

New York school bus workers defiant in face of attacks

A WSWWS reporter
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The Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1181 is continuing to collaborate in the restructuring of school bus operations in New York City on the backs of the drivers and matrons responsible for safely transporting 100,000 public school students daily.

Last month one of the largest operators, Reliant, transferred nearly 400 routes to a rival company. The move rids Reliant of higher paid drivers as it prepares to take on 1,200 routes in September. Reliant won those routes by offering low bids in anticipation of ruthless wage cuts, which were made possible by the betrayal by the ATU of last year's month-long strike to preserve the Employee Protection Provision in the school bus contracts.

The union's collaboration with the planned cuts was shown when it held a pick for the transferred routes last month. All but a handful of previous Reliant drivers lost their routes in the new pick. Workers suspect this is payback for voting down the ATU-backed concessions demanded by Reliant. These drivers and matrons had rejected the concession demands brought back by the union three times in succession.

Two younger drivers from the Reliant Bus Company spoke to WSWWS reporters about the conditions they face after the sellout of their strike a year ago. "The owner of this company is a crook," one of the drivers said. "Last Christmas he awarded himself a \$1.5 million bonus, while at the same time there were workers under him who had their pay checks cut. Workers at this company were fired illegally last week," he added, explaining that they had received a "fake check" for their severance pay, which bounced when they attempted to deposit it.

Both workers, who asked to remain anonymous, spoke with disdain for the Amalgamated Transit Union bureaucracy, calling it "corrupt" and "like another

business we're forced to pay dues to."

One of the workers continued, "The company and union have not bargained in good faith, we have been forced to vote on the same contract three times now. When a contract is rejected, it usually means that you are supposed to make a change in it before it comes back up for a vote." He also mentioned that the union had taken up different contracts with various bus companies, forcing the members at each to compete against one another in order to get work. "Whatever happened to solidarity?" he asked. "They [the union] make us feel as though whatever [contract] comes up, we must accept it."

A bus driver with 23 years of experience explained the situation at Reliant Bus Company. "The company has already given us a contract and we rejected it three times. They have already split the company in two to punish us for this. Reliant is the top company and I think they are trying to pit us against All American, the new company they made.

"Reliant owes me \$7,000 but I don't think they have the money. Last Friday, All American gave out checks but told the drivers not to cash them until Monday. The company did not have money in their account for this."

Asked about the situation after last year's strike, he said, "The company and [ATU Local] 1181 are in the same bed. Mayor Bloomberg wanted to get rid of the EPP for the company, and the union was with the company. The new mayor de Blasio signed something that said he would address the EPP. That is on paper. Maybe he did that all just for votes."



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