

Philadelphia municipal workers condemn union isolation while details emerge of tentative agreement for white collar workers

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Philadelphia's municipal workers are voicing anger at the unions, AFSCME District Councils 33 and 47, charging that union officials continue to isolate rank-and-file struggles and push through deals that fall short of members' needs.

On Wednesday, a *World Socialist Web Site* team spoke to workers as they voted on the DC 33 agreement. They handed out the Philadelphia Workers Rank-and-File Committee's statement, published the day the DC 33 tentative agreement (TA) was announced. The statement declares, "The union officials deliberately sabotaged us because they are joined at the hip with the same Democratic administration we're fighting against."

The committee states the 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." It proposed that workers join and build the committee in "a common fight" against government attacks on their living standards.

Many workers in Philadelphia spoke about the harsh conditions in the city. "The cost of living in this city is not matching the pay [we're receiving]," said a sanitation worker outside the AFSCME District Council 33 headquarters.

Another worker exclaimed that "the supermarkets are outrageous. What I used to buy for \$200 would fill my cabinets and refrigerator." "Now it's lucky if I leave with two or three bags" another worker continued. Both workers agreed that municipal workers need to strike together to "make a bigger impact."

But this is exactly what the AFSCME municipal

union bureaucracy doesn't want.

Demonstrating this view on Wednesday, an AFSCME union representative approached WSWS reporters as they leafleted to workers outside DC 33 headquarters. The official asserted they had no right to stand on the public sidewalk in front of the building. The official revealed he had been sent by "the union president" to tell the reporters off, claiming the WSWS is "confusing workers" about the contract and contradicting what AFSCME says about it.

In fact, workers know from reading the TAs that they are sell outs. The unions' social media pages themselves are full of harsh and critical comments denouncing the union and the new agreements.

"Where's the part we're gonna love? Are there a couple pages missing? This is friggin' awful," said a worker of the DC 47 TA. "If the No's win, are you going to just sign the contract anyways?" asked another.

"When [AFSCME national president] Lee Saunders got involved... he told [DC 33 president Greg] Boulware to wrap things up," said another worker, referring to the AFSCME president's brief visit to the picket line the day before the strike ended. "They clearly didn't want this strike," he noted.

More details on white-collar contract

More details have emerged about DC 47's proposed three-year contract for 3,000 white collar city workers. The new agreement raises base pay by a cumulative

13.5 percent through a combination of sub-inflation annual increases (2.5 percent, 3 percent, 3 percent) and a \$1,250 signing bonus.

The DC 47 agreement has sought to cover its substandard wage offer with pay gimmicks. It will boost salaries at service milestones, with percentage hikes replacing one-time bonuses: 1.5 percent after 5 years, 1.75 percent after 10, and 2 percent after 15 years. Nothing in the details publicly released suggests that these increases will be applied retroactively, and workers will have to reach advanced years of seniority for such increases to truly make any difference in their pay.

Slightly increased differentials for night and weekend shifts are also included, and city contributions to health and welfare funds will rise slightly. The TA doesn't say anything about re-introducing remote work even on a limited basis. Democratic Mayor Cherelle Parker removed remote working options last July, officially ending the final COVID-19 health protocols that remained in place for city employees.

"I am worried about the younger generation, who are still struggling to find a healthy work-life balance in this system," said another white collar worker. "The city will lose a lot of talented millennials and Gen Zers if this doesn't change," they added.

The ending of remote work occurs as the city is undergoing a catastrophic budget crisis in its public transit system, with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority (SEPTA) voting last month to implement its "doomsday" service cuts.

Notably, the protections for weekend overtime pay were not a part of the blue collar municipal workers' tentative agreement announced last week. Neither blue collar workers in District Council 33 or white collar workers have a "favored nations" clause in their tentative agreements, which would allow the union with a weaker offer to obtain the other council's gains.

On Thursday, the Philadelphia *Inquirer* reported that Tyree Ford, a striking municipal worker who was run down by a drunk driver on the picket line, "remains in critical condition at Jefferson Torresdale Hospital." The news publication reported that Ford was hit as he attempted to shield his pregnant fiancée from the threat.

According to Ford's sister, the father of six is "going to have to learn how to walk again. He has a cut in his pupil, so we don't know if he's even going to be able

to see." She said Ford is recovering from "a broken collarbone, a broken femur, a broken pelvis... a bruised lung. It's not punctured, but it's bruised... he has six fractures in his skull." His family has created a GoFundMe page which has received generous support from the community and his fellow workers.

Other workers are fighting to obtain the \$200 strike stipends that the union promised striking workers. "Our checks are all short," said one worker who had been on strike to the WSWS. "People are fighting" for additional days that they were out. "People are riled up about the call to vote 'no,'" they said. "Even after Boulware gave an interview telling them to vote for the tentative agreement."

The Philadelphia Workers Rank-and-File Committee called on workers to reject the contracts being offered and demand the restart of their strike. But it is essential that workers join and build the influence of the committee and begin to take control of their struggle against the attacks on their pay and democratic rights. They must make connections with workers in other regions and nationally.

On Monday, the committee held an online meeting that was addressed by workers from around the city and the country. A speaker at the meeting stressed, "The situation in the United States and around the world has reached the point where massive social struggles are not only on the horizon, they are beginning to break out. The Philadelphia strike is an early indication of that."



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