

New Jersey Transit commuter rail engineers launch strike

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Are you a NJT worker or a supporter of the strike? Tell us why you are striking, or the support the strike, by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

In a sign of the growing class struggle in the United States, around 450 train engineers at New Jersey Transit (NJT) walked off the job at midnight Friday, shutting down the nation's third-largest transit system.

NJT, which provides both bus and commuter rail service, transports nearly one million people each day in the New York metropolitan area. The strike has disrupted a significant volume of economic activity in the world's wealthiest city and center of global finance.

The last NJT strike occurred in 1983 and lasted about three weeks. The current walkout is part of a growing wave of labor struggles across the Northeast, including strikes at Butler Hospital in Providence, Rhode Island; 3,000 workers at Pratt & Whitney in Connecticut and potential nursing home strikes in Connecticut and Upstate New York.

The engineers, members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, are demanding pay parity with engineers on other commuter rail systems in the region. They have been working without a contract since 2019 and have not received a raise in that time.

NJT engineers earn about \$16 less per hour than their counterparts at Amtrak and \$10 less than those working for Port Authority Trans-Hudson (PATH), which connects New York and New Jersey. Their wages also lag behind those at the Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North, the other major commuter rail systems in the New York metropolitan area.

Workers overwhelmingly rejected a tentative agreement that failed to close the wage gap. According to the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET), the deal would have left engineers earning 20 percent less than their counterparts at comparable railroads.

"I am for the working class"

"Upwards of thirty engineers have left because of the pay being offered," an engineer told the WSWS. "We're not even asking for a five percent increase. They are crying they are broke. We are

trying to work with them. But they will not. They say if they give us 400 engineers [decent pay], it will fiscally bankrupt the company, which is a multi-billion-dollar organization."

"It would be good if we could join together with other workers," he continued. "The Long Island Rail Road is also under BLET and is subject to the same laws that limit their right to strike. The LIRR was up three years ago but not long enough to go on strike before passing all the parameters to strike like us."

Despite the inconvenience to commuters and efforts by the corporate media to turn public opinion against it, the strike has received widespread support from workers throughout the region.

"My group was going to go to the Shakira concert in New Jersey tonight, but now we will not," one worker told the WSWS outside Penn Station in Manhattan. "I am a union doorman in Manhattan, and we support the strike."

"I am for the working class," he continued. "I blame the corporate executives ... Whatever happens in the region all trickles down to New York City, like what happened at the Newark airport," where outages of the aging air traffic control system disrupted flights.

"Airports and trains are not being maintained. Education is being taken from the kids since COVID. They will not be able to fill in for who is working now. They are closing restaurants, 7-11s, Costcos. Shelves are bare, and they can't get workers. They are even going after migrants who have been here for seven years and went through what you need to do to become a citizen."

Cyndi, a garment worker, said: "New Jersey Transit says the railroad workers are asking for too much, but my monthly ticket went up from \$176 three years ago to \$190. Now the problems for air traffic controllers are also coming out in the media. Money is going for all sorts of things, but not us."

Commenting on the political situation, she added: "I am paying for Social Security since 1985, but Trump wants to take it away. Trump deserves to be politically obliterated, and the Democrats walk around with their tail between their legs."

Massive inequality

NJT's 2025 budget relies on nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars in federal funding, which is set to expire next year. The

agency currently faces a \$767 million budget deficit.

Nationwide, many transit systems are confronting similar funding crises. The Chicago Transit Authority, for example, faces a \$730 million shortfall and has threatened cuts of up to 40 percent of its budget.

But the claim that there is “no money” for transit is absurd—especially in New York City, which is home to more billionaires than any other city in the world. Meanwhile, the vast majority of its residents struggle to afford basic necessities like rent.

New York is the poster child for the extreme inequality that defines American society—and it is a key source of the political system’s turn toward dictatorship. It was in the New York real estate underworld that Donald Trump first rose to prominence. Now, his administration is establishing an oligarchic dictatorship, slashing the federal workforce and attacking workers through soaring prices and mass layoffs triggered by tariffs.

The strike underscores the need for a general confrontation between the working class and the capitalist ruling elite. Northern New Jersey has emerged as a significant flashpoint in this developing class struggle—not only due to the rail strike, but also the recent near-disaster caused by air traffic controller outages at Newark International Airport and the arrest of Newark’s mayor during a visit to an ICE facility.

The union bureaucracy is deeply nervous that the strike could spread. It has limited picketing to just two locations across the entire system—Penn Station in Manhattan and a station in Atlantic City—each staffed by only a handful of workers.

This is a deliberate effort to prevent engineers from engaging with fellow workers and commuters and winning broader public support, which they would undoubtedly receive. The pro-corporate union leadership is preparing to shut down the strike at the earliest opportunity before workers can secure their demands.

Meanwhile, the 14 other unions at NJT have already accepted contracts with terms below what the engineers are demanding, in a clear attempt to isolate and undermine the strike.

The BLET is part of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, one of several major unions that have lined up behind Trump’s right-wing “America First” policies, promoting the false claim that trade war protects “American” jobs.

But the NJT strike exposes this lie. Just miles away in lower Manhattan, trillions flow through Wall Street to finance speculative and often criminal financial dealings—wealth extracted through the global exploitation of labor. Meanwhile, the city’s working class, drawn from every continent, faces mounting hardship and seethes with social anger.

Mediation and the Railway Labor Act

Friday’s strike began after federal mediation in Washington earlier this week failed to produce a last-minute agreement. Further mediated talks are scheduled to resume on Sunday morning.

Ironically, the Trump administration eliminated the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, a key agency traditionally tasked with preventing strikes. It is unclear whether its absence affected the outcome of this week’s talks. While Trump’s cuts serve the broader aims of authoritarian rule, the requirement for “mediation” itself is mandated under the anti-democratic Railway Labor Act, which imposes sweeping restrictions on the right of rail workers to strike.

“We were not happy about the government stepping in on the freight trains,” the above-mentioned engineer told the WSWS. “Workers should be free to negotiate their contract.”

The law was infamously invoked in late 2022 to block a national strike by 100,000 Class I freight railroaders, after workers overwhelmingly rejected a sellout contract brokered through mediation with the Biden administration.

That struggle took the form of a rebellion by rank-and-file workers against the union bureaucracy, which deliberately delayed strike action until after the midterm elections—giving Congress time to intervene and ban the strike in a bipartisan move. In the course of that fight, workers established the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee to organize opposition and assert their independent interests.

It is entirely possible that Congress will move once again to outlaw the NJT strike, as it did with the national rail strike in 2022. This underscores the urgent need for workers in New Jersey, New York, and across the country to come to the defense of the engineers, build support for their struggle, and prepare for a broader mobilization of the working class.

Rank-and-file committees must be established to place control of the strike in the hands of workers themselves, break the isolation imposed by the union bureaucracy, and reach out to rail workers, transit workers, and the broader working class throughout the region. Solidarity committees should be formed in workplaces and working-class neighborhoods to build support and coordinate joint action.

The NJT strike can and must be transformed into the spearhead of a broader working-class movement against austerity, inequality, and the developing oligarchic dictatorship.



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