

# Union reaches deal, moves to end Dayton, Ohio transit strike

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The Amalgamated Transit Union reached a deal late Wednesday night in state-mediated talks with Greater Dayton Regional Transit Authority (RTA) officials to end the three-day strike by 463 bus drivers, mechanics and other transit workers in Dayton, Ohio, just north of Cincinnati.

The tentative agreement must be approved by transit workers and the RTA board before the strike, which affected 30,000 riders a day, ends. But ATU Local 1385 President Glen Salyer insisted full bus service would be resumed at 4 a.m. Friday. “We all had the same interest,” Salyer said, “getting the public service back on the street.”

The union has not released any results of deal and it is questionable whether a full agreement was even reached. “Specifics of the tentative agreement were not disclosed because a state mediator asked both sides not to release details before it was finalized,” the *Dayton Daily News* reported.

The behind-the-scenes character of the process makes it clear that the ATU has accepted major concessions, which should be rejected by rank-and-file workers. Workers, who have not had a raise since 2014, walked off the job at 12:01 a.m. Monday to demand increased wages, overtime pay owed to them and to oppose the transit authority’s demand for increased premiums and deductibles on their health care plans. Under RTA’s proposed health insurance plan, the union says, workers with families would pay \$4,472 in insurance premiums and the first \$5,000 in medical expenses before the plan contributes a penny.

Salyer, RTA officials and a mediator from the State Employment Relations Board met for 14 hours Wednesday before the agreement was announced at 11:30 p.m. Also present at the downtown Crowne Plaza hotel was the president of the Dayton Chamber of

Commerce, who has complained that the strike has hurt business.

During the walkout, the union worked to minimize the impact of the strike. ATU officials asked striking workers to stay away from the hotel where negotiations have been being conducted.

Despite the efforts of the ATU to sabotage the strike, transit workers on the picket lines who spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* expressed their determination to beat back management’s concession demands. One veteran worker, expressing the sentiments of many, said, “It is time to fight back.”

Drivers of passing cars shouted support or blew their horns to express solidarity with the striking transit workers. The city, formerly a major manufacturing center for General Motors, has been hit by years of plant closings, layoffs and a relentless lowering of living standards, all aided and abetted by the United Auto Workers and other unions. There is widespread support for a fight back.

Striking workers expressed concern that they would be forced to take many concessions, including the hiring of more part-time workers, because they had no confidence that the ATU would fight. One driver in his late 60s said he had retired, but went back to work because he wasn’t making enough money on his retirement to make ends meet.

Workers said they determined to defeat the proposal for a \$5,000 deductible before insurance kicks in. “It is like having no health care at all,” one worker noted. Others expressed strong opposition to getting a signing bonus in lieu of a pay raise, noting this had often happened in previous contracts.

Many workers complained about multiple pay tiers negotiated by the ATU in past contracts that stipulate different pay rates and different pay progressions

depending on hire date. One worker in Project Mobility said she, at top pay, currently makes \$16 an hour after working at RTA since 2008. Another driver said she would have to wait three or four more years to get to top pay, 10 years altogether. Others noted the irregular hours, and the fact that their workday was often split between shifts.

Pickers also complained about lack of information from the ATU. One worker said he thought it would be two weeks before they were eligible for strike pay, but had heard nothing concrete, and that nothing is being put in writing by the ATU.

Having taken the measure of the ATU, transit officials remained intransigent. RTA CEO Mark Donaghy said high-deductible plans are needed to cut costs and told the *Dayton Daily News* that the union's counter-demands had been an "absolute non-starter" that would drain the agency of \$3 million in additional costs. RTA is using management personnel as strikebreakers to operate Project Mobility buses to transport the disabled.

ATU Local 1385 officials said they would never have called the strike in the first place if RTA management had accepted the union's proposal for binding arbitration.

"Had we went to binding arbitration this contract would have been settled and the public would have never been in the middle," Local 1385 President Salyer wrote in a letter last month to RTA. "I would be willing to have language in all new contract[s] for binding arbitration, so the public can never be put in the middle of a strike."

This is a thoroughly antidemocratic scheme that strips workers of the right to strike and places their fate in the hands of a supposedly neutral arbitrator. It is not surprising that Republican state legislators want to impose the same measure on transit workers.

State Rep. Niraj Antani, a Republican from Miamisburg, told the *Daily News* that he is seeking legislative action to prevent future strikes, including forcing transit workers, like firefighters and cops, into binding arbitration. "Certainly, this is not working," Antani said. "I will look into a legislative solution to make sure this situation never happens again. It's absolutely unacceptable for a strike to happen—or the threat of a strike to happen."

The Republican legislator praised Democratic US

Senator Sherrod Brown's efforts to prevent the strike. "I commend him for not taking sides," Antani told the *Daily News*. "He's a labor guy, if he took the side of labor, people would understand. But he's above reproach."

RTA officials rejected the proposal for binding arbitration, calculating that they could get even deeper concessions by relying on the ATU to strangle the strike and impose management's dictates. RTA CEO Donaghy said the agency would not "delegate our responsibility to the local taxpayers to a third party to determine the future cost of operating this agency."



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