

School bus drivers discuss aftermath of the 2013 New York City strike

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New York City school bus workers spoke with *World Socialist Web Site* reporters about the devastating consequences resulting from the union's betrayal of 2013 and the loss of the Employees Protection Provision (EPP).

"School bus drivers cannot feed their families, especially with prices in New York," John, a driver for 20 years, told the WSWs as he took out his cell phone to do some quick calculations. "Salaries are about \$2,600 a month, which is \$31,200 a year. The rent in New York is about \$1,000 or \$1,200 a month, which, using the cheaper number, is \$12,000 a year. The cost of food for a person could be \$25 to \$30 dollars a day, which is \$9,125. That is already \$21,125, leaving \$10,075. But they also need money for the kids and wife. And a car because many live far from the bus yard and it is very difficult to go with the subway. You are maybe not even making a living.

"Workers also need the same money in retirement. Social Security is not enough to pay the rent. How will they live? They will be homeless. The pension is a Ponzi scheme. The new hires cannot sustain the old ones because the companies don't want to hire as many workers as are leaving and as are needed.

"So why do we work? Many of these workers are immigrants and for them the answer was that they hoped to maybe save \$2,000 a year and be able to retire to their country with some money. In the 2013 strike they had to use up their savings and now cannot keep up. Workers are afraid of striking now because of their past experience under this union. ATU Local 1181 was on strike in 2013 for four weeks before the union sent us back to work. We were worse off.

"Since the strike, I think maybe 10 or 15 school bus companies went out of business, with the city's low-bid competition for routes driving the bigger

companies, which grabbed up more routes, to take away wages and benefits. Yet, even though we are 12,000 school bus workers, the union now treats every company, even every yard as separate groups of just a few hundred that must act separately."

Drivers who spoke with the WSWs also reported that the companies have added greater "flexibility" in work schedules, resulting in even longer hours with no additional pay. Gary, a driver with 11 years, described the situation. "The strike was not good for all of us, but it was especially bad for the new drivers. For example, they don't get paid for a snow day. If it snows and the schools are closed we get paid, but the new drivers don't get paid. The new drivers don't get paid for holidays. As a result, the company is short of drivers. Nobody wants to work 14-hour days and not get paid overtime."

Although workers have repeatedly voted to give the union authorization to call strikes, the ATU has ignored their demands and kept workers on the job. In late 2015, more than 1,800 workers voted by margins of over 90 percent to strike against Pioneer Transportation and Consolidated Bus Transit.

In October 2016, about 900 workers, employed by two of the largest contractors, Jofaz and Y&M, voted to strike against benefit cuts, including increased healthcare costs and reduced holidays. Before the strike was scheduled to begin, however, Teamsters Local 553 and the companies announced an agreement.

In each case, the unions kept the workers divided and in the dark, promoting the illusion that they could somehow pressure the Democrats to grant concessions. That has meant the suppression of any actions that could be seen as a challenge to "progressive" Democratic Mayor Bil de Blasio, who the unions are backing for reelection. In reality, de Blasio has

defended the interests of Wall Street, just like his predecessor, billionaire Michael Bloomberg.

Workers are furious at the dramatic reduction in their living standards.

Wildone, a driver for 11 years, said, “The union negotiated this because they are with the company. The union and the company are the same. The union is working for the company and not us workers.”

He continued, “We lost health benefits. Before, we paid \$15 in copay for any type of doctor. We now pay \$25 for a general physician and \$45 for a specialist. We now pay \$100 for going to an emergency room when it used to be zero copay.”

Another driver, Marie, with 12 years, made similar comments. “If something goes wrong, the union does nothing,” adding that the union tells workers they should be grateful to have a job. “If we complain to the union, they tell us, ‘Well, you have 40 hours.’

“The union does nothing to help us. Now, we do not bother to complain to the union, because there is no point to do so. Instead, we complain to each other.”



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