

As voting begins on sellout contract for Philadelphia city workers, Mayor Parker declares AFSCME bureaucrats “are my people”

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*The Philadelphia Workers Rank-and-File Strike Committee is calling all city workers, union members and supporters to a public online meeting at 7 p.m. Eastern Time on Monday, July 14. **Register for the meeting here.***

Voting begins today, Monday, for 9,000 blue-collar municipal workers on a tentative agreement announced between the union, AFSCME District Council 33, and the city of Philadelphia. Voting also continues over whether to authorize strike action for 3,000 of the city’s white collar workers. The latter are members of AFSCME District Council 47, the city’s second municipal union.

The TA was announced in order to break the powerful eight-day work stoppage, the largest municipal strike in the city in nearly 40 years. The strike was shut down, however, because it threatened to escape the union leaders’ control and damage their relationship with the Democratic Party-controlled city government.

In response, striking city workers organized the Philadelphia Workers Rank-and-File Strike Committee, which denounced the unilateral ending of the strike and AFSCME’s complete surrender to the city. The committee condemned the decision to end the strike without input from the membership, a violation of union members’ rights: “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.”

Under the TA, municipal workers will receive none of the demands they originally struck for. Instead of 8

percent annual raises workers called for, the contract provides only 3 percent annual raises.

Over the three-year deal, the wage offer amounts to just 1 percent more than the city’s original proposal. Blue-collar city workers generally make roughly \$46,000 a year, or about 30 percent below the median level income.

Other worker demands, such as: an end to the requirement that workers live inside the city in order to be employed there; protection of overtime pay on weekends; and healthcare and other benefits, were also not met.

Under the deal, the city will also be exempted this month from paying their usual \$1,500 per worker into the city workers’ health and welfare fund. Instead, this money is cynically being diverted and offered to workers as a “ratification bonus” which in fact leaves them no better off.

Adding insult to injury, over the weekend AFSCME Local 2817, part of DC 47, posted its “demands,” which include 8 percent raises over three years. But the experience with the strike shows that they, like DC 33, will cave in to the city’s offer.

In a social media video last weekend, Greg Boulware, president of District Council 33, attempted to sow demoralization in order to push through the contract. If workers reject the contract, then “in my opinion, and the opinion of experts we have contacted, we go to the table with less negotiating power, and the city has the right to pull their offer and restart the process,” he said. Even accepting this at face value, it is a damning self-indictment of AFSCME’s decision to shut down the

strike.

He added: “We could go out on strike again, we would not need additional strike ratification for it. But I don’t believe it would operate in the same fashion as the initial strike. We got as much as we could possibly get out of the city.”

In fact, a renewed strike could be far more powerful than before, provided that workers break out of the straitjacket of the bureaucracy and organize and lead it themselves.

The real reason that the city refused to budge was because they knew that the bureaucrats were on their side. On Sunday, Parker gloated to the Philadelphia *Inquirer* in her first interview since the strike was called off. Answering the question as to “why was the mayor so confident she could prevail,” Parker declared: “District Council 33 — they are me. I am District Council 33. They are my people.”

On Thursday, the *Inquirer* was compelled to publish a piece revealing how various city unions “found themselves in the difficult position of having to choose between supporting the roughly 9,000 blue-collar municipal workers on strike and maintaining relationships with their employer, Mayor Cherelle L. Parker.” The article demonstrates how union after union forced their members to cross the picket line while giving hollow statements of “solidarity” with the strike.

The other major city unions, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and the Transport Workers Union Local 234, remained quiet during the strike. PFT president Arthur Steinberg told the *Inquirer* that scabbing was “traitorous,” but he has sought to distance himself from his own members’ 94 percent vote in late June to strike in August. Since then, Steinberg joined with School District of Philadelphia (SDP) officials to proclaim city officials and teachers’ supposedly shared values and concern for children.

The rotten character of the DC 33 deal was so blatant that Boulware tried to publicly save face, claiming he was “not happy” with it.

As the Philadelphia Workers Rank-and-File Strike Committee concluded, “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.”

The rank-and-file strike committee has issued a call for workers to oppose this tentative agreement, to vote it down and renew the strike, this time together with DC47 workers, transit workers and other key sections of the working class. But this requires building their own independent organization to take control of the struggle out of the hands of the AFSCME leadership.

The committee advances 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.
- Reinstatement of 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 of dollars 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.



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