injunction last week. The action followed a strike notice from the ATU after workers opposed the latest contract offer.

During the course of negotiations, union members have voted down two contract offers endorsed by the ATU leadership. At stake are wages, health care and pensions. AC Transit workers haven't received a pay raise since 2009 and took an 8.5 percent pay cut in their last contract.

The threat of a bus strike so soon after the BART strike has caused a furor among politicians and the media. During negotiations Brown has raised the possibility of imposing binding arbitration for transit workers. Other Democratic officials had proposed the banning of strikes. They have been supported by

newspapers like the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which has published numerous editorials opposing transit workers.

In a comment published in the *Chronicle* on Thursday, business commentator Andrew Ross complained bitterly that transit workers have the right to strike in defense of their interests. "It is time for a strong legal remedy—'final binding arbitration along with the strike prohibition,'" he wrote, quoting Stanford law professor William Gould, the former chairman of the National Labor Relations Board under President Bill Clinton.

The fate of AC Transit workers and BART workers are intimately linked. Both provide transportation for commuters across the San Francisco Bay and are crucial for the Northern California economy. Together BART and AC Transit are responsible for about eight percent of the Bay Area's commuters.

Throughout negotiations, the ATU has worked tirelessly to keep its BART and AC Transit workers separate and isolated. Although the contracts for both sections of workers ended at the same time, the ATU only called BART workers out to strike. They simultaneously agreed to increase the number of buses run, effectively ordering AC Transit workers to scab on BART workers.

After calling off the first BART strike with nothing to show for it, the ATU and the Service Employees Industrial Union (SEIU) imposed on themselves another 30 days of negotiations and then supported Brown in imposing a 60-day injunction on BART workers.

While that was going on, the ATU made a tentative agreement with AC Transit and brought a concessions contract to their membership for a vote first in August and then again in September.

When the 60-day injunction against BART workers striking ended on October 11, the ATU continued to prevent a joint strike of transit workers. The ATU finally issued a strike threat for October 17, but kept delaying a BART strike until after Governor Brown had stepped in to prevent an AC Transit strike on October 16.

With the injunction now in effect, the ATU hopes that it has plenty of time to impose a concessions contract first on BART workers and then on AC Transit workers.



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