

Union rams through non-existent “tentative agreement” to end Northern Virginia transit strike

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In a bid to end the two-week-old Fairfax Connector transit strike in Northern Virginia, the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 689 announced Tuesday that it had reached a tentative agreement (TA) with Transdev, the private operator overseeing the transit service.

In reality, no such agreement has yet been completed. According to a source, the more than 638 drivers, mechanics, facility workers and clerks that work at the Connector were not given a full TA before voting due to the fact “they still need to be typed up.”

A vote was hastily called for the next day despite the membership not being even given a full version of what they were voting on. On Wednesday, the ATU published an announcement that the contract had passed.

The ATU’s social media proclaimed it had won “transformative improvements” for its members without providing specific details.

No vote conducted under such conditions can be considered legitimate. The ATU Local 689 has created conditions for the extortion of its own members. The fine print and numerous loopholes that have doubtlessly been introduced into the final contract after the fact will more than make up for whatever figleaf compromises Transdev may have accepted.

Transdev cheered the TA in a statement, declaring it was “pleased to share that ATU Local 689 and Transdev came to a mutually agreeable, tentative agreement on their collective bargaining agreement for employees for the Fairfax Connector Fixed-Route Bus Service,” as a spokesperson told WTOP.

Fairfax Connector workers are some of the most exploited transit employees in the Washington D.C.

region. Striking workers explained to *World Socialist Web Site* reporters that they had been given no protections during the first months of COVID-19 and that their bus system did not even pause its services while others did.

“This company is not prepared to spend resources. They hoard everything,” a former Transdev employee told the WSWS.

Again demonstrating its ruthlessness, on Monday the company cut health insurance for the striking workers. The ATU published the story of one of its striking members, Fallah Moiwah, whose son, Sahr, was diagnosed with cancer.

“Because @TransdevNA cut off Fallah’s health insurance without even 24 hours notice, Sahr is having to put lifesaving chemotherapy on hold,” the ATU posted on Twitter/X. “Fallah and Sahr are just one of the hundreds of working families that @TransdevNA has no problem retaliating against,” it added.

The fact that a tentative agreement was announced only one day after the company cut off health care for striking workers suggests that the deal is entirely in line with management’s demands.

Throughout the strike, which crippled commutes in the busy Northern Virginia-Washington D.C. metropolitan area, the ATU refused to mobilize its membership to assist the struggle while absurdly begging the local Democratic Party officialdom to “stand with workers.”

While Democratic County Supervisor Jeff McKay never so much as acknowledged the issues in the strike, he has iterated several times that costs must be kept down, signaling that transit contractors’ demands would be opposed if they impacted the county’s bottom

line.

Northern Virginia is home to numerous military and intelligence headquarters, as well as powerful corporate interests, such as General Dynamics, Northrop Grumman and Amazon's "HQ2" East Coast corporate base. Despite this or because of it, the region's big business political representatives refuse to offer basic assistance and living standards to its working class population.

A recent report, published by Virginia Commonwealth University titled "Lost Opportunities: The Persistence of Disadvantaged Neighborhoods in Northern Virginia," explains that while between 2009 and 2021 poverty rates fell in over half of the wealthy county's jurisdiction, this growth came at the expense of displaced poorer residents.

While one community's median household income shot up from "\$87,233 to \$132,603 and the poverty rate plummeted from 19% to 5%," less economically well-off groups left the area in droves.

Under these circumstances, it is noteworthy that ATU Local 689 has offered its support to a harsh anti-crime bill which recently passed in the Washington D.C. legislature.

On Tuesday, the same day it announced its phony "agreement" with Fairfax Connector, the ATU Local 689 tweeted support for the Secure DC omnibus, thanking the bill's sponsoring legislator for "passage of increased penalties for assaulting transit workers. ... This measure is a major victory for transit workers and riders!"

As the WSWS wrote last week, "rather than deal with the root social causes of crime," Democratic Party officials "advocate a massive crackdown on the poorest layers of the population, thus criminalizing poverty." The ATU's promotion of law-and-order policies goes hand and hand with its sellout of its membership.

Throughout the strike, the *World Socialist Web Site* and its reporters advocated for workers to form their own, independent worker-based organizations capable of extending their struggle beyond the narrow confines of the ATU.

Striking Fairfax Connector workers must "form links with other workers' struggles, in particular, that of 9,000 WMATA employees whose contract expires in June this year, coinciding with major planned cutbacks in transit service," we wrote.

"In doing this, they must refuse to subordinate themselves to the strategy and demands of the pro-corporate and pro-Democratic Party ATU, which is seeking to contain their struggle before it even gets started." This warning has been confirmed.



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