

In violation of members' vote, Long Island Rail Road unions call off a strike, appealing for intervention from Trump

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15 September 2025

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Union officials of five Long Island Railroad (LIRR) unions announced Monday that they have called off a potential strike for Thursday. Instead, they are asking fascistic President Donald Trump to intervene in their contract struggle against the New York State Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA).

This declaration came as news broke that members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) voted overwhelmingly in favor of strike action. The almost 600 engineers carry about 250,000 riders each weekday between Long Island and New York City. The members of the other four unions have also voted for strike action.

However, instead of organizing a walkout, the five union heads are asking Trump to appoint a Presidential Emergency Board (PEB), which could postpone a legal strike for 60 days. After that, if another PEB is activated, it would delay any job action until mid-May of next year.

Last month, the National Mediation Board released the parties from mediation, creating a 30-day waiting period ending Thursday at midnight, after which the unions would be free to strike. However, under the Federal Railway Labor Act, any of the disputants can ask for the president to appoint a PEB, which would prevent legal sanction for a strike.

In appealing to Trump, the union chiefs have aligned themselves with the would-be dictator preparing to deploy troops all over the country, including New York City, to crush resistance in the working class.

The general chairman of BLET, Gil Lang, sought to paper over the sabotage of the strike, saying at a news conference Monday, "This action does not mean a strike won't happen, but it does mean it won't happen now." But on Friday, the BLET National President Mark Wallace, when asked if they will ask the White House to intervene, said, "We will not," and condemned such a move as a delay tactic rather than a solution.

The wage improvements that the LIRR unions are fighting for are, if anything, extremely modest given the cost-of-living crisis and prospects for massive further cost increases due to

tariffs. There are 60 craft unions in the LIRR, most of whom settled for a 9.5 percent wage hike over a three-year period. The workers of the five unions holding out are demanding more than that, considering the high cost of living and what other railroaders in the country are making.

The MTA has already stated that it is willing to agree to higher wages but only in exchange for offsetting work-rule concessions. This is similar to the contract which ended the three-day New Jersey Transit engineers' strike in May of this year.

This is not the first time that the rail union bureaucrats have asked the federal government to intervene to block a strike by their own members. In 2022 talks with Class I freight carriers, they requested a PEB from the Biden administration, claiming that the White House would take the workers' side and force the companies to back down from their demands.

Instead, the PEB proposed a sellout contract, touching off a rank-and-file rebellion. A national strike was only narrowly averted by the unions stalling for time long enough to allow Congress to pass a bipartisan law to ban a strike and impose the deal which workers had rejected.

But to make this request to the fascist Trump, who is openly working with rail executives to determine which cities to send troops into next, represents a new stage in the utter hostility of the bureaucrats to the workers they claim to represent. They are essentially auditioning for a role as labor police under the new regime Trump is attempting to construct.

The BLET and its parent union, the Teamsters, are openly supporting Trump. Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien spoke at the Republican National Convention last year. Virtually the entire American labor bureaucracy backs Trump's "America First" tariffs and backed his pick for Labor Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer because of her support for the PRO Act which would make it easier for them to expand their dues base.

To deflect anger over its own betrayals, the BLET has launched a racist campaign blaming Mexican rail crews for threatening railroad jobs in the US.

The urgent issue is the building of a mass movement in the working class combining a fight against the corporate oligarchs

who are slashing jobs and working conditions, with a fight against the Trump dictatorship which is their most ruthless representative. The actions of the rail unions are fresh proof that this can only be done through rank-and-file committees, new independent organizations which fight to overthrow the petty bureaucratic dictators in the unions as a key step in uniting the working class against fascism and exploitation.

The Democratic Party, which has completely accepted the right-wing narrative in the aftermath of the Charlie Kirk shooting, has also openly appealed to Trump to intervene against the railroad workers. Democratic New York Governor Kathy Hochul said, “The Trump administration can prevent this right now by ordering both sides back to mediation. If they refuse, LIRR riders should know exactly who is to blame.” Hochul attacked him for not moving *more* aggressively against the workers: “The White House already intervened, and they screwed us in the process. They never should have given license to stop the negotiations. They never should have shut it down and given authority to strike.”

The MTA, which is part of the state government, had also prepared a plan to use bus operators to act as strike-breakers, a plan that none of the unions objected to.

Hochul’s statement shows how the cowardice of the Democrats in the face of Trump flows from their defense of the interests of the ruling class whom Trump also represents. They are far more terrified by the working class than they are even of an American dictatorship.

On Sunday, the governor also penned a guest essay for the *New York Times* officially endorsing Zohran Mamdani, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), for mayor of New York City. To the shock of the party establishment and Wall Street, Mamdani won the Democratic primary this summer by campaigning against poverty and inequality. Since then, he has done everything he can to reassure corporate America that he is no threat to their interests.

Significantly, Mamdani has said nothing about the potential strike, despite or rather because of the galvanizing impact that the shutting down of the city’s most used commuter rail system would have on the working class in New York City and nationwide. In 2022, members of the DSA in Congress voted to ban a rail strike.

LIRR workers must reject the move towards a Presidential Emergency Board as having no legitimacy. They must insist that their original vote to strike take precedence over this bureaucratic maneuver and organize themselves into a rank-and-file committees to enforce their will against their union’s sabotage.

This is what freight railroaders did during the 2022 national contract fight. The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee played the central role in galvanizing resistance in the face of threats and lies from the bureaucracy and the government. The committee’s founding statement from September 2022 emphasized:

... We are in a fight not just against the railroads but against an entire political system controlled by the corporate oligarchy. But we are more powerful than any Congress. Many times throughout history, workers have gone toe to toe with the courts, Congress and even the White House and defeated attempts to impose injunctions. That can happen again. It depends not only on organizing ourselves independently to ensure maximum unity and solidarity, but also that we hold no illusions in the bought-and-paid-for political stooges of Wall Street.

Our strength lies not in the pretended support of the Democrats but the real and powerful support from the working class. We must appeal for support from the dockworkers, the refinery workers, the tens of millions of workers around the country who are fighting against the same things as us. If we make a stand, workers will see us as the tip of the spear for a broad counteroffensive. This is exactly what Congress is afraid of, and why Biden, the railroads and their union accomplices are trying to keep us on the job: If a crack appears anywhere, then the whole dam is liable to break.

Long Island Rail Road workers must take forward these lessons from three years ago. Today, rank-and-file committees are even more necessary under conditions where there is a growing alignment of the union leaders with the fascist Trump, aided by the Democrats.



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