



On The Move

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SEPTA Negotiators Grow Worse with Age

The Authority's contract demands are an insult to the members of Local 234

While *every public sector contract* recently negotiated provided wage increases, along with other economic enhancements, such as signing bonuses and pay-hikes for the lowest paid employees in the bargaining unit---with weeks to go before the expiration of our contract, SEPTA has offered Local 234 a four year agreement with no wage increases, but with a proposal to base wage increases on the Authority's "ability to pay." The funny thing is, if SEPTA actually based its offer on its "ability to pay," our wage increases would be higher than the others, since SEPTA has already received *over \$2 billion* in federal money since the start of the pandemic, with more in the pipeline, once the infrastructure bill passes the U.S. House of representatives. No other agency received nearly as much.

SEPTA's wage offer is an insult to our intelligence and Local 234 cannot accept anything less than what was negotiated in other public sector contracts. However, SEPTA's wage proposal is not the only problem with the Authority's four year contract offer.

SEPTA management is targeting seniority for picking work and vacations

SEPTA thinks it has a problem with attendance, so the Authority wants to "reward employees with exemplary attendance" records, but the "reward" will not be paid by the Authority in the form of bonus money, additional paid days off, or the ability to bank sick leave toward one's retirement. Instead, SEPTA wants to reward members with perfect attendance by requiring the rest of us to lose our seniority rights!

Here's what SEPTA wants to do. Employees with twelve consecutive calendar months of perfect attendance will be credited with *three additional years of seniority*, to be used for purposes of picking vacations and job assignments. In other words, employees with perfect attendance will be able to jump ahead of those with more seniority when it comes to picking work and time-off for vacations.

Think about it. An employee with twenty or more years on the job, who has worked her way into a decent run and some good weeks off, will lose out to a junior employee, because the junior employee had perfect attendance, while they went into the sick book for a single day during the year.

The Authority's proposal would also strip seniority rights from employees with fewer years of service. Take the employee with five years on the job. If he called out one day because of a cold, a junior employee with only two years on the job could pick work and vacations ahead of him, if the junior employee had perfect attendance over a twelve month period.

SEPTA's perfect attendance proposal is an affront to the fundamental right of seniority and it will never see the light of day.

There are also other ways in which the Authority is trying to diminish our seniority rights.

For example, SEPTA wants to eliminate all straight runs, something operators can pick only after many years on the job and replace those runs with swing runs that can be “cross-scheduled” and pay only eight hours in a day.

SEPTA wants to strip our members of vacation, personal holidays, floating holidays and paid excused days by requiring us to use these paid days when we get sick and are otherwise eligible for Family and Medical Leave and/or sick leave. Like the attack on our seniority rights, this proposal will never see the light of day.

SEPTA demands concessions on almost every front

In addition, SEPTA wants to increase the co-pays for prescription drugs, reduce health coverage for retirees and their spouses, make it harder to get credits under the attendance point system, reduce SAH and EAH days to one within any consecutive twelve month period and eliminate the no lay-off clause.

Elimination of the no lay-off clause has always been a non-starter for the Union. However, it is important to recognize that with the development of autonomous vehicle technology, the Authority may push much harder over this issue than they have in the past. In fact, the Authority has included a proposal asserting its prerogative to “utilize new technology, including autonomous vehicles.”

While demanding concessions across the board, SEPTA is refusing to bargain over the Union’s demand for parental leave, even though many of our female members have suffered miscarriages or have had to resign as a result of SEPTA’s archaic maternity leave policy.

Hopefully the political appointees on SEPTA’s Board are paying attention

At the end of the day, the members of the SEPTA Board and the politicians who appointed them are responsible for what’s going on in the negotiations and the possibility that management’s hard ball tactics could lead to a strike that no sane person wants to see.

As a result of recent municipal elections in the suburban counties, a majority of the SEPTA Board is now in the hands of representatives of the Democratic Party. Given the democrats promises to working people and the support they receive from the labor movement one would expect that the tenor of the negotiations this time around would be different from the past. However, from what we’re seeing at the bargaining table it would be easy to conclude that there is no difference between the two parties. This is unfortunate, to say the least.

Indeed, the hard ball negotiating tactics being pursued by SEPTA management means that when the politicians behind the SEPTA Board come asking for “support” from Local 234, they should not be surprised if they get a very rude response. Simply put, the leadership and membership of Local 234 are tired of empty promises. Instead, we expect to see action that reflects greater support for labor and the front line workers who have sacrificed everything to keep Philadelphia and the surrounding region moving during an unprecedented public health crisis.

TWU LOCAL 234
WE MUST AND WE WILL