

Teamsters hail sellout contract for 600 Orange County, California bus operators

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Teamsters Local 952 announced the ratification of a sellout contract for around 600 bus operators who work for the Orange County Transit Authority (OCTA). The deal was only announced only a few days before the last contract expired on April 30, with a vote organized before workers had a chance to review the deal.

According to Local 952 officials, the contract “was overwhelmingly ratified.” In reality, out of a total of around 600 members, only 223 voted in favor, 172 cast no votes, and over 100 voters abstained altogether.

The abstentions clearly reflect a lack of enthusiasm for the contract, as well as difficulty voting given the snap character of the vote, which was announced less than a week before voting began. In 2021, workers twice rejected the last contract.

Much like the last contract, the new deal contains abysmal pay raises. In the first year, raises are only 4 percent (5.5 percent for top rate members), just 2 percent in the second year and 6.5 percent for the third year. This effectively leaves workers poorer due to inflation, leaving them struggling to live in one of the most expensive areas of the country.

On top of that, much like the last contract, pensions were frozen; no changes were made to the progression, which takes five years to hit top rate; and the continuance of split shifts.

The starting rate for new hires is capped at \$21.51, which is only \$1.51 higher than the local \$20 minimum wage. In comparison, the certification rate for new bus operators in 2007 was at \$13.72 at a time when the minimum wage was at \$7.50, a \$6.22 an hour difference compared to the wage agreed to in this year’s contract.

Gregory, a bus operator with 19 years of experience, denounced the union bureaucracy and OCTA for allowing split shifts to go on, which is not only a

physical and mental drain on employees but poses an indefinite safety risk to passengers riding transit with overworked employees.

“Our biggest issues that we have is the structure of the run and the way they set them up,” Gregory stated. “It’s so crazy. Why do they mix day time schedules with night time even if you are a senior driver?”

“The splits are too long, no pay, and you’re there all day! Yes, it’s a split shift. I don’t understand why they have to split most of the runs.

“It used to be better, but now it’s getting worse and worse bit by bit. You go in at 6:00 in the morning and you’ll get out after 6:00 p.m. on a 10-hour run.”

On split shifts, the only language in the new contract adds a measly \$0.50 per hour shift differential after clocking in after 2:00 p.m. and a \$0.25 per hour shift differential for any hours worked after 6:00 p.m.

In comparison, the average shift differential pay for Amazon employees around the country ranges from \$0.50 to \$3.00 per hour depending on location, with some even offering \$5.00 per hour for peak delivery seasons.

Another worker, who wished not to be named, stated, “In the current contract we received no pension raises. The little-to-no pension raises phenomena has become the [Teamster General President Sean] O’Brien administration’s trademark since taking power over two years ago.”

This contract negotiation, much like the last one, is another example of how the trade union bureaucracies work against the interests of the workers that they supposedly represent.

As the trade union bureaucracies become more integrated with the Democratic Party’s drive for world war and attacks on protests of any kind at home, sellout contracts such as these will be the norm for years to

come.

Workers must draw the lessons from other working class betrayals and form rank-and-file committees in order to wage a genuine fight against below-inflation “pay raises,” an end to split shifts, significant increases in pensions and healthcare coverage which have been given away by the leadership. Workers must have direct control of all negotiations and vote tallies in future contract negotiations.



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