

New York transit union offers massive concessions to block strike

Alan Whyte and Daniel de Vries
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Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100 in New York City signed a tentative agreement last Wednesday with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) to prevent the walkout of 38,000 transit workers. The deal was reached after the TWU kept workers on the job without a contract for more than half a year.

In striking the deal, the TWU is seeking to head off any challenge to the demands of the Democratic Party, which controls the MTA, and its Wall Street paymasters who are determined to make the working class foot the bill for the estimated \$44 billion debt the transit agency has accumulated over decades.

The TWU has not released the exact terms of the deal, continuing an information blackout in place since the contract expired in May. Instead, they have offered only a handful of self-serving highlights designed to conceal the concessions. Nonetheless, what has emerged from the MTA makes clear that the new terms will ramp up exploitation, shift more healthcare costs to workers, and expand the use of low-paid contractors. In exchange, the union will be rewarded with further integration into the management structure and monetary benefit for increasing the productivity of workers.

A press release by the MTA explained, "The agreement includes a suite of provisions that, combined and enacted in partnership with the TWU, will ensure the MTA continues to deliver on improvements in operations while realizing savings." A large share of these "savings," an estimated \$17 million a year, requires an increase in the number of days employees report to work by an average of one-and-a-half days per year throughout the transit system. If the union is able to impose an increase beyond one day, "any additional savings will be jointly shared between the TWU and MTA," the transit agency said in its press release. In

other words, the union apparatus stands to gain financially from increasing the exploitation of transit workers.

While the TWU claimed there no increases to health insurance premiums, workers will be forced to pay an additional \$27 million in annual out-of-pocket costs in the form of higher co-pays for emergency room visits and prescription drugs.

In addition, the deal changes overtime rules, inducing workers to trade shifts rather than authorizing additional overtime payments workers often depend on to cover the increasing cost of living in the country's most expensive city. The deal also contains unspecified provisions to "modernize" employee discipline, allows the deployment of new technologies ostensibly for worker safety, on top of already implemented biometric timekeeping clocks, and establishes a joint task force of the union, the agency and law enforcement.

The union further authorized a "one-time" contracting out of the cleaning of 180 subway stations to cheap labor contractors. Earlier this year, the TWU agreed to allow management to contract out the cleaning of 100 stations and 3,000 train cars, also under the proviso that it was "one-time." It is now clear that contracting out cleaning operations is intended to become standard practice.

The pathetic wage increases in the deal, which over the four years step up from 2.0 percent in 2019 to 2.25 percent in 2020, 2.5 percent in 2021 and 2.75 percent in 2022, fail to keep up with inflation in the metropolitan New York City area, which since 2000 has averaged 2.8 percent. After factoring in the above-mentioned concessions totaling \$178 million over the contract period, workers will be forced to take a significant cut in real wages.

Patrick Foye, the chair of the MTA and Governor

Cuomo's henchman, gloated in a statement that "the tentative agreement is responsive to the financial challenges we face and addresses important issues such as accessibility, overtime and health-care costs."

One of the most far-reaching parts of the deal is the provision that gives the union a direct financial stake in reducing workers' use of sick leave and other absences. With the details of the agreement still under wraps, it is impossible to know exactly how much money this amounts to. Though the TWU has long been bought off by MTA management, the funneling of money to the union bureaucracy for lengthening the work year and forcing workers to show up to work despite sicknesses and family emergencies, will literally make them the paid hirelings of management.

This process is well established in other unions throughout the country. The United Auto Workers (UAW), for example, which is currently attempting to push through a sellout agreement on Fiat-Chrysler workers after sabotaging the strike of nearly 50,000 GM workers this year, has received billions of dollars in legal and illegal bribes from the auto companies through joint company-union training centers. The UAW president was recently forced resign for embezzling millions in union assets.

The TWU is involved in a giant cover-up in order to con its members to vote "yes" on this deal. After the union's executive board rubber-stamped the deal in a 42-4 vote, the union only sent out self-serving "highlights," rather than the full contract, in order to conceal the full scope of the concessions. After keeping workers on the jobs without a contract since May, the TWU is rushing to mail out ballots to ram through an approval by the membership.

In past contracts, the TWU was forced to release the full agreement before the vote. But even if they send out the deal with the mailed ballots, workers will have little if any time to study and discuss the long document, loaded with legal jargon, before they have to return the ballots.

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges workers to defeat the TWU's efforts to ram this sellout agreement down their throats and to reject the deal with the contempt it deserves. But that is only the beginning. Transit workers must take the conduct of this struggle out of the hands of the MTA stooges in the TWU by forming rank-and-file workplace committees, led by the most

militant and class-conscious workers and controlled democratically by the workers themselves. These committees should reach out to every other section of workers—teachers, sanitation, public health, logistics, manufacturing, retail, service and others—to launch a powerful counter-offensive against the decades-long assault on workers, which has shoveled billions in profits to Wall Street and the super-rich.

New York transit workers are engaged in a struggle not just against the MTA or the local Democratic and Republican politicians such as Governor Cuomo or New York City Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio. Transit workers are in a struggle against the same capitalist system that demands austerity such as fare hikes against the more than eight million passengers that use the system every day and drives the immense social inequality where three billionaires own as much wealth as half the country's population.

The fight for an industrial counter-offensive must be combined with the political offensive by the working class against both corporate-controlled parties and for the socialist redistribution of wealth to meet the needs of the vast majority of society, not the wealthy few.



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