

Reject the Transport Workers Union sellout contract! Build rank-and-file committees to unite transit and other workers in New York City

New York City Transit Worker Rank-and-File Committee
4 July 2023

The following is the founding statement of the New York City Transit Worker Rank-and-File Committee. More than 38,000 subway, bus and other transit workers are currently voting on the sellout contract Transport Workers Union Local 100 officials have reached with the Metropolitan Transit Authority and state and local Democratic Party officials. For more information on joining the committee, fill out the form at the end of the article.

Brothers and Sisters:

We are calling on all New York City transit workers to reject the proposed contract and join us in preparing a real fight to defend our health care, reverse years of lost wages and secure our health and safety on the job.

We've been through too much to accept another sellout agreement. After three years of the pandemic and with the cost of living out of control, it's time we take a stand.

After accounting for inflation, the pathetic wage increases over three years will leave us even worse off at the end of the contract than today. On the other hand, the deal will save the MTA millions by shifting retiree healthcare onto private Medicare Advantage plans known for fraud, overbilling and denying coverage for necessary procedures. And the deal will further transform the union apparatus into an arm of management by providing them a financial reward for forcing us to take less time off.

The TWU bureaucracy is working for the MTA and the Democratic politicians, not the membership. Governor Hochul demanded hundreds of millions in cost savings at the MTA in the latest state budget, while Mayor Eric Adams is forcing through the shift to Medicare Advantage for retired city workers, just like at the MTA. While the contract meets the demands of the bought-and-paid-for political hacks, it makes our lives worse.

The need to transfer power and decision making from the TWU apparatus to rank-and-file workers is urgent. The last

three years of the pandemic have demonstrated that this is a life-and-death matter. The MTA demonstrated it is more concerned about appearances than workers' lives, but it would not have been able to force us to remain on the job during COVID-19 outbreaks without the help of the TWU hierarchy. The MTA denied transit workers masks and other essential protective equipment until after our brothers and sisters started dying. The union not only stood by and allowed the MTA to implement these criminal policies, but it actively defended them.

The union-management indifference to the lives of workers continues to this day. All COVID leave policies have been rolled back. Office workers are denied a remote option. The agency denies sick leave requests for doctor appointments. Workers are essentially placed under house arrest if they dare call in sick. With the proposed contract, union officials have an incentive to ramp up these policies in order to force us into work five more days a year.

Meanwhile, the union collaborates with the MTA on a whole range of other threats to health and safety. Side mirrors are being removed on buses, replaced with unreliable cameras. Workers breathe in toxic air in subway tunnels and platforms. Workers across the system confront the consequences of an intensifying social crisis in the form of homelessness, mental illness, suicides and violence.

Since the agreement was first announced at the end of May, the union bureaucrats have engaged in a campaign of misinformation and cover-up. They refuse to release all the details of the agreement, sharing only the vague Memorandum of Understanding and a bogus "highlights" document. They refuse to provide any side letters and the exact terms that will go into the collective bargaining agreement. As part of their damage control over their capitulation on retiree healthcare benefits, TWU officials argue that transit workers need not worry because some

details differ from those for city workers.

The TWU bureaucracy, like the rest of the unions in New York City, has long functioned as a tool of the Democrats and dutifully imposed the requirements of big business. This has contributed to the massive inequality in the city and virtual collapse of public services. The crisis of poverty, homelessness and mental health that transit workers and passengers face every day is a product of decades of destruction of social programs at the hands of these so-called “friends of labor.”

Decades of concessions by the TWU bureaucrats have led to a substantially undermined position of transit workers, long one of the most powerful sections of the working class in New York City.

In the past strikes in 1966, 1980 and 2005, our collective action inspired millions and paralyzed the financial center of American capitalism. The transit workers are fighting for the whole working class. By breaking from the TWU hacks, we can once again play a central role in all the struggles of the working class.

Our committee will seek to unite all workers against anti-strike laws. We will fight to unify transit workers and riders opposing fare hikes and poor service to join with teachers and other city workers facing skyrocketing inflation and austerity, even while the stock markets hit record levels, and millions of other workers struggling each day to survive.

The TWU has given its full support to Adams, Hochul and Biden, who have endless sums for bank bailouts, corporate tax giveaways and war, yet they insist that workers tighten their belts and sacrifice. In the first six months of 2023, the world’s richest billionaires—many of whom call New York City their home—have seen their personal fortunes rise by \$852 billion.

It is not possible for us to be dragged down this road any longer. We must transfer power from this parasitic layer of union officials—who are loyal only to our enemies—to ourselves, the rank-and-file workers in New York City’s transit system.

Coming in second in a race to the bottom is unacceptable. Workers everywhere are under attack. We can and must reverse this, but it depends on a common struggle together with other sections of workers. The New York Transit Worker Rank-and-File Committee strives to break down the barriers imposed by the unions and unite with UPS workers, teachers, healthcare workers and others in the city and beyond to win what we need to live, not what the bosses say they can afford.

Voting down this sellout contract is just the beginning. We must use this struggle as the beginning of a counteroffensive with the following minimum demands:

- A renegotiated contract conducted with full

transparency. All negotiating sessions must be live-streamed and available for all members to oversee. Workers have a right to know what is in the contract they are asked to sign. No more secret side letters and hidden terms.

- Massive wage increases over and above inflation. In the last contract, our wages went down 7 percent after inflation. We demand wages that will make up for decades of declines and allow all transit workers to live in the city they serve with financial stability.

- Fully funded and free healthcare for current workers and retirees. Transit workers risk their health every day on the job. The shift to Medicare Advantage for retirees and concessions for active workers in previous contracts must be rolled back, and access to quality healthcare must be guaranteed without further cost to employees.

- Workers’ control over health and safety policies on the job. The failure of the MTA and TWU has already cost more than 170 transit workers their lives due to COVID-19. Workers continue to be constantly exposed to dangerous working conditions that threaten further injury and illness. We demand the formation of rank-and-file workplace health and safety committees elected directly by members to oversee policies, including the expansion of sick leave, to protect the health of workers.

- Fully funded public transit. The MTA is in a perpetual budget crisis, which it uses to attack workers as well as transit riders. Decades of underfunding and mismanagement must be rectified, not through fare and toll increases, but by using the immense wealth controlled on Wall Street and in corporate boardrooms to meet the needs of the working population.

We urge all transit workers to join us in this fight.

For more information on joining the committee, fill out the form below.



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