

Following strike sellout, frustration grows among Philadelphia city workers, after union delays strike pay

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After ending the powerful eight-day strike earlier this month with a widely hated backroom deal that fell far short of workers' demands, AFSCME District Council 33 has now angered members further by failing to pay out promised strike stipends.

Meanwhile, tension is spreading beyond the blue-collar ranks, as white-collar city workers represented by AFSCME District Council 47 prepare to begin their own vote this week on a nearly identical agreement.

DC 47's TA was announced last week to pre-empt a then-ongoing strike ratification vote for the 3,000 white-collar workers. Rather than risk blue-collar and white-collar city workers pressing for strike action together, the two AFSCME councils have done everything in their power to restrain and break workers' determination to unify and expand their struggle against the Democratic city government's poverty demands.

An internal email sent to DC 47 members last week confirmed that 76 percent of the union's members had voted to go on strike.

On Friday, DC 33 union officials released a memo acknowledging that many never received strike pay, stating, "We understand the frustration around strike stipend disbursements, and we want you to know we're working hard to get things right."

DC 33 leaders tried to blame their failure to pay workers their already low \$200 strike payments by explaining that "funds are issued based on sign-in sheets provided by your strike captains. Unfortunately, several sheets were damaged by rain during the early days of the strike, and others have not yet been turned

in."

Earlier this month, union leaders abruptly shut down the strike just as momentum was building, agreeing to a tentative contract that offers only a modest 9 percent raise over three years—only 1 percent improved from the city's original offer—while conceding to residency requirements and allowing millions in health fund cuts.

"I went down there [to the union headquarters] 2 days straight and still no check," stated one worker on the union's Facebook page. Another worker wrote, "You have a strike fund. Everyone should have gotten \$600. And if not that, at least give EVERYONE 200. Y'all splitting hairs and people are struggling." And another worker wrote, "100% guarantee that the union leadership, who make six figure salaries, were paid in full during the strike."

In response to the union's attempt to justify "splitting hairs," other workers jumped into the conversation: "if you don't know how to properly manage funds to support your members, maybe you should stop taking our money for dues!"

"Why do you think people went on strike? Because they're struggling! If the union couldn't come through with \$200 by payday, they should have told members that from the start so they could plan accordingly. The union didn't communicate until people went down to the union hall to pick up checks that don't exist. We're beyond the time for patience imo. And *everyone* who didn't go to work and gave up a paycheck participated in the strike, even if our union doesn't think that solidarity is worth \$200."

Another worker said, "After sweltering heat, rain, two people almost dying, one person arrested, one attacked and me personally getting thrown middle

fingers and swears, WE have been through enough to have earned at a minimum the \$200.”

Other workers told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “[DC 33] didn’t communicate anything to us on the picket line. It seemed to me like the only communication going on was between the President [Greg Boulware] and the mayor [Democrat Cherelle Parker].” The worker added, “I remember thinking, ‘That’s an unusual relationship!’”

The Philadelphia Workers Rank-and-File Strike Committee, formed among city workers during the strike, denounced DC 33’s miserably low \$200 strike stipends in its founding statement, calling for the strike to be expanded and pay lifted to \$750 per week, leveraging the AFSCME union’s millions in assets to support their struggle.

The committee has said “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 failure to distribute strike stipends comes as DC 33 members wrap up a seven-day voting period on the tentative agreement pushed by the union leadership, sparking renewed opposition over the concessions made in the deal.

It occurs as Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) workers are facing a “doomsday” budget that threatens to cut their workforce by thousands. In August, the contract for 14,000 Philadelphia public school teachers will also expire. They have already voted in June for a strike if no contract is offered.

“How can SEPTA say they are going to cut service in half without also cutting half the workers?” said a SEPTA station cleaner and member of Transport Workers Union Local 234 to the WSWS.

“We are on a one-year extension of our contract that ends in November,” said another. “That only means that we will face the same problem of striking in November as the DC 33 and 47 strikers.” The TWU ignored the SEPTA workers’ strike vote last year as they were seeking to strike along with DC 33, which also had its contract extended in 2024.

“All strikes work better if there is solidarity,” said the Philadelphia transit worker. “Instead we have the

unions on one day each saying they are doing this, but not together, and on another day saying now we are doing that. We need to be acting together. I agree with the idea of a general strike,” the worker said, expressing support for the Philadelphia Workers Rank-and-File Strike Committee’s demand to build a movement of city workers and educators to strike as one.



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