San Diego transit workers in third day of walkout over pay and benefits

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Hundreds of Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) workers walked off the job in San Diego, California, on Wednesday, following a rejection of the “last, best and final” contract offer from their employer, First Transit.

The MTS workers employed by First Transit have been without a contract since July 2015. “They rejected it, so as of 3 a.m. this morning they are on strike,” Teamsters local 542 representative Phil Farias told San Diego’s KPBS.

On Wednesday morning, two hours into their picket, a motorcyclist struck two MTS workers as he sped through the picket line. No details of charges have been released.

The MTS system uses a network of private companies to contract drivers. First Transit workers drive 18 of the 95 bus routes, as well as the “paratransit” system of door-to-door bus service.

A major concern of transit workers is the fact that the contract proposal does not include a pension, only a 401(k). It also allows only 40 hours a year off work, including vacations and sick time. Workers also face very high health care costs.

According to the salary data collections site carreertrends.com, San Diego Public Transit Bus drivers in San Diego make an average of $28,580 per year ($13.74 per hour), with an average starting pay of $21,640. “Relative to past years’ salaries in San Diego, the average pay for this job has decreased by $604 (–2.11%) from a year ago, and decreased by $16,268 (–36.72%) from five years ago,” the site reports.

The MTS strike follows a four-day walkout by 1,700 San Diego AT&T telecommunications workers. A day before transit workers walked off the job, the AT&T strike was shut down by the Communications Workers of America (CWA) union, further isolating the strike by 39,000 Verizon telecommunications workers on the East Coast.

The strike was supposedly called to demand that the employer hand over call and procedure logs that have been used to justify the reprimanding, suspension, and firing of workers at the telecommunications giant. Only a perfunctory statement that the “grievance was settled” and a demand to return to work was issued to workers.

As with all AT&T West workers, those in San Diego still do not have a contract.

AT&T workers expressed anger that they had been cynically called out of work one day and sent back to work on another day without any information or a contract. “I am frustrated I didn’t get the details until this morning, and I still don’t know anything,” one worker told WSWS reporters.

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