

“I would be willing to strike”: New York transit workers prepared to fight for their needs

Our reporters
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Organize rank-and-file committees to prepare an independent fight! For more information, fill out the form below.

Almost a month since their last contract expired, New York City transit workers are determined to fight for their needs against the administration of the Metropolitan Transit Authority. The MTA is demanding huge concessions in a new contract for 40,000 subway and bus workers, including 2 percent annual pay increases, restrictions on overtime and sick leave and a doubling of out-of-pocket costs for healthcare.

The MTA claims there is “no money,” in the richest city in the world, for pay that keeps pace with inflation. Meanwhile, around 15 percent of the MTA’s overall budget is spent servicing debt to Wall Street firms like BlackRock and Vanguard.

The fight is against the city’s financial elite, as well as the Democratic Party, including Governor Kathy Hochul and city mayor Zohran Mamdani. Brought to power because of widespread opposition to inequality, Zohran Mamdani quickly aligned himself with the pro-business governor, held two fawning meetings with Trump, and is now establishing a municipal agency, COGE, patterned after DOGE, which slashed 300,000 federal jobs.

“It’s a lot. You got to have two jobs,” a subway station cleaner said on the cost-of-living crisis. “I mean, this little amount of money that we make is still not enough, you know what I mean? That 2 percent is kind of crazy, right? They should give us, you know, at least 30 percent. At least we get free coffee, because the cost of that is way up. As far as food, we pay double for the same food that used to be 50 cents. This extra money, where does it go? So, they keep it for themselves.”

Asked about the Democrats and the Republicans, she said, “I don’t like them. They’re nonsense. Because they could fix all this. There is homeless in the station. They could fix homelessness. They have housing in the [housing] projects, but they don’t like the projects. So, a lot of them don’t have people in them.

“They need to maintain the housing projects. If the economy is messed up and it’s for a deficit, they could fix that. Going to

Albany and fighting over budgets for things like welfare is not enough. Hochul and Mamdani cut everything. Hochul, she’s a pain. Hochul doesn’t have a soul. She’s like a succubus. Mamdani’s a puppet for Trump.”

There is enormous potential for a fight which would win wide support. Instead, the bureaucracy is loyally imposing the state’s anti-strike Taylor Law, keeping workers in the dark. Meanwhile, they are deliberately isolating transit workers. The strike on the Long Island Rail Road last month, which began the same day as the MTA contract expired, was shut down after three days with a deal for only 4.5 percent. Voting on the deal is currently ongoing.

This is why the WSWs urges workers to organize rank-and-file committees to prepare for struggle, independent of management and pro-corporate bureaucrats, and to establish democratic control over the struggle on the shop floor.

Asked about the union leadership, she responded, “They need to look at the Long Island Rail Road strike. We could learn a lot from that. Separating us is not fair. The union leaders, they could get to go and rally downtown. And what about us? We got to still work when y’all go and rally. And we have to say so, too. We’re talking about all of us. They say, ‘Don’t stop working.’ They’re not going to fight. They’re not because they’re so afraid. Well, but the workers have to pay the bills. Then we have to fight. I would be willing to strike, if we could unite everybody.”

Discussion turned towards Fourth of July holiday. On figures like Trump whose “long train of abuses” eclipsed even those of the British monarchy which had led to the American Revolution, she said: “That’s a funny joke. But it’s true. We have to fight for this country. We got to die for this country, no matter what race. So why are we fighting a lot of those wars that shouldn’t have been fought, like Iran. If you’re going to have an Independence Day, why are we having a war in Iran? Why are we still celebrating July 4th?”

An MTA subway train engineer declared, “I would strike. The changes granted for Tier Six pensions was way off from Tier Four. The heads of the unions are beholden to the politicians. Hochul is not doing anything for us. She denied the

bill for your family to get your full pension benefits if you die before retirement. They want to save \$38 per hour plus benefits for conductors by introducing one-person trains. We need two people on a train. New York City requires unique things for it. We need people to feel secure. If an operator has to leave the train to investigate something, then there is no one left on the train to help the riders.”

A subway train conductor said, “I have been here ten years. When I first started, it wasn’t that bad. I was here in COVID. A lot of people died in COVID. Now, things just got a lot worse. The conditions of work are not good like they should be. As far as living conditions, the cost of living is very, very high and it gets higher and higher and higher. We need better wages to live here in New York City.”

Regarding the LIRR strike, he stated, “The unions didn’t keep it together. It needs to be corrected. It needs to be corrected. We need some improvements. We haven’t heard anything from the union. I think we all do need to be united and work together to get better wages and better things for us in the future. I think everything needs improvement.”

He also spoke out against the war with Iran. “I think that war in Iran is very unnecessary. We didn’t need to be over there. And I agree we did not need Afghanistan, Iraq and Ukraine with Russia. We should focus on what’s going on for all the problems that’s going on here in the USA.”

Asked about Mamdani’s campaign pledges for rent freezes and free bus fare, he replied: “Right. Well, he walked back from that. I didn’t vote for him. A million people did but I figure since he got the win, let’s give him a chance to see what he’s done. So far, I have not seen anything.”

Asked if the rank-and-file workers should organize committees to all unite in opposition to the ruling class, including a general strike, he answered, “I’ve thought about that, that maybe we should all do that. But the thing is, we’ve got to all pull together. A rank-and-file committee sounds like a good idea.”

CSX railroader issues open letter to Long Island Rail Road workers

The *World Socialist Web Site* also received the following letter from a working CSX railroad worker, addressed to Long Island Rail Road workers. Workers on LIRR and the Class I freight carriers share many of the same unions.

To My Brothers and Sisters at the Long Island Rail Road and the MTA:

I’m writing as a fellow rail worker — a conductor, a SMART member, working CSX in the northeast. First:

what you did on May 16th took guts. The first LIRR strike in 32 years. The MTA couldn’t break you — their scab operation was a humiliation, and the strike was working at the very moment it was shut down.

But solidarity means being honest. Your officials ordered you back without showing you a single term of the contract — and when asked why, the answer was plain: they were afraid you’d vote it down if you saw it. That’s not representation. Now they’ll tell you this is the best deal you could have gotten. They always do.

They did the same thing to us on the freight railroads this contract cycle, also weakening our bargaining power by isolating each craft during contract talks. This tactic of negotiating each craft separately, is not an accident — it is a pattern, and its purpose is to weaken your hand before you even sit down at the table. When you hear “this is the best we can get,” what it really means is: this is the best they were willing to fight for.

This moment demands more than waiting for the next contract cycle or the next hot shot union rep. The power that shut down New York’s commuter rail for three days belongs to the workers who walked that picket line — not to the bureaucrats who ended it without your consent.

Take that power back! The time is now to form your own workplace committees — democratic, rank-and-file bodies that answer only to you, that you run, that represent what you actually need. We should do this nationally, and right now.

In solidarity — A CSX Conductor, Northeast Region, SMART-TD Member



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