



LARRY HANLEY, INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT

NYC school bus Local fights on for employee protections

The fights for transit workers are well known. Our school bus workers are struggling too.

The members of ATU's largest local union, Local 1181 in New York City have been through a very rough time. As the billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg was leaving office he stripped the members of a labor protection that existed since 1979, and dated back before that in other forms.

In this magazine we walk through the recent history of the struggle of school bus workers in one of the world's richest cities. A place where globetrotting moguls buy \$100 million condominiums, but women and men who work getting kids to school became the target of the envy of the rich. Overpaid! Cost too much! Grey Poupon?

Confronted with the full force of the city destroying their contracts and jobs, the Local went on strike.

During the strike in 2013, in 15-degree weather, I stood on a picket line in the Bronx and a member, a struggling worker who was on strike for weeks already, told me that our staff was welcome to come to her house for dinner. "We might only have Oodles of Noodles," she said, but her home was open to us. What these workers have been through, just trying to hold on to their jobs and salaries is hard to fully explain.

A full year after the strike, after mass layoffs and disruptions, a new mayor was elected. He was full of promise and very different politics than Bloomberg. Mayor deBlasio offered his full support, but together we were not able to get legislation passed in Albany in the first year of the deBlasio Administration.

And it's been a long hard struggle to put the Bloomberg Genie back in the bottle. Local President Michael Cordiello has been relentless in his efforts, working every day with high ranking city hall officials, city attorneys, the Department of Education, and even the state legislature.

Throughout the strike and its aftermath, alongside President Cordiello, was a remarkable union officer, Recording Secretary Tom Jemmott. Together at almost every meeting

they withstood all the arguments against our members, and fought the holdover Bloomberg administration officials – who had not been replaced in city government. They strategized how to overcome huge resistance throughout the government. This attack had come at the very time that workers and unions were under attack throughout the U.S.

The Local Union was stressed. The legal bills alone were in the millions of dollars. The officers put in long hours. The local officers cut their own pay, moved the headquarters to a more economical location and cut expenses, even as their work became more difficult.

The strain this placed on the members was also placing strain on the officers. They carried with them the agony and outrage of the membership to every meeting. Eventually, it took a toll, and Tom Jemmott's heart failed last summer. ATU and Local 1181 lost a great officer, and Michael Cordiello lost a very close friend and confidant. But Michael and the other officers have soldiered on.

The news is changing. The Local appears to have turned a corner. The city has extended the contracts of bus companies that employ our members and did pass a \$42 million supplement to help restore wages. But, the solutions have been imperfect and delayed. An attempt to get state legislation to support the mayor in his effort to restore employee protection is on track in Albany as you read this.

It is impossible for our members to know the amount of work and energy that has gone into this within the Local Union. We have all suffered losses, financial and personal in the process and we can never be made whole for all of them.

But, Local 1181 will survive and will soon be able to restore the jobs, salaries and benefits our members lost and help those still suffering to rebuild their lives. Hats off to the members and officers of Local 1181 for sticking together, working hard and weathering the storm of the century in their industry. ❖