

Vote “No” on the TWU sellout contract!

Form rank-and-file committees to defend New York City transit workers!

WSWS Transit Worker Newsletter
18 December 2019

After keeping workers on the job for nearly seven months without a new contract, the Transport Workers Union (TWU) has agreed to a deal which will impose all the essential demands of the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), the Cuomo administration and the Wall Street bond holders. If the TWU is able to push this sellout through, transit workers will face an unprecedented expansion of outsourcing and attacks on healthcare and working conditions, which will set the pattern to attack all city workers.

That the TWU would bring back such a contract only proves that it works for the corporate and political establishment not the 38,000 subway and bus workers the TWU falsely claims it “represents.”

If there is going to be a fight to defend their jobs and living standards, then it is up to rank-and-file transit workers to organize it. Workers should immediately hold social media and in-person meetings to mobilize the ranks to defeat the contract. In every bus barn, crew room, maintenance facility and other work locations rank-and-file committees should be elected to organize demonstrations and other forms of collective action, independently of and in opposition to the company stooges in the TWU. These committees should formulate demands that transit workers and their families need, not what the corporate-controlled politicians say is affordable.

The purpose of this agreement is to incorporate the TWU as an integral part of management in order to increase the transit agency’s exploitation of its workers. In return, the union bureaucracy will be financially rewarded. The Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) includes the following concessions:

- **Pay raises don't keep pace with inflation.** The paltry 2.3 percent average annual pay increase is well below the inflation rate for metropolitan New York City—one of the

most expensive cities in the world. While transit workers fall further behind, the average income of the top one percent in New York City has risen to an astronomical \$2.2 million a year.

- **\$27 million a year in added health expenses for transit workers.** The MTA already does everything it can to deny the injury claims of workers who face an array of health and safety hazards. Now it will require workers to pay \$100 for emergency room visits and added fees for non-generic drugs.

- **\$17 million a year in reduced pay due to increased “availability” and overtime changes.** The deal will drive down overtime payments, which workers rely to pay for the high cost of living. TWU officials will now have a financial incentive to force workers to come to work with injuries and illness. According to the MOA, “For each additional improvement above one (1) day in Overall Employee Availability, the Union and the MTA will share equally in the savings as they shall determine.”

- **Union-management partnerships to increase productivity.** The MOA will establish productivity committees of the TWU and management to “review and evaluate mutually agreed upon productivity gains with the goal of achieving savings.” The savings are to be divided between the MTA and the union under the guise of increasing pay for bus and train maintainers. In reality, the goal is to push through a speed up so that the MTA can reduce the number of maintenance workers.

- **Contracting out of station cleaning.** The MOA authorizes the use of subcontractors to deep clean approximately 160-180 subway stations starting in February 2020. This advances the agency’s moves, already begun, to cut labor costs through the use of contractors to perform core functions of the MTA.

- **Use of transit workers to police riders.** In one of the

most outrageous aspects of the contract, the TWU has agreed to pit transit workers against the millions of commuters who are struggling to pay constantly increasing transit fares, along with skyrocketing housing, education and medical costs. According to the MOA, the union and the transit agency have agreed to “meet and confer to work collaboratively on new initiatives as may be mutually agreed upon to aid the MTA in reducing fare evasion.”

The financial crisis in the transit system is not caused by “fare-beaters,” let alone “overtime thieves.” It is caused by the financial thieves and tax-beaters on Wall Street who control the MTA’s massive \$44 billion debt. The money that is being squeezed out of transit workers and working class commuters is going directly into the investment portfolios of some of America’s richest billionaires. As *Crain’s New York Business* wrote earlier this year, “The MTA is one of the most prolific issuers in the \$3.8 trillion municipal-bond market. Its bonds can be found in most portfolios, especially in New York where taxes are high and there’s plenty of wealthy people looking for tax havens.”

Underlying the contract battle is the despicable lie, echoed by the TWU, that there is no money for transit. New York is home to some 82 billionaires. The stock market has run up to record levels based on massive tax cuts by Trump and the Democrats and a decades-long attack on the living standards of workers. Real wages for US workers have not gone up a penny since the 1980 strike by New York City transit workers.

Around the world millions of workers are saying “Enough is enough!” In Paris and throughout France, tens of thousands of transit workers have joined a public sector general strike to oppose the demands of Emanuel Macron (the “President of the Rich”) to raise the retirement age by two years and gut pension benefits. This year alone, millions have protested in Chile, Lebanon, Iraq, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Sudan and many other locations to fight government austerity and social inequality. US teachers and autoworkers have struck, along with transit workers fighting privatization in Washington, DC.

Workers face a common enemy: the capitalist system, which enriches the few at the expense of the many. The fight to provide the resources needed to raise the living standards of all workers and pour trillions into the building and repair of critical infrastructure, including the public transit system, will require a frontal assault on the personal fortunes of the corporate and financial elite and the transformation of the banks into public enterprises

collectively owned and democratically controlled by working people themselves.

The biggest obstacle to unifying the working class for this fight are the TWU and other unions, which defend the capitalist system and operate as the paid enforcers of big business. The TWU has promoted Governor Cuomo and the Democratic Party as “friends of labor” even though the Democrats are just as ruthless defenders of the super-rich as Trump and the Republicans. To fight for the social rights of all workers—black, white, native born and immigrant—workers will have to build a mass political movement to fight for socialism and a radical redistribution of wealth that the workers produce.

The TWU is not in any genuine sense of the word a “union.” It does not unite workers, it divides them—young against old, NYCTA workers against LIRR and MetroNorth workers, and transit workers against all other sections of workers. The TWU does not fight for an increase in the share of income that goes to workers, it has spent the last four decades reducing that share.

Transit workers must take the struggle out of the hands of the TWU and build new organizations, democratically controlled by the rank and file and committed to a real fight. These rank-and-file committees must reach out to every section of the working class—teachers, logistics, telecom, retail and other workers—in the US and internationally to carry out an industrial and political counter-offensive.

The WSWS *Transit Worker Newsletter* and the Socialist Equality Party will provide every assistance to transit workers to form rank-and-file committees and establish lines of communication with other sections of workers in struggle. We urge you to contact the SEP and to attend an online meeting on Monday, December 23 at 8pm EST to discuss the strategy needed for transit workers to fight back. To join the call, register here.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact