

Online meeting: The Wellington bus drivers dispute and the case for rank-and-file committees

Socialist Equality Group (New Zealand)
11 July 2021

The Socialist Equality Group in New Zealand is holding a public meeting on Saturday July 17 at 4:00 PM (New Zealand time) to discuss the way forward for bus drivers in Wellington, and the need to build rank-and-file committees. We call on workers and students throughout NZ and internationally to take part in this important discussion. Please register here to attend on Zoom.

The forum will be addressed by members of the SEG in New Zealand and the Socialist Equality Party in Australia, as well as David O'Sullivan, a member of the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee in the UK. O'Sullivan was sacked for upholding workers' rights to health and safety, during the pandemic, that has killed more than 60 London bus workers, almost 130,000 people in the UK, and more than 4 million worldwide.

NZ Bus drivers in Wellington took a significant stand last month when they voted to reject a sell-out deal backed by the Tramways Union, which would have reduced overtime and weekend rates of pay for workers, who earn close to the minimum wage of \$20 per hour. The union sought to pressure workers into accepting the offer, by telling them any industrial campaign for better wages and conditions would be hopeless.

The rejection is part of an emerging rebellion by workers around the world, against the union bureaucracies, which have for decades functioned as adjuncts of the corporations and the state. In country after country, the unions have joined governments and employers in compelling people to work in unsafe conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, with workers in many cases paying for this with their lives.

The unions have also helped to impose mass redundancies and attacks on wages and conditions, in response to the economic crisis.

In New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern's Labour Party-Greens government is relying on the unions to enforce a wage freeze, while living costs, especially for housing, are sky-rocketing.

The SEG's meeting will discuss the need for new working class organisations: rank-and-file committees that are democratically controlled by workers themselves, completely independent of the trade unions. A committee of NZ Bus workers would seek to break the isolation imposed on the Wellington drivers by the unions, and to unite with other workers throughout New Zealand and internationally, as part of the fight for an International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. This includes public transport workers in Wellington, Auckland and elsewhere at Tranzurban, Uzabus and Transdev, as well as healthcare workers, who recently held a nationwide strike against the government's wage freeze.

The meeting on Saturday will also raise the need for a political break from the Labour Party and its allies, including the Greens, and the building of an international socialist party, as part of the International Committee of the Fourth International. It will discuss the need for a socialist program, including the establishment of a workers' government, public ownership of transport and other vital industries, and for billions of dollars to be diverted to improve social services and provide decent wages and conditions.

In opposition to the unions, which seek to divide workers by whipping up nationalism, the SEG in NZ and the Socialist Equality Party in Australia are calling

for a joint struggle by workers in both countries. NZ Bus is owned by the Australian-based private equity firm Next Capital, which runs several companies in Australia. These include Lynch Group, which has carried out major attacks on the conditions of workers at its flower processing factories.

We urge workers to read and share this meeting notice, as well as the SEG's statement, " The Wellington bus drivers dispute and the case for rank - and - file committees ,” and to register to attend the meeting on July 17.

Meeting time in different zones:

New Zealand: Saturday July 17, 4:00 PM

Australia: Saturday July 17, 2:00 PM

India: Saturday July 17, 9:30 AM

United Kingdom: Saturday July 17, 5:00 AM

New York: Saturday July 17, 12:00 AM

Los Angeles: Friday July 16, 9:00 PM



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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