



On The Move

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HUGE NUMBERS TURNOUT, VOTE TO AUTHORIZE STRIKE AGAINST SEPTA

More than 1,400 rank and file TWU members voted on Sunday to authorize a strike against SEPTA in the City, Frontier and Suburban Divisions of the Authority. Leaders from the UTU Local 1594, representing Suburban Operators, were also in attendance, and plan to coordinate their strike with Local 234. The unanimous strike vote on Sunday showed that the members are angry and unified in the fight for pension reform and against attempts by SEPTA to roll back our standard of living. The members also showed a willingness to lead the fight against inequality between labor and management in the public and private sector---by standing up to SEPTA's credo that management doesn't get enough, while the workers should get less.

As far as SEPTA is concerned, the families of supervisory personnel are entitled to pension benefits *averaging* in excess of \$5,000 a month, while our pension benefits are capped at \$2,500 a month. SEPTA also thinks it's OK to raise management's wages 5%, or more, a year, while the people who do the work should be satisfied with wage increases averaging less than 1% a year between now and 2019! Here's the problem. Top management at SEPTA believes we are **second class citizens**. As a result, SEPTA's bargaining team has adopted *classism* as its guiding principle in negotiations. All for them, none for us. That's SEPTA's motto. To hell with the operators, mechanics and cleaners *who actually make the system work*.

The members in attendance at the strike authorization meeting agreed with President Willie Brown and the Administration on these two key points:

- The strike is a weapon of last resort. Nobody wants one. Nobody wants to deal with the sacrifices we all make during a strike. However, we have to stand up for our dignity and our rights. We have to sacrifice in order to *close the intolerable gap* in pension benefits between workers and managers. We have to fight to secure wage increases that will allow us to maintain a decent standard of living. We have to fight to keep our health benefits intact, without paying thousands in premiums and thousands more in additional co-payments.
- Many powerful civilizations and unions have been destroyed from within. Internal union politics must be put aside if we are to win a strike. We have to squash the doubters and mobilize the members. We have to support, not criticize the Union, in the middle of a life and death situation. Make no mistake, SEPTA intends to test our resolve and our solidarity like never before. We have to respond by staying united, however challenging the situation might get.

Local 234 has two simple choices---surrender to SEPTA's outrageous demands or fight to protect our jobs, our families and our standard of living. With the unanimous vote on Sunday authorizing a strike, the members of Local 234 have decided which path to follow.

At Press Conference, President Brown Pledges 24 Hour Strike Notice

At a press conference held on Monday, October 27, President Willie Brown indicated that the Local will evaluate the state of the negotiations at the end of the week to determine whether a strike is necessary to break the logjam at the bargaining table. Brown also stated that the Local will give the public 24 hours' notice before the start of a strike, if one becomes necessary. The media representatives in attendance were surprised to learn how much of a gap in benefits there is between workers and managers when it comes to pensions. Managers get much more, even though our members pay far more into the pension than management. For example, they were amazed that a maintenance custodian puts in \$1,492.40 a year, yet a manager making \$105,000 puts in only \$945!

Freelancing Backfires in Contract Negotiations and in Public Opinion

Just days after agreeing to keep politics out of the contract negotiations, a Local 234 "in-house politician" from Comly Depot contacted Channel 6 claiming that SEPTA is responsible for vehicle knockdowns due to the placement of the left-side bus mirror. Earlier in the day, Local 234's negotiating team was *hammering SEPTA* at the bargaining table *over the same issue*. However, as a result of the negative TV coverage, SEPTA thinks the Local sandbagged them with the media and is *digging in* on the mirror issue. To make matters worse, the Channel 6 report set-off a fire storm of public criticism against the Union *and its members*, with many stating that knockdowns are solely the fault of the drivers. This story proves one thing for sure. The "politicians" in Local 234 should lie low until negotiations are over, since they often fail to think about or understand the consequences of their actions on the Union and the membership.

Local Must Have the Right to Schedule Contract Grievances for Arbitration

Prior to 2009, discharge cases were arbitrated prior to contract disputes. This made it harder to enforce the contract, due to the long delay between the violation and arbitration. In 2009, the Local took several steps to correct the problem. It is now the rule that one contract case gets arbitrated for every three discharge cases. In addition, subletting cases trump all others and can be scheduled ahead of any other case. Despite these improvements, the problem persists. If we are to enforce the contract in a timely manner, the Union must be able to decide which cases go to arbitration first. In the current negotiations, this issue has a high priority. The Union is demanding control over the scheduling of cases for arbitration. Of course, discharges will still be arbitrated, but there will be more balance between discharge and contract grievances. If we can win this change, the number of contract violations will likely decline, since managers will no longer feel free to violate the agreement due to the time it takes to bring the dispute to arbitration.

Local 234 "Whiteboard Action Video" can now be Seen on TWU Website

The Local just posted on its website a very entertaining "whiteboard" action video about the state of the labor movement and this year's midterm elections. The video walks the viewer through a brief history of the labor movement and draws the connections between a time in American history when plutocrats ran the country to today's exercise of political and economic power by the top 1%. During both eras, the wealthy few fought to crush the power of labor in order to get the economic system totally under their control. Now, just as then, it will take organized action by labor and others to turn the tide in favor of working people. Take a look at the action video on the Local's website: twulocal234.net and then forward it to friends, co-workers, and family members. Let's get this video to go viral.