

New York City school bus workers form rank-and-file committee

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The Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1181, which claims to represent the interests of thousands of New York City School bus drivers, attendants, and mechanics, has kept workers from striking for months following a 97 percent strike vote by union members.

The bureaucrats of the local have now announced that bus operators and the union, with the blessings of the Department of Education, have come to a deal that is “good,” according to the limited communication coming from the union. The details of the deal are being kept secret from school bus workers.

New York City Democratic Mayor Eric Adams and the other politicians of the big-business parties have now embarked on a program of massive austerity for the city budget, blaming migrant workers for straining the city’s finances. Ten years after the betrayal of the 2013 strike and after abandoning a master contract and making concession after concession, Local 1181 bureaucrats are only capable of throwing school bus workers into deepening poverty.

The conduct of local 1181 has angered thousands of school bus workers. A public meeting on September 17 called by the Northeast Educators Rank-and-File Committee called upon workers to act independently of the bureaucrats and the Democratic Party and form a rank-and-file committee of their own.

A group of school bus workers met soon afterwards to form this committee that will unite all the school bus workers the union apparatus has divided, fight for what workers really need, and seek to win support from educators, parents, and the city’s powerful working class.

The committee issued this statement, which was distributed at the last union meeting on Tuesday.

Vote no on the contract! Fight for what we need, not

what Mayor Adams and the companies say they can afford!

Join the School Bus Workers Rank-and-File Committee to wage this fight!

We, the school bus workers in New York City, have formed a rank-and-file committee to fight for what is right and necessary in our living standards and working conditions, the needs of children, and public education.

We urge all members of ATU 1181 to vote “no” on any contract proposals whose details are not published in full and have not been read and discussed by the membership. From the limited information released by the union and in the media about the tentative agreements with several companies, we can tell that what is being proposed by the city, the companies and the union does not meet our needs as workers. It is a rotten sellout, and we demand better.

The leadership of Local 1181 has kept us working without a contract. Our living standards and rights on the job have declined steadily since 2013, when the union systematically isolated our strike and surrendered to Bloomberg based on a promise by the five Democratic Party candidates for mayor, including the future mayor, Bill de Blasio.

The union has divided our strength by negotiating company-by-company instead of a master contract citywide. It has allowed the city to abolish the Employee Protection Provision (EPP), which guaranteed us the right to keep our wages and benefits at whatever company we work.

Now, under Eric Adams, schools are under attack with budget cuts of 15 percent, for starters. This is justified by a vicious campaign suggesting that the cost of housing migrants is bankrupting a city where the 10 wealthiest

people control \$290 billion in wealth. These proposed budget cuts are being made in close consultation with Governor Hochul and the Biden administration. When it comes to funding wars or rescuing banks, these politicians can find unlimited resources. For basic services like busing children to school, we are told there is no money.

We are not addressing ourselves to the Fret leadership of local 1181, who has hired Michael Cordiello, the man who shut down the 2013 strike, as a consultant. Cordiello was paid more than \$300,000 from workers' dues last year despite retiring midyear. These bureaucrats are serving their own interests. They are not fighting for ours.

We are speaking to our fellow drivers and attendants/matrons and asking them to conduct a fight independent of the union bureaucrats.

We demand full information on contract negotiations and any agreements. The full contract must be published with at least two weeks' time to study it before any vote.

We believe workers should reject any deal that does not include what we need to live decently. These must include:

- A 40 percent pay raise to make up for past losses as well as inflation.
- Restoration of the Employee Protection Provision.
- A minimum wage for attendants/matrons of \$25 an hour.
- Eliminate the multi-year progression with lower wages and benefits. Equal pay for equal work!
- Full medical benefits for individuals and families on day of hire.
- An annual Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) to fight inflation.
- Overtime after eight hours on the job. No unpaid hours with the bus.
- Full pay for vacations and holidays.
- Hiring substitutes to provide paid sick time for all workers.
- Workers control over health and safety in association with trusted scientific advisors, including COVID pandemic measures.
- Pensions at full wage level fully funded by the company.

Brothers and sisters: the companies and their agents in the union bureaucracy and in the Democratic and Republican parties will bitterly resist these demands. They will lie and tell us to wait for the next contract, even as the cost of housing, food and other necessities continues to increase. In five years, where will we be? Workers must go on the offensive now.

This means a united struggle of all school bus workers in close coordination with the rank-and-file of teachers, paraprofessionals, and other school workers. These brothers and sisters received a pay cut in their last contract. Physical and occupational therapists were forced to vote again on the contract they had rejected by the bureaucrats in the United Federation of Teachers.

We must also reach out to fellow transportation workers, including New York City MTA workers who were recently betrayed, and to UPS workers who were ready to strike but instead were given a sellout contract.

Our struggle is part of a growing offensive of workers around the world. We support the expansion of this offensive, which includes striking actors, many of whom work in New York City. In particular, we must give our full support to our brothers and sisters in the auto industry, who, like us, have voted to strike but most of whom are kept on the job by the United Auto Workers union bureaucracy.

- Oppose the Local 1181 union bureaucracy and the national ATU bureaucracy.
- No support for Adams, Hochul, Biden, Trump or other capitalist politicians.
- Defend public education. No budget cuts. Restore all previous cuts.
- No to the scapegoating of migrants. The wealth hoarded by the billionaires must be used to fund education and other basic social needs.
- Full support for the needs of parents.
- Join the rank-and-file committee for independent action!
- Unite school bus workers with parents, educators, and other school support workers in a struggle for democratic decision-making over the school system!

Attend the online meeting of the NYC School Bus Workers Rank-and-File Committee: "Stop the betrayal of the NYC School Bus Workers Struggle! Local 1181 must release all details of the agreement before a vote!"

October 1, 2023 at 12:30 PM EDT

Register here to attend. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.



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