

SIDE THE UNION

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POSTOPINION

The Workers Won, the Fat Cats Lost

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JAMES**



DESPITE unprecedented attempts from several quarters to pressure and intimidate our union, TWU Local 100 has achieved what yesterday's Times called "the largest annual raises received by any of New York City's public employee unions in a decade."

The significant wage increases contained in the proposed three-year contract are only part of the story. We held firm on job security, preventing any layoffs during the contract term, and we won substantial improvements in health benefits.

The agreement raises employees' hourly pay by 12.5 percent over the term of the contract. Nearly all members will realize another 3.3 percent because of reduced employee pension contributions. We also won increased contributions to our health plan that will ensure that there are no added out-of-pocket expenses for premiums or co-payments. In addition, the health plan will begin providing unlimited chiropractic coverage, which is important because many transit workers are living with painful back injuries they acquired on the job.

Perhaps most significantly, given our members' widespread and well-justified resentment toward management's usual "guilty until proven innocent" assumptions, we challenged abusive MTA disciplinary procedures and succeeded in changing them in the interest of workplace fairness and justice.

I have no doubt that the 33,000 members of TWU Local 100 will vote to accept our new contract with the MTA by a wide margin.

We couldn't have come this far without the support of other unions and a large segment of the riding public. Back in September, when we decided to make an issue of "corporate welfare," we were confident that few would be fooled by misleading media pundits and editorial writers who tried to portray honest, hard-working transit workers as "the real fat cats."

We raised the issue of adequate funding for transit and other vital public services and linked it to the all-too-common practice of handing out huge subsidies, grants, tax breaks and other so-called "incentives" to favored corporations in exchange for empty promises to maintain or create jobs.

No one with open eyes or an open mind could fail to see the connection between state and city sanctioned giveaways to wealthy corporations and the failure to invest more of our resources where the public need is greatest.

Already, Mayor Giuliani is complaining that we won too much and that other public employees dare not expect to make comparable advances. While we share his relief (and that of nearly all New Yorkers) that a strike was averted, we caution him against trying to bully our brothers and sisters into accepting less than they deserve.

What's the bottom line? Working people and the general public should have as much right to decide what our civic priorities should be as do corporate fat cats and their political sponsors. And the proponents of "privatization" had better stop acting as if raiding the public treasury was their birthright.

Willie James is the president of TWU Local 100.