

Hamilton, Ontario transit workers must Vote “No” on sellout contract offer

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After a seven-day strike by 900 Hamilton transit workers was called off last week when Amalgamated Transit Union Local 107 president Eric Tuck and NDP mayor Andrea Horwath announced a tentative agreement, workers are now witnessing a textbook case of the absolute betrayal of their fight for a decent wage by their own union leaders.

In the upcoming contract vote, workers must record a resounding “No” vote in the face of this miserable sellout deal. The rejection of the contract must be made the starting point for an organized rebellion against the ATU leadership through the building of rank-and-file committees to expand their struggle against the NDP-led city government and its allies in the union bureaucracy to other sections of the working class.

As first reported on Monday by Joey Coleman, editor of *The Public Record*, the tentative contract to be presented to workers later this week contains the same inferior wage offer from the city that sparked the strike in the first place. In fact, the contract is virtually identical to the one overwhelmingly rejected by a 94 percent majority on November 5.

That “final offer” from Horwath—and the one now agreed to by the union leadership—is a demand for a cut in the real wages of workers after the ravages of inflation are factored into the proposal. The city offered a 3.75 percent increase retroactive to January 2023, and then 3 percent increases in each of the next three years, which amounts to a 12.75 percent wage raise spread over a four-year contract. Workers were demanding a 4 percent per year increase over four years with an additional “market adjustment” to account for earlier wage erosion due to inflation.

Horwath, as the *World Socialist Web Site* has reported, was adamant that her administration would not budge on its so-called “fair and reasonable” offer

and would green-light the use of scab bus contractors to move crowds gathering in the city last weekend for the national Grey Cup Canadian football championship.

Workers have insisted that their wage demands are entirely reasonable. After all, just this past summer 1,100 nonunion municipal employees—mostly managerial and professional staff—who already earn between \$120,000 and \$160,000 annually were given a 4 percent annual wage hike with an additional market adjustment award of up to 11 percent. Apparently, what was “fair” for the well-paid city managers and what is “fair” for rank-and-file workers is quite another matter.

The tentative contract also temporarily boosts health benefits from \$1,000 to \$2,000 in 2024 for one year only before returning worker spending accounts to the paltry \$1,000 amount in future years. This small, one-time only increase plus the measly \$750 signing bonus is less than the estimated \$700,000 accrued as a result of savings in wages and system maintenance during the strike.

Workers have been adamant from the very beginning of the contract dispute that the issue of wages was central to their fight. Even the now discredited union president Tuck could not avoid raising the matter at the outset of the strike, when he told the press, “My members have taken real wage losses of 7 percent due to inflation over the last two years and we are being priced out of the very communities we worked to build and serve as the working core. By accepting another deal that fails to keep pace with inflation we are on the road to becoming the working poor, and that simply isn’t acceptable or fair.”

And then, just to take his fake outrage up a notch during a strike-line rally, Tuck blustered, “If this City has money for [management], goddammit they better have money for the frontline workers. We’re not about

to become the working poor. We all have to rise together. If we're not all in partnership, we're getting left behind."

So, what has changed Mr. Tuck?

Now, all of a sudden, a cut in the real wages of his membership isn't so bad. According to the union bureaucrat, "There was considerable compromise on both sides of the table in efforts to reach an agreement," said Tuck to local online news outlet inthehammer.com. "That's the way you get deals done. Nobody really comes out with everything you wanted. At the end of the day, we wanted to get a deal done for passengers."

Shortly after the announcement of the tentative agreement last week—just in time to get buses rolling again for the city's hosting of the Grey Cup festivities—Mayor Horwath offered an effusive thanks to Tuck for his services rendered to management.

"I'm thrilled to announce that the City of Hamilton has reached a tentative agreement with ATU Local 107 that they will be recommending to their members ...," she said. "Thank you to my City Council colleagues, our City bargaining team and ATU Local 107 leadership for their commitment to achieving a fair and speedy resolution to this important process."

Horwath's posture of "fairness" towards transit workers is repugnant. Underscoring the NDP's ingrained hostility to the working class, she threatened workers with the use of scab labour in the event a contract was not reached prior to the Grey Cup game.

The issue of wage erosion due to past years of spiking inflation has become a centerpiece in the upsurge of workers' contract struggles across Canada.

Corporate and government employers have fought to impose continued real wage cuts on their workforces in order to boost profits even as global capitalism spins into deeper crisis. Spiking inflation, they pontificate, is declining and workers' "lavish" wage demands must be suppressed. The funds clawed by the ruling elite from workers through real wage cuts can be diverted to funding Canada's increasingly bloated military budget for waging imperialist wars around the world and handouts for big business and the super-rich to keep Canadian capitalism "globally competitive."

Grocery prices are still increasing by 5.8 percent a year and are projected to remain at or near that level. Automobile prices are 10 percent higher than only two

years ago. The average rent increase this year is 11 percent—and climbs even higher in the larger municipalities with projections showing there is no relief in sight anywhere.

The bus drivers' strike underscores that workers entering into struggle today are coming into direct confrontation with the NDP and its trade union backers. Horwath's brazen support for strike-breakers exposes all of those political forces who continue to claim that the NDP represents the working class and can be pressured to fight on its behalf. The reality is that Canada's social democrats are a key pillar of support for the federal Trudeau government, which is committed to war abroad and savage attacks on the living standards of workers at home.

The whole affair also exposes, yet again, the utter bankruptcy of the trade union bureaucracies, which have been thoroughly integrated into a corporatist partnership with the state and big business over the past four decades.

The urgent task facing Hamilton transit workers is to break out of the political straitjacket imposed upon them by the ATU bureaucracy and build new forms of organization, rank-and-file committees, to mobilize the broadest possible support in the working class for a political struggle against the union bureaucracy, the NDP, and their allies in the Liberal government, which is the only way they can secure their legitimate demands.



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