



On The Move

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RAIL AND BUS RODEOS, PLUS CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS EXPOSE SEPTA'S HYPOCRISY

TWU members and their families were recently invited to participate in SEPTA's Rail Rodeo, featuring hot dogs, hamburgers, and other goodies provided by the Authority. Prior to that, SEPTA held a similar event for bus operators, mechanics, and their families. These events are meant to demonstrate SEPTA management's "support" and "appreciation" for the hard work operators, mechanics and other members perform on behalf of SEPTA each and every day. SEPTA's top managers walk around, shaking hands and kissing babies---as if they were politicians. If you didn't know any better, you would think that union workers and managers are part of one big happy family and that workers are treated with respect on and off the job.

Unfortunately, the Union and many members know from first-hand experience that nothing could be further from the truth. The same managers who parade around at the bus and rail rodeos on one day, will fire you the next day, if you stand up for your rights or demand true respect from them on the job. Not too long ago, an Allegheny operator got held off for standing up to a supervisor who started yelling at him. The operator responded by saying: "I'm a man...don't talk to me that way." The operator got charged with insubordination! The charge was in line with the testimony of a SEPTA manager who stated, under oath, that the rule against profanity didn't apply to a manager talking to an employee, it only applied to a member talking to a manager. And this is not the only example of the *double standard* and the *hypocrisy* we have to deal with at SEPTA every day.

The Union leadership is experiencing the same problem in contract negotiations with SEPTA. The SEPTA Board refuses to budge on the Union's demand for pension improvements *earned* by our members' growing contributions to the pension fund. Yet, SEPTA continues to reward managers with greater and greater pension benefits, even though the *managers contribute far less* to the pension fund than we do. SEPTA believes that the welfare of their managers' families is more valuable than the welfare of our members' families in retirement.

There was a time when Local 234 actively supported the Bus and Rail Rodeos sponsored by SEPTA. Back then the relations between labor and management were on the mend, and the leadership of SEPTA recognized the value and role the workforce plays in the Authority's success as a transportation service provider in the Philadelphia region. Unfortunately, that is no longer the case.

Here's why. SEPTA is being run by a Board Chairman who identifies with the 1% crowd---multi-millionaire Pasquale Deon---whose experience is in private profit rather than public service. While Deon is receiving honors as the nation's top transportation boss he is simultaneously overseeing a labor relations policy designed to whittle away at our rights, discipline and discharge employees on a whim, and send our members into retirement on a monthly pension benefit *less than a third* of what a supervisor or manager receives after obtaining the same years of service.

As we have been saying for months now, the gross disparity and inequality in pension benefits has become intolerable and can no longer persist. We have every intention of waging a hard fight for what is a very worthy cause. To win, every Local 234 member must be on board with the program. We have to put aside petty differences, join together on the picket lines and in the streets, and be determined and willing to fight for our rights, our jobs, and the future well-being of our families.

UNION AND SEPTA AGREE TO TURN OFF CAMERAS AT COMLY DEPOT

The battle over the use of surveillance cameras on SEPTA property erupted again recently at Comly Depot when the Authority began installing cameras to monitor TWU members in the transportation room. However, this time Local 234 President Willie Brown and SEPTA's Labor Relations Chief Officer, Stephanie Deiger, reached an agreement to turn the cameras off, unless developments at the depot prove it necessary to revisit the issue.

According to SEPTA, the decision to install the cameras came as a result of a number of written complaints the Authority received *from operators* about bullying at the hands of some of their co-workers. SEPTA decided that the only way to verify or discount the complaints was through the use of surveillance cameras. The Union emphasized that even if SEPTA had some justification for placing the cameras in the transportation room, the issue had to first be *negotiated* with the Union. After going back and forth for a few of days, SEPTA agreed that the cameras would be turned off.

The agreement to turn the cameras off does not prejudice the rights of either the Union or the Authority. In other words, SEPTA's agreement to end surveillance in the transportation room may have to be revisited if the Authority continues to receive complaints from operators about bullying. At the same time, the Union reserved its right to file unfair labor practice charges against SEPTA, if the Authority decides to use the cameras without first negotiating with the Union.

It is important to consider how this latest camera dispute could have been averted. It is well-known that the manner in which union members conduct business at a particular location can influence the attitudes and conduct of new members assigned to the location. Unfortunately, a practice has developed at Comly, and some other depots, where members are *reporting* conflicts between co-workers to management rather than trying to resolve the conflicts in-house, by encouraging co-workers to work out their problems with the assistance of the Union, not SEPTA.

As a result, when some Comly operators felt threatened by bullying, they thought it was ok to take their complaints directly to management from the start. In years past this would never have happened. Union solidarity really meant something back then, and it should still mean something today. In this case, the result was the installation of cameras to spy on innocent Comly operators, next time a member might get fired when a co-worker reports them to management.

This is a critical time for Local 234. With a strike looming we need to build union solidarity more than ever before. So let's not play into SEPTA's hands. If you have a problem with a co-worker, talk to a section officer or with your staff representative. We need to stick together and watch each other's backs. Our solidarity will soon be tested like never before and our jobs and livelihoods will depend on us sticking together, however challenging the situation might get.