

Unite the working class behind Bay Area transit workers!

By the Socialist Equality Party
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This statement will be distributed to transit workers in the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system in Northern California, who went on strike beginning today.

For the second time since their contract expired in July, BART workers in Northern California are on strike.

Underlying the action is a deep feeling of opposition among the nearly 2,400 mechanics, train operators, custodians and station agents at BART to the demands from management for concessions on health care, pensions and work rules. Transit workers, like every section of the working class, are being asked to give up everything, even as corporate profits soar, the stock market booms and inequality is greater than ever.

While transit workers are looking for a way to fight, the unions involved—the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU)—are absolutely opposed to a struggle. For the unions, committed to their political alliance with the Democratic Party and their defense of the capitalist system, the strike is seen as a necessary measure to wear down opposition and eventually force through a contract on management's terms.

Indeed, the unions have already reportedly agreed to significant cuts in health care and pensions, and their proposal on wages—which management has rejected—would amount to no increase at all after accounting for inflation.

After the unions called off the initial BART strike in July, with nothing to show for it, they have imposed extended negotiations on their members and supported Governor Jerry Brown in imposing a 60-day injunction against further action.

The unions are determined to prevent a united struggle. Indeed, the announcement of a second BART

strike came only after Brown issued another 60-day injunction against a strike by workers at AC Transit, the main bus service in the East San Francisco Bay Area. With the complicity of the ATU local, AC Transit routes were increased during the last BART strike, with workers effectively directed to act as strike breakers.

Unite the working class!

It is imperative that the working class as a whole defends the BART workers as part of a broader defense of living standards.

No expense is being spared by the transit authorities and capitalist press to vilify workers as selfish and greedy. BART and AC Transit managements have cynically claimed that the attack on pensions and health care is required in order to make resources available to improve safety. The aim is to drive a wedge between those who rely on the transit system to commute and those fighting for a decent wage.

This is a fraud! The same conditions face every section of the working class. In justifying the demand that workers pay substantially more in health care and pensions, the political establishment points to the fact that many other sections of workers have fewer, if any, benefits. But it is not the transit workers who must give up their rights, but rather the right to a quality pension and health care must be extended to all sections of the working class!

The California state budget has cut funding to the bone since 2008 under both former Republican Governor Schwarzenegger and current Democratic Governor Brown. Public employees have seen effective pay cuts of up to 25 percent due to furloughs, while funding for needed safety measures and BART maintenance has been delayed due to the same policies.

For independent organizations of struggle!

Workers can secure their rights only through a struggle. But this requires a break with the unions, including the SEIU and ATU. The unions are dead set against a unified struggle because of their political alliance with the Democratic Party.

The unions know that there is mass opposition to a concessions deal among workers. The strike authorization votes before the last contract expired amply demonstrated this—98.5 percent for SEIU members and 99.9 percent for ATU. The aim of the unions is to wear down this opposition, send the workers back to work and get a contract pushed through after workers lose the initiative.

The SEP calls for the formation of new organizations of struggle to mobilize broader support. An immediate appeal must be made to unite bus and BART workers, who are being prevented from waging a joint struggle by the actions of the unions and Governor Brown. An open letter should be written to all members of the working class, explaining that the interests of the striking workers and the interests of the riding public are fundamentally united.

A political fight!

This struggle is above all a political fight. Since the economic crisis first erupted in 2008, the Democrats and Republicans have launched a coordinated effort to force the working class to pay for the crisis. Trillions of dollars were funneled into the banks by Bush and then by Obama, followed by budget cutting at the local, state and national levels.

From the city level to the federal, the Democratic Party has sought to balance budgets by taking money from workers' pensions and health care while the stock market soars to record heights and corporations are raking in unprecedented profits. The recent bipartisan agreement in Washington to end the government shutdown and raise the debt ceiling is the prelude to major cuts in Social Security and Medicare.

These attacks are not limited to the United States. Workers everywhere are being told to live with less and less while the bankers make record profits. Austerity measures in Greece and Spain have slashed social spending and raised the level of unemployment to nearly a quarter of the workforce. Unemployment in

Europe is at its highest levels since the Great Depression.

The universal claim that there are no resources is a lie. Corporations are sitting on a multitrillion-dollar cash hoard and the stock market is soaring, due in large part to the infusion of \$85 billion a month into the financial institutions from the Federal Reserve. Yet there is supposedly no money to ensure the right to public transportation, jobs, health care and pensions for all workers.

The answer to unending austerity and corporate dictatorship is socialism. Workers can defend their interests only through a direct attack on the wealth and privileges of the bankers and corporate executives who control the economy. The giant corporations that dominate society must be nationalized under democratic control and trillions of dollars made available for decent jobs, education, and health care.

The BART strike can only move forward by appealing to the broadest sections of working class for a united struggle. The Socialist Equality Party is organizing a counteroffensive, throughout the Bay Area and across the country. We urge transit workers seeking to take up a fight to contact us today.

To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>