

Organize to override the AFSCME sellout in Philadelphia! Restart and expand the strike under rank-and-file control!

Philadelphia Workers Rank-and-File Strike Committee
9 July 2025

Below is the founding statement of the Philadelphia Workers Rank-and-File Strike Committee, which was formed Wednesday following the snap announcement of a tentative agreement to end an 8-day strike by 9,000 city workers.

To join the committee, text (484) 466-8841, or fill out the form at the bottom of this page. All submissions will be kept confidential.

The so-called “tentative agreement” announced early this morning by the AFSCME apparatus and the Parker administration is a complete sellout. It must be rejected by every worker. We must organize mass meetings to override the decision to end the strike, which was taken in direct violation of the clear will of the rank and file and without any vote.

The strike must be renewed immediately, and expanded to include transit workers, white-collar employees and all other sections of the working class in Philadelphia.

No matter what they claim, this is not over—because we have not yet had our say. Not a single worker was consulted. This is an outrageous violation of our democratic rights, including the basic principle of “no contract, no work.” They ordered us back to work at 4 a.m., while we were asleep, before we had even seen the deal, much less voted on it.

The so-called 9 percent “raise” is not an agreement—it’s an abject surrender. It’s only one percentage point better than the “offer” we refused to even consider when it came from Mayor Cherelle Parker. Not even AFSCME officials attempted to defend this sellout. DC 33 President Greg Boulware told reporters, “There’s a deal that’s been reached, unfortunately. I’m not happy or satisfied with the

outcome of things.”

They take us for idiots, as though Boulware wasn’t the one who agreed to it in the first place! Let’s call this what it is: deliberate sabotage of our strike.

There is no reason to stop now—because we have shown immense power and won broad support. The Fourth of July was a debacle for the city after top musical acts pulled out rather than cross our picket lines. Workers in AFSCME DC 47 are now preparing to vote on a strike to join us.

We are not just fighting for ourselves. The city is imposing massive cuts across the board—\$300 million slashed from the school budget and a “doomsday” financial plan for SEPTA, which the transit board itself admitted would permanently degrade the system. These conditions are mirrored in every major city in America, including in Chicago, where “doomsday” cuts are also being prepared; and in Los Angeles, where the Democratic city council has declared a “fiscal emergency.”

We know our fight is part of a broader struggle against the danger of dictatorship and the return of Donald Trump. There is a division of labor between Trump and his enablers in the Democratic Party. The Democrats are doing nothing to oppose him because they too represent the corporate oligarchy. Both parties are in full agreement on bleeding the working class dry to fund Wall Street and war. As one worker said, “They’ll always find money for bombs, but never for our wages.”

But the more power we showed, the more AFSCME gave away. That’s because the apparatus was never on our side. The union officials deliberately sabotaged us because they are joined at the hip with the same

Democratic administration we're fighting against.

A clear turning point came Monday, when Lee Saunders—the national president of AFSCME and until recently a member of the Democratic National Committee—flew into Philadelphia. He came not to support us, but to give his marching orders: shut this strike down before it grows into a fight against the entire political establishment.

But the widespread backing of the working class across the city—and the impact the strike had on everything from trash collection to July 4 events—was precisely what terrified both the Parker administration and the union bureaucracy. From their standpoint, the strike was becoming “too powerful.”

Everything was done behind our backs. Talks resumed in secret. Boulware refused to share any proposals with the rank and file. Backroom agreements were struck. The strike was undermined from the start by the decision to keep 3,000 white-collar DC 47 workers on the job. Now we are being told to return to work based on a “tentative agreement” without so much as a ratification vote.

This entire process exposes the union bureaucracy for what it is: an instrument of the Democratic Party and the capitalist state. The Parker administration responded to the strike with police, injunctions, and slander—calling workers “vandals” and “violent.” While this happened, AFSCME officials did nothing. They welcomed the injunctions. They refused to expand the strike. They kept workers on starvation strike pay. They did everything they could to grind down opposition and isolate the struggle.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees warned from the beginning: “The strike is in danger as long as control remains in the hands of the AFSCME bureaucracy. Victory is possible—but only if workers take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands.”

We agree. That is why today we are founding the Philadelphia Workers Rank-and-File Strike Committee. Our aim is to organize our coworkers in a fight against both the Democratic city administration and their agents in the union apparatus. This committee will give us real power over our own struggle, break through the isolation and lies, and build a powerful movement uniting us with workers across Philadelphia and throughout the United States.

The union officials will try to tell you that nothing more can be done—that the city won't budge, and that in any case we have to accept the deal because the strike is over. We reject this completely. What is over is the period where these corrupt officials were allowed to lead us into one dead end after another.

We raise the following demands:

- No return without a vote! Full details of the agreement must be released and a democratic vote held. No back-to-work order can be accepted before this.

- Reinstate the demand for an 8 percent annual wage increase. Workers cannot live on 3 percent raises.

- Expand the strike! DC 47, SEPTA workers and teachers must join in a common fight. The massive school closures and transit cuts must be opposed by a unified movement.

- Increase strike pay to \$750 per week. AFSCME is sitting on hundreds of millions in assets. This money belongs to workers, not bureaucrats.

- Build links with workers in other cities. The conditions facing Philadelphia workers are the same everywhere: layoffs, inflation, collapsing services. Build a national network of rank-and-file committees to coordinate the fight.

This strike has shown that workers are ready to fight. It has shown that the ruling class—Democrats and Republicans alike—are terrified of a real working-class movement. And it has shown that a different leadership is needed. That is the purpose of the Philadelphia Workers Rank-and-File Strike Committee and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

The outcome of this strike will not be determined by what is signed behind closed doors, but by what workers do now. The way forward is not retreat—but a new offensive.



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