

Dayton transit workers set to vote on sellout contract

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17 January 2017

Transit workers in Dayton, Ohio are set to vote on a sellout contract Tuesday that includes derisory wage increases and a major attack on health benefits. Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1385 announced the tentative deal last Wednesday and sent 460 striking bus drivers and mechanics back to work on Friday, in advance of the vote.

The *Dayton Daily News* published some details of the agreement after filing a Freedom of Information Act request with the Greater Dayton Regional Transit Authority (RTA).

The proposed contract reportedly calls for workers to pay 15 percent of the total cost of their health care plan for 2015 and 2016. In 2017, workers will be assessed a weekly rate depending on the kind of plan they chose. A single worker will pay \$27.53 weekly for medical, prescription and dental coverage and \$88.21 per week for a family plan, or more than \$4,500 per year.

If that isn't bad enough, the contract includes a reopener clause permitting either the RTA or the ATU to renegotiate the health care portion of the agreement over the next five months. If there is no agreement, the union could call a strike, but not until early 2018.

The *Dayton Daily News* did not publish any information on health care deductibles. Workers were particularly outraged over management's reported demand for a \$5,000 per year deductible. Several transit workers contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site* said they had heard that the deal included a \$2,500 deductible on health insurance, but the WSWs was not able to independently confirm this.

According to the *Dayton Daily News*, the contract calls for a lump sum for back overtime pay owed to workers for one year following the ratification of the last agreement in April 2015. Workers had sought back pay for the full time they were working without an

agreement, a period of some 20 months. Going forward, there will be two percent pay raises each year through 2019, with no cost of living adjustments. As a result, the wage increases will be more than eaten up by inflation.

There were no reported improvements in working conditions or on the use of part-time workers. RTA drivers are currently employed under a confusing welter of pay rates depending on date of hire and job designation. In addition, they work irregular hours and often work split shifts.

Workers should reject this miserable agreement and mobilize the widest possible support for the continuation of their struggle. The decision by the ATU to shut down the strike and capitulate to management is another demonstration that the official unions are not working-class organizations, but tools of the employers.

A serious struggle to defend jobs, wages, health care and working conditions requires the building of new organizations, workers' committees democratically controlled by the rank and file, to mobilize support for the fight against the RTA, the big-business Democrats and Republicans and the profit system they defend.

Dayton transit workers contacted over the weekend by the WSWs expressed anger over the ATU's ending of the strike and the union's failure to provide any information to the workers on the terms of the tentative contract.

A source familiar with Local 1385 said it was standard practice for the ATU to withhold full details of the contract, handing workers instead a sheet with "highlights" when they came to the union hall to vote.

"It's a sellout deal," said one worker. "We have been without a contract for more than a year and this is what we get." Others said they felt the strike was essentially

a stunt called by the union to “let off steam.”

A driver with less than one year of seniority told the WSWs that he was working another job in addition to his position with the RTA in order to make ends meet. He said he might end up losing both jobs because of his irregular hours driving a bus.

“It would be OK if I had an assigned run and knew what time I would get off,” he said. He added that he was so angry over the sellout he was considering quitting the RTA.

Neither the ATU nor RTA management has commented on the *Dayton Daily News* report. A labor attorney contacted by the newspaper said the reopener clause on health care indicated that it was a “big deal” in negotiations, implying that the union was desperate to shut down the strike.

He said, “What they did, essentially, is punt on the issue for a little while, get people back to work and deal with it later if they have to.” He added that “if you have some vocal members who are getting hurt by this earlier in the year, they can say, we need to go back to the table and try this again to see if we need to do a little more.”

The walkout by transit workers in Dayton was the first in decades. The city was a former manufacturing center and hub for General Motors. A series of Democratic Party administrations in the city have overseen the decimation of the jobs and livelihoods of workers, as corporations closed their doors and threw workers into the streets.

Since the late 1970s, GM and other industrial employers have virtually abandoned the city. During the decade 2000-2009, the Dayton metropolitan area experienced one of the steepest population declines of any major metro area in the United States, 7.21 percent.

In the wake of the Dayton transit strike, Republicans in the Ohio legislature plan to introduce a bill outlawing strikes by transit employees. Under terms of the measure, outstanding differences would be subject to binding arbitration.

The response to the strike by Montgomery County Commissioner Dan Foley, a Democrat, was to issue a hypocritical statement essentially endorsing the hard line taken by management, calling for the RTA and ATU to be “be realistic and understand the current economic environment in which local tax-funded agencies operate.”

For its part, the ATU had requested binding arbitration. RTA management declined, calculating it could get deeper cuts by using the services of the trade union bureaucracy to strangle opposition from the workers.



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