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## My Day with the TWU Local 100 Rallying against the MTA



(by Jason Gooljar, NYC Independent Media Center, Dec. 14, 2005) Everywhere we go.... The people want to know... Who we are..... So we tell them..... We are the union... The Mighty Mighty Union... The People's Union...

Yes, it was a cold day in New York. It's funny how the temperature seems colder in Manhattan than it does up by me in [Westchester County](#), but regardless the duty of being a progressive beckoned and I would not stray from the cause. I am more radicalized each day by the assaults on the people that I hear of and witness.

From New Orleans and the way [Katrina](#), FEMA, and the US government hit. To the [Iraq war](#) and the thousands of workers losing their jobs to offshoring and [outsourcing](#), you can either get very angry or very depressed.

However, maybe you are one of the people who are shielded from reality thanks to your wealth. Wealth which was most likely made off the sweat and suffering of others. You could be a CEO or board member who is basically way too overpaid. Even those of you benefiting from the dividend checks do that from the work of others who are most likely suffering at the hands of profit maximization.

They suffer from [low wages](#), [no healthcare](#), [no pension](#), and [dangerous workplace conditions](#). Then if you really want more profit and bang for your [dividend](#) check the executives just close a few plants and offshore jobs and layoff workers. You could have also inherited your wealth, which the repeal of the estate tax was the greatest thing to happen for you.

I'm a progressive who has always been angry with the way things are, but it only makes me want to work harder. That's why as a progressive I cannot support Senator Hillary Clinton, a [corporatist](#), when a progressive like Jonathan Tasini has decided to challenge the corporatism and imperialism of our government. I also cannot stand and watch as millions of workers are suffering at the hands of corporatist and elite executives who are only out for themselves and profit maximization.

So here I was leafleting for Tasini on 42nd and Lexington in front of the Grant Hyatt hotel as the TWU Local 100 gathered to rally against the injustice of another New York public authority that needs to be reigned in. That public authority is the [Metropolitan Transit Authority](#). A public authority who is guilty of corruption and mismanagement.

Three years ago they had the money to give the transit workers what they deserved but they lied and moved money around to make it look like it was not there. They used allot of what you would call creative accounting. Then when their was finally a settlement it resulted in the MTA raising the fares which was uncalled for, especially since we all now know that they have a budget surplus of one billion dollars.

What TWU Local 100 is asking for is not outrageous and with the billion dollar surplus of the MTA, the workers should get what is rightfully theirs, which is the eight percent raise for three years that they seek. The workers deserve more than the paltry raise being offered by the MTA. On top of that the MTA wants the union to giveback things like sick days.

The MTA wants to move the [retirement age](#) from 55 to 62. They are also asking for higher co-payments for [prescription drugs](#) and office visits. Also with this proposal new employees would have to contribute two percent toward health care premiums. The MTA also wants to remove conductors from some trains and turn them into customer service roles.

So as we gathered there for a rally in the cold though we were all freezing I was proud to be helping fight for a good cause. When I first arrived on the scene I was surprised to see a gated off protest area. This reminds me of a George W. Bush speaking event where they have protest pens for people. I felt that it was wrong but the workers were still able to overcome that and come out in force. The chants started with your "TWU Local 100 make some noise!" and continued with "when they say giveback, we say fightback!"

As I started to look around I could see the people sitting in their comfortable lounges in the [Grand Hyatt](#) looking down on us or watching a flat screen TV without a care in the world. I also saw two helicopters above us hovering to keep an eye on us as if we were the threat. The real threat were the MTA management inside the Grand Hyatt who are trying to steal from 34,000 people.

Then the speakers started to come out and talk. Congressman [Anthony Weiner](#) showed his support for TWU local 100 and said a few words as did NYC comptroller [William Thompson](#). This would not be a day to find the [mayor](#) anywhere near this gathering as he went to court to get an injunction along with the NY attorney

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general's office, unfortunately. I also heard the union's secretary-treasurer Ed Watt speak, he was actually pretty good as a speaker and led some chants.

Next up, was [Brian McLaughlin](#), president of the [New York City Central Labor Council](#) who has started a **solidarity fund** where \$1 dollar from every unionized worker in the city would go into that fund to help pay for the massive fines and loss of pay to the transit workers resulting from a strike that would be illegal under the Taylor law.

I saw a [SEIU](#) local union present showing solidarity along with the president of the teachers union who said a few words. Then came the Reverends [Al Sharpton](#) and [Jesse Jackson](#). They were both great speakers as usual and I think it was good that they came out to show support. I heard Jesse's trademark "keep hope alive" along with Al Sharpton putting [Pataki](#) to shame when he said that Pataki did not care enough to be in NYC, instead he's running around trying to run for president.

To close the rally it was left to the TWU Local 100's president [Roger Toussaint](#). I did not realize until I heard him speak that like my parents he comes from [Trinidad](#). He started out talking about the funeral he will be attending tomorrow for a transit worker. And he brought up another incident which shows the brutal mentality the MTA has towards it's workers.

This is how the MTA treats it's workers:

Lewis Moore, whom a co-worker found unconscious on a work train in the Bronx last week, could have been taken to a nearby station to the south, Toussaint said. But that maneuver, from the middle track, would have clogged subway traffic - so the train was driven seven stations to the north, Toussaint charged.

"They put service before a stricken Transit Authority worker and they wouldn't have done that to a dog," Toussaint said. "If it was a dog on the tracks, they would have stopped service ... and spent whatever time was necessary to retrieve the dog."

Moore was dead by the time the train, which carries a huge crane, arrived at the E. 180th St. station. An initial autopsy was inconclusive. It's unclear, Toussaint said, whether Moore could have been saved.

You could hear the loud shouts of disapproval from the union members as Toussaint talked about the injustice. But as he too led the famous mighty, mighty union chant he made it clear that it was a mistake for the MTA to test the union. After he spoke the rally came to a close with a Toussaint saying "Maestro cut to the music" and then [Bob Marley](#) reminded us to "[Get up, stand up, stand up for your rights.](#)"

On my way home to Westchester County on the [Metro North Railroad](#), I saw that there were these notices placed on all the seats for the passengers to read. They said that the railroad had a contingency plan for the NYC transit strike. Actually what they made clear was that while the [strike was illegal](#) in New York but that it could happen anyway.

I found it disgusting that they are trying to pit the passengers against the transit workers. So what did I do? Well, I took my notice underlined "illegal" and wrote "It's the MTA's fault," "Give the workers what they deserve." As I left the train I left that notice on my seat along with a rally sign I had taken with me that said "no more hugs for [Kalikow](#)" "give the workers 8, 8, 8%."

Stand up for your rights...

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