

Details emerge of sellout deal as Long Island Rail Road workers return to work

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The Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) began resumption of service in phases Tuesday afternoon, ending a four-day strike which began Saturday. The strike, the first in New York City's main commuter railroad, was shut down following the announcement of a deal between five unions and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA).

The union bureaucrats ordered members back to work without disclosing a single term of the agreement, let alone allowing workers the chance to vote on it. WSWs reporters on the ground Tuesday confirmed that workers had received no information about what had been agreed to in their name. Asked at Monday night's press conference about the contents of the deal, a union representative refused to elaborate, telling reporters: "Due to the nature of the negotiations, we cannot discuss the specifics."

This says more than perhaps was intended. The specifics could not be discussed because the "nature of the negotiations" was a conspiracy between the Democratic Party and union bureaucrats to shut down the strike. A strike which significantly impacted the world's richest city and the center of world finance.

The unions later sent an email to members with some details of the four-year contract, which runs retroactively from 2024 to next August. On wages, the deal is identical to the inadequate recommendations of a Trump-appointed Presidential Emergency Board following mediation earlier this year. Workers will receive retroactive pay increases of 3 percent for the first year, 3 percent for the second, 3.5 percent for the third and 4.5 percent in the final year of the contract. Previously, the MTA said it would agree to 4.5 percent in the last year only in exchange for concessions on work rules.

But even the value of this 4.5 percent increase is diluted by the fact that the last year of the contract carries a six-week extension, meaning it applies over 58 weeks.

While union leaders had repeatedly pledged not to accept work-rule concessions, the agreement eliminates pay for computer-based training for up to 16 hours.

The agreement must be rejected. It solves nothing for workers confronting soaring living costs in the New York metropolitan area. Workers should form rank-and-file committees, independent of the pro-management union bureaucrats, to

organize opposition and continue the struggle. Such committees should hold meetings to discuss workers' own non-negotiable demands and the means to fight for them.

The result of this tentative agreement is that workers will be poorer when the contract expires. Inflation in the Metro New York area is currently 4.6 percent, according to the most recent figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, far higher than the national average of 3.8 percent. This is a sharp increase driven by food and fuel prices, which is especially due to the disastrous consequences of Trump's war against Iran on working people.

New York governor Kathy Hochul's response to the deal was triumphalist. "We stood firm for a deal that would not require any additional fare increases or tax increases, period," she said. "Full stop. Got it done." Significantly, she credited New York State AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento with playing a key role in brokering the deal. This means the highest levels of the union bureaucracy were coordinating directly with the government to shut the strike down.

The MTA had been adamant throughout the strike that workers' demands were "unaffordable," with Hochul denouncing the strike as "reckless." Officials repeatedly claimed that any substantial wage increases could only be offset through fare increases imposed on commuters.

This argument is obscene in a city where Wall Street financiers and billionaires have amassed staggering fortunes. New York City alone is home to 154 billionaires with a combined net worth of roughly \$975 billion. The refusal to grant even minimal concessions to railroad workers amounts to a declaration by the financial oligarchy that it will accept no infringement on its wealth.

The tremendous support for the strike within the working class has terrified the ruling elite. Gothamist declared in a headline that Hochul had avoided a "nightmare political scenario" through the abrupt ending of the walkout.

The strike was proving its power precisely when the unions moved to shut it down. The MTA's attempt to break the strike using shuttle buses proved a failure. MTA chief Janno Lieber was forced to acknowledge that out of 13,000 daily seats provided, barely 2,100 commuters used them. Meanwhile, the contract for more than 40,000 subway and bus workers in

Transport Workers Union Local 100 expired the same day the LIRR strike began, creating conditions for a broadening of the strike.

The sentiment for a broader fight was unmistakable. Bus drivers at the East New York depot told WSWS reporters, “We all should unite collectively. Do what we need to do to get done, because that’s the only way it’s going to get done.” Another was explicit: “I would be in favor of bringing us on strike together with the LIRR strike. Think what we could do.”

Over one million New Yorkers voted for Zohran Mamdani for mayor last November on promises of free buses, taxes on the rich and a challenge to inequality. For three days, he offered not a single word of support to the strikers, directing commuters instead to the MTA’s scab shuttles.

When asked about the deal Monday night, he responded evasively: “I think the most important thing is that there’s acknowledgment of the kind of work that is being done to ensure this commuter rail system is continuing to operate and also the importance that it plays in the lives of so many New Yorkers.”

Mamdani did not even give the insincere, verbal support of the kind he gave to the strike in January by 15,000 nurses. Following a photo-op appearances on the nurses’ picket lines, New York police arrested 13 nurses protesting outside of the headquarters of the Greater New York Hospital Association.

The political establishment was extremely sensitive to the danger that even a token statement of support could risk legitimizing broader resistance. As Gothamist noted before the strike was shut down, “openly supporting the railroad strike now could erode Mamdani’s leverage in future negotiations with the city’s teachers, police officers or other municipal unions.”

The shutdown of the strike casts light on Mamdani’s close collaboration with Hochul, a relationship he called a “model” when he endorsed her reelection in February, even after she signed executive orders authorizing strike breaking measures during the nurses’ strike.

Mamdani has also maintained a “productive” relationship with the Trump administration, personally meeting with him twice. The fascist in the White House earlier intervened twice, at the request of the union bureaucracy, to block a strike by appointing a Presidential Emergency Board.

John Samuelson, the president of the Transport Workers Union which covers subway and bus workers in the city, went out of his way to defend Donald Trump against Kathy Hochul in comments to the press. The two have traded blame publicly for having allowed the strike to take place at all. “There’s absolutely no doubt that the blame [for the LIRR strike] lies with Kathy Hochul... There’s no reality in anybody’s world that this is Trump’s fault.” Samuelson even lamented that Hochul’s opponent in the gubernatorial election, the Trump-endorsed right-winger from Long Island, Bruce Blakeman, had not made the most of the strike to attack Hochul.

The TWU bureaucracy previously endorsed Hochul in 2022, with one local official declaring that she was taking “steps in the right direction for transit workers and transit riders.” Now Samuelson is attempting to cynically divert popular anger and frustration against Hochul into support for the extreme right.

His statement is also significant because it accepts the evaluation of the capitalist political establishment of the strike as a disaster for which someone must be blamed. This expresses the outlook of the union apparatus, which functions as an industrial police force integrated with management and the state. TWU Local 100, which covers subway and bus workers, has even legally sworn ever calling a strike, dutifully accepting New York State’s anti-worker Taylor Law.

LIRR workers should reject this agreement and demand the full, public release of every term before any ratification vote takes place. A vote held while workers are already back on the job is an attempt at rubber-stamping the deal by the same officials who ended the strike without the workers’ consent.

Workers must fight against the framework imposed on them by the corporate politicians and union bureaucrats, who insist that workers alone must pay for the economic crisis while the financial oligarchy continues to enrich itself. For the struggle of LIRR workers to go forward, it requires rank-and-file organization at every yard and job classification, uniting LIRR workers with the 40,000 TWU Local 100 members working under an expired contract, and with nurses, teachers and other sections of the New York working class fighting the same enemy.

The WSWS urges LIRR workers and all transit workers to contact the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to begin building the rank-and-file committees needed to take this struggle forward.



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