

Long Island Rail Road Workers: Vote “No” on the contract! Unite with NYC subway and bus workers to fight for inflation-busting wage increases!

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To workers on the Long Island Rail Road:

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges you to reject the new four-year tentative agreement in the upcoming vote. The deal’s wage terms do not even keep pace with inflation—and the full details are still being kept from you.

We urge you to form rank-and-file committees, independent of the union apparatus, to finish what you began in your three-day strike. That means uniting with the 40,000 subway and bus workers in Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100, whose contract has also expired, to fight for increases that beat inflation and make up for years of frozen wages.

For three days, you shut down the busiest commuter railroad in the country. In the center of world finance, the strike demonstrated the real power of the working class and won enormous support across the city. Attempts to scab on the walkout with shuttle buses largely collapsed: Only a little over 2,000 riders used the substitute service each day, compared with the Long Island Rail Road’s roughly 300,000 daily riders under normal operations.

There was also a powerful impulse to unite with the 40,000 subway and bus workers of TWU Local 100, whose contract expired the same day the strike began. Voting “yes” now would help isolate these workers, who are being kept on the job.

The strike terrified the corporate oligarchy because it threatened to set an example—showing millions in New York and tens of millions across the country, already seething over staggering inequality and an impossible cost of living, what happens when workers begin to act together and use their collective power.

But the union bureaucracy shut the strike down abruptly at the exact point it was beginning to have a broader impact, as the work week started. You had no say in it. Even now, you still don’t know the full terms, beyond a brief email to members.

The MTA, Governor Kathy Hochul, New York City’s “democratic socialist” mayor Zohran Mamdani and the union officials all know what they agreed to. The one group being kept in the dark is the workers who will have to live under it.

When asked point blank by a reporter, BLET union official Kevin J. Sexton refused to provide details, saying: “due to the nature of negotiations, we don’t want to go into specifics.” He

added: “We don’t want to fail ratification. If they get part of this story through the media, it may impact their decision.”

In other words, if workers had full information, they would vote differently. This exposes the “nature of negotiations” as a conspiracy against workers.

Workers will be poorer under the deal

What is now known shows that workers will be poorer by the end of the contract. The four-year contract expires next July, with retroactive wage increases of 3, 3, and 3.5 percent, with a 4.5 percentage increase for the fourth year. The union says that the “only” concession is the elimination of pay for computer based training for up to 16 hours. However, the deal also extends the contract an extra 6 weeks as management had originally demanded, effectively diluting the impact of the last annual increase.

This does not keep pace with the official inflation rate in the New York metro area, which is currently running at 4.6 percent. It’s even higher for workers facing food and fuel prices that increase practically on a weekly basis, driven by the economic impact of the criminal war against Iran. Housing is already unaffordable.

The agreement is broadly in line with the terms proposed by the Trump-appointed Presidential Emergency Board (PEB) earlier this year, albeit slightly worse because of the training concession. The PEB’s terms, handed down by appointees from a fascistic administration who claims there is “no money” for social programs because “we’re fighting wars,” were totally inadequate from the get go.

The lie of “no money”

No doubt the union bureaucracy will try to tell you that, while the contract does not meet your needs, it is the best you can expect “under the circumstances.” But those “circumstances” were created by the bureaucracy’s collusion with the political establishment—including blocking strikes earlier by asking Trump to appoint PEB’s under the anti-strike Railway Labor Act—and its refusal to organize a struggle that threatened the city’s business interests.

Nevertheless, after three days on strike, the MTA appears to have backed down from the most extreme positions which it had held onto for years. This includes its refusal to accept 4.5 percent without onerous changes to work rules, including on overtime, hiring and contracting.

If this is what resulted from a struggle shut down behind workers’ backs, then what could have been accomplished by a struggle that was not sabotaged by the union bureaucrats?

If it is the case that the MTA backed down on its most egregious demands—and here it must be stressed that nothing is certain without access to the full text—it is above all because it wanted to split Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) workers from NYC subway and bus drivers in the TWU.

The political establishment has claimed for years that there was no money for decent wages. Governor Hochul called workers’ demands “reckless” and insisted that pay increases had to be offset by fare increases. But shortly after the strike ended, the Trump administration announced \$8 billion in funding to renovate Penn Station in Midtown Manhattan. Contracts are going to companies controlled by Trump insiders like Peter Cipriano and Steven Roth.

There is plenty of money in the wealthiest city in the world, but it is controlled by Wall Street firms and the city’s 154 billionaires. Fifteen percent of the MTA’s budget goes to servicing its \$49 billion in bond debt. That money goes straight to Wall Street firms like BlackRock. Any real struggle requires a fight against this oligarchy itself.

A fight against the Democrats and Republicans

This also means a fight against the entire pro-corporate establishment. Instead, the bureaucracy works with them. Hochul denounced strikers as “reckless,” but TWU Local 100 had endorsed her for governor in 2022. TWU president John Samuelsen sat on Mamdani’s transition team, and Mamdani abandoned his plan for free buses while meeting with Wall Street executives and even Trump.

Mamdani said almost nothing during the strike because even empty statements of support would have worsened the position of the city in forcing concessions from subway and bus workers, as well as 100,000 municipal workers whose contract expired in November.

Mamdani’s only statements from the city were to direct riders to use the scab buses. He claimed this was for “essential workers.” This was a total fraud. They don’t care about essential workers, a category which includes MTA workers. Over 175 died during the

first phase of the covid pandemic, when “essential” workers were left exposed without PPE.

A new struggle, under control of the rank-and-file

It is a historical fact that not a single major victory in the history of the working class was ever won without braving anti-strike injunctions, legislation and the full force of the state. NYC transit workers have done this before, including strikes in 1966, 1980 and 2005 in defiance of the Taylor Law. But this requires a broad mobilization and structures making possible the maximum unity and initiative.

Workers cannot retain the initiative and wait for “approval” from the apparatus or from the political establishment. A serious struggle requires the construction of rank-and-file committees, run democratically, answerable only to the membership and capable of making decisions that the bureaucracy cannot reverse behind closed doors.

The WSWs urges that these committees:

- Organize a “NO” on the contract. Demand the full text of this agreement—every term, every clause, every side letter—be released publicly, with real time for workers to read it and discuss it collectively.

- Prepare a united struggle with NYC transit workers. Workers should organize discussions at every facility to discuss a common program for TWU and LIRR workers and establish “red lines” to fight for. These should include immediate, substantial raises that offset years of below-inflation contracts; full cost-of-living adjustments so your wages never fall behind again; and the complete rejection of every work rule concession.

- Make direct appeals to other sections of workers in New York, including other public sector workers whose contracts expire this year and immigrant workers under attack by the Trump administration.

Major wage increases must be paid for not by fare increases, but by the cancellation of the MTA’s \$49 billion Wall Street debt. This is only a first step in requisitioning all of the wealth controlled by Wall Street to put at the disposal of public need. This must be combined with the demand for the repeal of the Taylor Law, Railway Labor Act and all other illegitimate restrictions on workers’ inalienable right to strike.

The struggle to defend the rights of the working class cannot be separated from the development of a united movement outside the control of officials who negotiate with the government in secret and independent of politicians who talk about affordability while managing Wall Street’s bottom line.

You move this city. It’s time you decided the terms.



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