

Transit Union Campaign

Reformists No Answer to Bureaucrats

After a two-and-a-half month campaign, Local 100 of the Transit Workers Union (New York City subway and bus workers) counted the ballots for local and divisional elections in December. With less than half of the 36,000 members voting, incumbent President Sonny Hall's slate won all but a handful of Executive Board seats with an overall 3 to 1 margin. In the Train Operators division, however, the opposition New Directions slate won all three posts.

In the Track Division alone members had a chance to vote for a candidate running openly as a revolutionary. A long-time shop steward who supports the program of the League for the Revolutionary Party (LRP), Eric Josephson won nearly 17 percent of the votes. Although a good showing for a communist candidate, it disappointed many younger workers fed up with the pro-management, anti-strike strategy of the Hall bureaucracy. Over 200 workers had signed nominating petitions to get Josephson on the ballot.

THE BUREAUCRATS' BITTER LEGACY

A long string of defeats, engineered without a fight by the TWU leaders since the 1980 strike, has left the membership bitter and atomized — and in the absence of an alternative leadership, demoralized and passive.

down the city (as in the past) and could trigger the mass action that city workers need to halt the public and private bosses' across-the-board cutbacks.

As Josephson said in a campaign leaflet:

"Hall, like other union leaders, tries to convince workers we don't have enough power to fight the bosses. Hall wants us to believe that strikes and militant actions don't work anymore. Instead of fighting the bosses, Hall's strategy is to work with them.

"But the reason strikes are isolated and fail is because of leaders like Hall. The solution is not Hall's policy of no strikes and every union for itself. Rather, we must mobilize the membership in each and every division to fight back. Only then can we launch a solid strike to win back what the bosses have taken away and show the way forward to the rest of the city workers by raising the call for a general strike."

Josephson also ran on a 5-point action program, dealing with defending workers' rights on the job, union democracy, union independence from the bosses and the capitalist political parties and defense of workers and oppressed people against violence. In response



Transit workers have the power to shut down New York City and ignite a general strike.

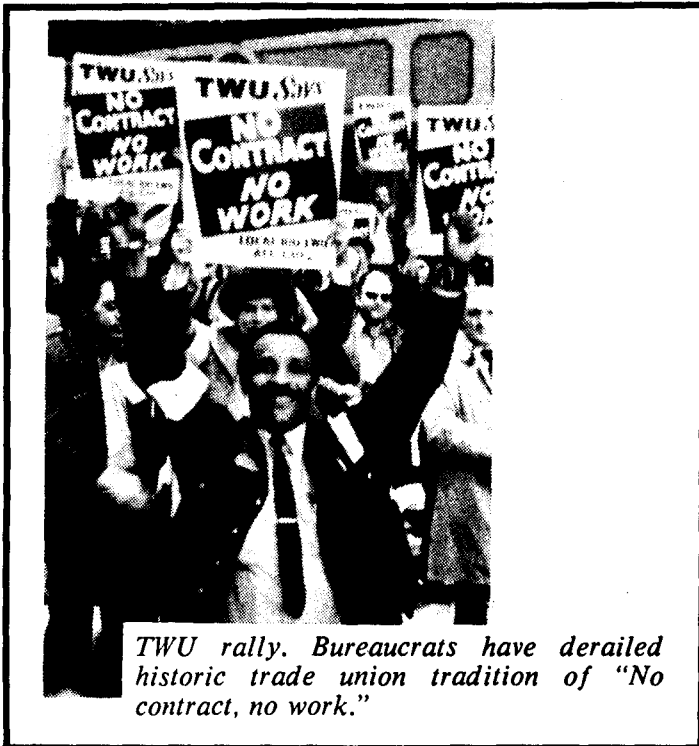
Although the 1980 walkout won substantial wage and benefit gains, it was abandoned by the bureaucrats under John Lawe (later the TWU international's head) and crushed by the heavy fines imposed under New York's Taylor Law forbidding public employee strikes.

It was no wonder then that the members endorsed a 1988 contract with substantial givebacks, including a near-minimum wage scale for new hires and a 3-year postponement of contractual raises for some workers. Hall kept the workers unmobilized, and everyone knew that the bureaucrats would sabotage a strike even if they called one. The TWU leaders betrayed not only their own members: a well-conducted transit strike could shut

to recent assaults on clerks and other transit workers (including one murder), as well as to the wave of racist and police violence against black and Latino people in New York, Josephson demanded: "Union defense of token booth clerks' right to bear arms; Double staffing of booths; Union-organized defense against racist attacks!" Readers interested in seeing Eric Josephson's campaign literature should write to *Proletarian Revolution*.

NOT SO NEW DIRECTIONS

The New Directions slate was organized for the election largely by Hell on Wheels, a long-time oppositional caucus/newsletter backed by the "socialist"



TWU rally. Bureaucrats have derailed historic trade union tradition of "No contract, no work."

Solidarity organization and others. New Directions' program was a list of proposals like those commonly put forward by moderate union reformers, a list noticeably more tepid than usual. It has been traditional, for

example, for New York government union militants to oppose the viciously anti-union Taylor Law. New Directions, however, stood for "reform of the Taylor Law" rather than mass action to abolish it.

In the same spirit, New Directions endorsed local job actions but not a unified strike. Hell on Wheels also failed the test of the recent contract when they called for a "No" vote without a strike as the only answer to Hall's concessions. That's why the LRP did not support the New Directions campaign: despite its sometimes militant rhetoric, it was no alternative to Hall.

The slate advocated electoral support to "groups like the Rainbow Coalition," the framework built by Jesse Jackson for his Democratic primary campaign. The TWU bureaucrats also supported Jackson; passive electoral diversion is the standard line of union misleaderships today. Jackson's campaign for the capitalist Democratic Party and Dukakis was a trap for workers, only the latest evidence of what a disaster such a strategy is. When socialists fail to stand up clearly against capitalist politicians, they are stabbing the workers in the back.

The method behind the New Directions campaign is "rank and filism," the strategy that tells militant workers what they already know and makes no attempt to transform their passive or capitalist political consciousness by openly and honestly stating the truth. Eric Josephson worked hard to break through this common leftist fog of deception. *Proletarian Revolution* congratulates him on a job well done. ■

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