

# Toronto Needs a Solid Transit Strike

**CUPE, ATU Must Stand Together!  
Picket Lines Mean Don't Cross!**

The nearly 700 electrical workers of CUPE 2 in Toronto transit are geared up to go on strike on April 22. The CUPE leadership is trying to bargain a deal on its own, claiming they can win their demands by demonstrating that the company must take their proposals seriously. This go-it-alone strategy reinforces the craft unionism that divides CUPE electrical workers from ATU operators and maintenance workers, who have a history of defending each other despite the divide and conquer strategy of the bosses. The strength of the labour movement comes from organization and unity. Simply put, the more divided you are the weaker. One way to bridge craft and other divisions is to fight for equal conditions for all TTC workers.

As for the 12,000 workers in ATU 113, their contract expired last month. The ATU leadership demands that TTC management change its course to grant fair contracts or else it will face a strike by both unions — which in fact is urgently necessary. They also say that ATU stands shoulder-to-shoulder with CUPE 2 and supports them in any way possible. Nice — but then, why are they explicitly forbidding their members to honour the CUPE 2 picket lines (ATU Notice of April 18)? What kind of solidarity is this? Crossing each other's picket lines is the surest way to defeat — for *both* unions.

By promising the bosses that the union will jump through all their legal hoops and leave CUPE 2 isolated, the ATU leadership gives the company a green light to continue its assault on *all* transit workers. Clearly this is a

recipe for disaster! Rather the answer should be: *One out, all out! Picket lines means don't cross! Strike together to win!*

There is no doubt that the TTC bosses are preparing to isolate and defeat a strike by CUPE 2. CEO Rick Leary was explicit that they have “contingency plans” to keep service running. This is a clear threat to mobilize non-union foremen and managers to break the strike. Of course, if all TTC workers go out together with solid picket lines, no scabs would be allowed to keep service running.

Leary and company also aim to vilify the unions by whipping up hysteria that gains for transit workers will come at the expense of the rest of the population in the form of increased fares and higher taxes. Enough of this blackmail! There are natural allies within the broader population who can be rallied to support a transit strike. The unions must show them how it serves their interests too. Better conditions for transit workers mean a better transit system. The largely working-class and student TTC ridership is fed up with unreliable bus service, overcrowded subways that break down and streetcars that move at a snail's pace. Other Toronto city workers will be up against similar forces in their own contract battles, and a win in transit would embolden them and strengthen their struggle. The same can be said for the beleaguered health care and education workers of Ontario.

Privatization schemes and profit-driven models currently in place for extending transit are delaying the

**Trotskyist League in Quebec and Canada**  
[trotskyist.toronto@gmail.com](mailto:trotskyist.toronto@gmail.com) | 416-593-4138 | [website: iclfi.org](http://website:iclf.org)

much-needed expansion. This is especially true in heavily working-class areas like Scarborough, as well as the 905 area on the outskirts of the city where many families have moved, priced out of the exorbitantly expensive 416 area. Even in the 416, there are transit deserts in working-class and immigrant neighborhoods. The unions can rally all these allies by fighting for a massive expansion of transit that is fully public, fully unionized and free for riders.

A victorious transit strike in Canada's financial capital is in the interests of all workers. It has the potential to turn the tide, to break the impasse in the Ontario labour movement and chart a course to fight against plummeting living standards and to refurbish the severely eroded public services. This is the way to win allies. Instead, the ATU and CUPE leaderships push a "strike avoidance" public relations campaign, which relies on moral suasion of the bosses and undermines a transit fight by putting workers on the back foot.

There is no doubt that the threat of back-to-work legislation is hanging over the heads of transit workers: the bosses' government will always threaten workers with outrageous fines and even jail. It is the strength of a uni-

fied labour movement mobilized against its class enemies that will defend workers and their leaders from repression for "illegal" strike actions.

Toronto transit workers can expect that the TTC and all layers of government will plead that they are broke and can't meet their demands. All this points in one direction: for CUPE and ATU to win even their minimal demands for wages, job security and benefits, they must be united as they confront the TTC, Toronto City Hall and Queens Park, all of which represent the interests of the capitalist class. Confronted with such an upsurge, the bosses will "find" the money, no worries.

Toronto needs a solid transit strike to turn the tide, but there must be a different strategy than that presented by the current union leaderships. The unions need a leadership that understands that the capitalists will always defend their class interests by paying as little as possible for public services and lowering taxes for themselves. To win, workers must defend *their* class interests: the right to a decent living, affordable housing, quality public services, a safe work environment, shorter work hours and more.

**We encourage transit workers to take up the following points as an immediate program of action:**

- **CUPE, ATU: Stand together!**
- **Picket lines mean don't cross!**
- **Equal conditions for all!**
- **No privatizations and contracting out — unionize all transit workers!**
- **Expand transit services across the GTA!**
- **For massive investment in infrastructure and public services — transportation, social housing, health care and education. Take the money from the banks and corporations!**
- **No reliance on the courts or any of the bosses' parties, Liberals or Conservatives!**
- **For a class-struggle leadership of the unions!**

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