

Democratic Party, union apparatus conspire to shut down powerful New York rail strike

International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees
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On Monday evening, New York Governor Kathy Hochul announced on social media that the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and the five Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) unions had reached a tentative agreement to end the powerful three-day strike. Service is to resume Tuesday at 12:00 p.m.

Not a single term of the agreement has been publicly released. Asked at Monday night's news conference about the contents of the deal, a union representative told reporters: "Due to the nature of the negotiations, we cannot discuss the specifics."

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) calls on the 3,500 LIRR workers to demand the immediate, full and public disclosure of every term of the agreement that has been negotiated in their name. No worker should be compelled to vote on—or live under—a contract they have not seen, have not read and have not had the time to study and discuss collectively.

The way in which the strike is being ended exposes the contempt which the trade union apparatus and the entire political establishment in New York have for the workers. Workers are being ordered back to work before any ratification vote, on the basis of a contract whose contents remain a closely guarded secret between the MTA management, the five union heads and the political establishment in Albany and City Hall. Everyone has agreed to the deal but the workers themselves.

Whenever the vote is eventually held, it will be held with workers already back at work, the leverage of the strike dissipated and a recommendation to ratify already in place from the same officials who shut down the strike. This is a flagrant violation of the most elementary principles of democratic procedure. The entire framework of the negotiations was conducted as

a conspiracy against the workers. Hochul publicly denounced the LIRR workers as "reckless" and as "the highest-paid workers of any railroad in the nation."

The Hochul-appointed MTA and the officials of the five unions agreed to a concessions framework: 9.5 percent over three years, with the "dispute" narrowed to the fourth-year raise. This is under conditions in which the cost of living in New York has risen more than 18 percent since 2022, median rents exceed \$3,800 a month, and food prices are up nearly 25 percent.

As for the New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America who was elected on a campaign that appealed to popular opposition to inequality, he refused for three days to offer LIRR workers a single word of support. His one public statement on the strike directed riders to the MTA's strikebreaking shuttle buses.

But the most important fact about the past three days is this: The strike has demonstrated the enormous strength of the working class in the capital of global finance capital, New York City. This is what the entire political establishment fears, and it is what drove every party in the room to shut the strike down.

Despite the legal and political apparatus arrayed against them, the 3,500 LIRR workers brought North America's largest commuter rail to a halt. The MTA's scab shuttle buses ran nearly empty. MTA Chief Janno Lieber was forced to acknowledge Monday that ridership on the substitute buses had been "pretty light"—out of 13,000 daily seats provided, only some 2,100 commuters used them. The other 298,000 daily LIRR riders telecommuted, found alternatives or simply stayed home rather than scab on the strike.

The issue is not the weakness of the workers but the treachery of the union apparatus. After seeking to prevent a strike through mediation and appeals to the

Trump administration, the LIRR unions worked to shut it down as quickly as possible once it was begun.

The 40,000 subway and bus workers of TWU Local 100, whose contract had simultaneously expired on May 15, were kept on the job under an expired contract and used as strikebreaking infrastructure through shuttle bus operations. Just as the LIRR unions dutifully enforce the anti-strike Railway Labor Act, the TWU bureaucracy enforces New York's hated Taylor Law, which bans public employees from striking.

In 2008, Local 100 signed an affidavit forswearing the right to strike in exchange for the reinstatement of automatic dues checkoff.

A joint LIRR-TWU walkout—backed by the active sympathy of nurses, teachers, municipal employees and the broader working class across the region—would have shut down the financial capital of American capitalism.

The IWA-RFC calls on LIRR workers to form rank-and-file committees, independent of the trade union apparatus, and take the following steps immediately:

Demand the full text of the agreement. Every term, every clause, every side letter—released publicly, in full, before any vote takes place. No vote should be held until workers across all five unions have had the chance to read the contract, to discuss it collectively at mass meetings under their own control at every yard, station and depot, and to weigh it against their demands.

Prepare to reject any sellout contract. That the entire political establishment—including officials who publicly attacked the workers from the moment they walked out—has signed off on the contract before the workers themselves have read a word of it is proof that this agreement is designed to break the strike, not to meet the workers' demands. If the contract presented to the membership does not meet workers' demands, it must be voted down and the strike must be resumed.

Elaborate the non-negotiable demands of the workers. In opposition to the concessions framework accepted by the apparatus, workers should demand immediate double-digit wage increases to offset years of below-inflation contracts and the full retroactive application of those increases; the restoration of the Cost-of-Living Allowances; the rejection of every “productivity” concession, including any proposal for reduced crew sizes, extended shifts, or harsher scheduling; the full restoration of healthcare coverage

with no premium increases; and no fare hikes on riders.

The LIRR strike has demonstrated, in just three days, the immense power of the working class, exposing how quickly the “normal functioning” of economic life depends on the labor of workers. Ending the strike behind closed doors has not changed any of the conditions that produced it: soaring living costs, decades of concessions, and a political establishment that insists workers must accept “fiscal reality” to pay for war and the enrichment of the oligarchs.

Across the United States and internationally, anger is rising over inflation, layoffs, attacks on public services and the diversion of society's resources to war and repression. Workers are searching for a way to fight. The ruling class and its bureaucratic agents are responding by trying to isolate struggles, impose settlements without rank-and-file control and prevent the emergence of a unified movement that challenges the oligarchy's dictate that everything be sacrificed for profit.

The IWA-RFC urges LIRR and transit workers to take the next step: Organize independently. Contact us immediately to begin building rank-and-file committees that are controlled by workers themselves, insist on full transparency and democratic decision-making, and prepare a broader counteroffensive—uniting workers across rail, transit, schools, hospitals and workplaces throughout New York and beyond—against the austerity and strikebreaking of the Democratic Party, the corporations and the financial oligarchy they serve.



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