

New York City bus drivers support striking Oklahoma teachers

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On Thursday, reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site Transport Workers Newsletter* spoke in New York City to bus drivers of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) at the Fillmore Avenue Depot in Brooklyn. Transit workers declared their support for striking Oklahoma teachers, expressing the solidarity that workers across America, indeed internationally feel for the growing strike wave of teachers. Remarks on their own conditions and distrust of the role of the unions reflected what has been seen in the struggles in West Virginia, Arizona, Kentucky and elsewhere, as well as in Oklahoma.

The courageous actions by Oklahoma teachers—who have, as in West Virginia, found it necessary to organize themselves in the face of opposition and misdirection of the unions, the Democrats as well as the Republicans—were recognized by the transit workers as an important step forward for the working class as a whole.

Tony, a bus operator for ten years, explained, “It is a shame that the teachers get such low pay. I support their strike. The cost of living is constantly going up and everyone needs a place to stay. If you only make \$24,000 a year and rent is around \$1,000 a month then you have a real problem. The unions are too weak. Management has the unions in their pocket. The unions are getting paid off. The teachers have the right to strike for a better living.”

A fifteen-year veteran bus driver, not wanting his name used, offered support for the striking Oklahoma teachers, expressing, “The unions are always for their own pockets. Workers should fight back until they get what they want. The more you fight, the more you should be able to get something. When we went on strike in 2005, we did not get what we deserved because we should not have gone back after a few days

as we did but should have kept fighting. My message to the Oklahoma teachers is, ‘Stay out until you get something. Twelve years ago we didn’t and should have.’”

Another bus operator who requested anonymity explained that transit workers face similar issues as teachers. “In Oklahoma, they have to fight, to continue to struggle. When your contract is going to be up, as ours is soon, we should be preparing [to strike]. I don’t trust the structure of the unions.”

Patrick, operating a bus for 22 years, declared, “I agree with the teachers strike 100 percent. All workers should support each other. The problem is that the unions are working with management. If the union is not going to work with the striking teachers then the teachers should get out of the union.”

A driver with fifteen-plus years stated, “The unions have already been giving away everything. There are 75-year-old people driving buses because they cannot afford to retire. The infrastructure is going. Just look at the doorway and stairway right here where we are standing. There is asbestos.” She pointed to the crumbling cement at the base of the door and the peeling paint.

One bus worker said, “I think the teachers should get paid more money. They shape our future. The kids are shooting up schools because they see no future.”

Another bus driver stated, “I think the teachers in Oklahoma striking is legitimate. Teachers have to put up with a lot. I hear them complain always about pay. Now they want to make them carry guns,” referring to proposals made by right-wing politicians since the nationwide protests against gun violence.

A driver with 22 years’ experience described what he thought teachers and all workers needed to be fighting for: “First, conditions clearly need to be changed

around the worker. Management has to respect the employees. This means that what goes wrong in the workplace is not always the fault of the employee.”

Mr. Crawford, a bus operator for 20 years, also expressed the sense of solidarity that workers feel for the Oklahoma teachers in their struggle. “Wages don’t keep up with inflation. Workers have to fight back. Nobody should have to work too many years to collect a pension. There should be real unity with the teachers in struggle. Wage-earners have got to support each other and are going to have to organize themselves for these struggles in order to protect their rights and interests.”



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