



TWU LOCAL 100 IN THE NEWS

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The Chief



Warns MTA: 'Won't Be Shackled With 2% Raises' Fighting Words From TWU President Kick Off Bid for Above-Inflation Hikes

By BOB HENNELLY

Several thousand members of TWU Local 100 converged on MTA headquarters on lower Broadway last week to hear President John Samuelson forcefully lay out a broad set of contract demands, topped by annual raises above two percent—ahead of the rate of inflation—and major improvements in workplace safety.

“We don’t want to play catch-up with inflation. We want to be ahead of price increases,” he told the boisterous crowd that went back several blocks from the rally stage. “We will be fighting for raises that continue to beat inflation. That way, we have a chance to improve our standard of living, not just tread water.”

Some Trade-Union Fire

The rally, which had the vibe of a rock concert and religious revival, was emceed by LaTonya Crisp-Sauray, Local 100 Recording Secretary. Her high-energy performance fired up the crowd as union members cheered a long list of

speakers during lower Manhattan’s evening rush hour.

“We are never, ever, ever, going to accept a contract with two percent raises in every year. We are just not going to do it,” Mr. Samuelson said defiantly. “And anybody that wants to shackle us with two-percent raises is going to meet Local 100 head-on and they are going to get hurt.”

“We need to stand side by side, in every depot, in every borough, in every terminal, and on the railroad tracks, side by side, and fight for the kind of contract we deserve, no matter what the negative impact is on this company. We need to fight, and if the company gets hurt in the process, so be it.”

Mr. Samuelson appeared to be bracing his membership for a tough contract negotiation to replace a deal that expires Jan. 15. The Local 100 President raised the specter of a strike, roaring, “We make the city go, and we can make it go in the other direction if we need to.”

Cites MTA Budget Surplus

He told the crowd, which punctuated his remarks with cheers and air-horn blasts, that five years ago the union leadership made the “smart decision to bargain past the end of the contract” because “there was an economic crisis back then that was very real...but there is no economic calamity this time. The MTA is actually working with a slight surplus.”

But higher wages, the improvement of existing medical coverage, and other fringe benefits were just part of what amounts to a comprehensive series of Local 100 demands that range from improving the quality of MTA-issued work boots to workplace safety rules.

Throughout the massive crowd there were signs that invoked the memory of Louis Gray, a Track Worker who was killed earlier this month by a train on the G line as he attempted to set up a safety zone for a work crew on the overnight shift. A co-worker was injured but subsequently

Continued Opposite



released from the hospital. The National Transportation Safety Board is investigating.

"A major goal in these talks will be to improve workplace safety and occupational health," Mr. Samuelsen said. "Since 2001, 13 of our brothers and sisters have suffered line of duty deaths. Two of those—Bus Operators Edwin Thomas and William Pena—were flat-out murdered. No more. Enough is enough."

Honor Their Dead

At one point the large crowd came to a hushed silence after Mr. Samuelsen's directed that they take their hats off and observe a moment of silence for their co-workers that had been killed on the job. Through the damp still night air, workers called out the names of individual union members, who had been lost on the job.

"Another five transit workers a day are hurt bad enough that it causes them to miss work. That's every single day we come to work," Mr. Samuelsen said. "As we rally here today, one of our sisters—Monique Brathwaite—a Signal Helper and single mother, is lying up in Harlem Hospital. She tripped and fell in a third-rail accident a couple of weeks ago. As a result, she had to have half her right arm amputated."

Much to the delight of those assembled, the subheadings of union's key demands were projected onto the facade of the MTA's 2 Broadway headquarters. The illuminated slides included demands for more respectful treatment by management, improved facilities, particularly for the MTA's growing female workforce, increased focus on workplace safety, enhanced training, and the reduction of the use of diesel fuels to reduce workers exposure to the fuels toxic emissions.

Local 100 also wants to enlist the support of the MTA as it tries to convince Albany to walk back cost-cutting reductions to the union's pension program when Governor Cuomo and the Legislature set up Tier 6, which covers workers

hired after March 31, 2012. The Governor at the time said it would save taxpayers \$80 billion over 30 years.

The list of Local 100 contract demands was the result of a canvas of the rank-and-file membership during the spring and summer and refined last month at the divisional level, according to union officials.

Other Unions Turn Out

The rally also drew members from other unions like David Unger, a CUNY faculty member and activist with the Professional Staff Congress. "We are really one big labor movement in New York City," Mr. Unger said. "The people who work at CUNY depend on Local 100 members day in day out to get to work. They are our students, they are the parents of our students, and if we don't figure out a way to support good jobs, than we are not doing what we need to do for the City of New York."

Several blocks from the main stage, Victor Whitmeyer, a Local 100 member with 15 years of service, banged a drum and cheered the speakers. "I am a veteran and I am grateful for this job and I have been blessed with my children, so I am no complainer, but enough is enough," said Mr. Whitmeyer. "We have to get more money. I see millions of dollars wasted and I can't even get a raise."

Local 100 members heard speeches from Public Advocate Letitia James and City Comptroller Scott Stringer, both potential mayoral candidates.

They were also addressed by Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams, City Council Members Elizabeth Crowley and Francisco Moya as well as Marisol Alcantara, who a week earlier won a State Senate seat.

At the end of the rally, Mr. Samuelsen and other top local 100 officials walked the union's

demands over to the MTA's lobby surrounded by a TV cameras and a large crowd of rank-and-file members.

MTA Plays Fare-Hike Card

A spokesman for the MTA had no comment on what was said at Local 100's rally. But a day later, the agency unveiled two options for increasing fares and tolls over the next two years by less than 4 percent—or an average of 2 percent annually, which the agency said was "consistent with the financial forecast made in July."

"The MTA's continued discipline in keeping costs down has resulted in the lowest increase since 2009, when the MTA committed to a biennial schedule to keep adjustments as small and predictable as possible," the agency said in a statement.

"The MTA continues to keep its promise to make sure that fare and toll increases, while necessary to keep our system running, remain as low as possible and that they are done in as equitable a way as possible," said Chairman and CEO Thomas F. Prendergast. "Fare and toll revenue cover just 51 percent the operating budget, which is why this modest increase is needed to ensure that subway, rail, bus and paratransit services continue to operate safely and reliably and to fuel the region's economic and financial growth."

There will be eight public hearings across the MTA region in December on the proposed increases. The MTA Board will review public input before a final proposal is selected and voted on in January. The new fares and tolls would take effect on March 19, 2017.

According to the MTA's latest financial analysis, conditions have improved for the agency since it issued its July Plan. It has realized close to \$300 million in debt-service savings and posted lower electricity costs and higher passenger and toll revenue than originally forecast.