



On The Move

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SEPTA brass flushing public transit down the toilet

The small group of aristocrats running SEPTA are clueless when it comes to tackling the problems that plague public transit in the region. SEPTA's top decision makers now include General Manager, Leslie Richards, her underboss, Stephanie Deiger, and Pat Deon, the monarchal Chairman of the SEPTA Board. Below them are a bunch of state troopers and lawyers in top management positions. By disregarding those who came through the ranks and are more familiar with transit operations, SEPTA's aristocrats are flushing our public transit system down the drain.

Human Resources fumbles the ball---over and over again

Take SEPTA's Human Resources Department for example, headed up by attorney Stephanie Deiger. In the past few years, Deiger has replaced seasoned veterans with incompetent bureaucrats. And the result has been disastrous. Last week, an operator with a year on the job broke his arm, at home. When he went for treatment, he discovered that SEPTA had failed to enroll him in our health plan, in violation of the law. Adding insult to injury, SEPTA has so far refused to pay the bills, even though they are self-insured.

The Union became aware of the problem during the Local's new hire orientation program. Many new employees didn't know how to do the paperwork to make sure they received the benefits they are entitled to. As a result, we offered to have Local 234's benefit's rep work with Human Resources to fix the problem. SEPTA refused our help because their college educated bureaucrats think they have nothing to learn from a union bus driver.

Transfer rights taking a hit

The Human Resources Department is also making a mockery out of our members' transfer rights, by assigning new hires to fill vacancies instead of eligible transferees. In a recent meeting on the subject, a SEPTA labor relations manager confessed that while "the Union follows the contract," SEPTA managers responsible for the transfer book "follow orders"! In other words, SEPTA is either knowingly and willfully violating the labor agreement or they just don't know how to implement a basic contractual right. This issue is set for arbitration in November.

SEPTA's pathetic pandemic response

Soon after the pandemic hit, operators started wearing masks to protect themselves from exposure to the deadly virus. So what was SEPTA's response? They threatened to discipline any operator who wore a mask, because masks were scaring the riders! Can you believe it! No surprise, the aristocrats bungled SEPTA's pandemic response from the onset, by failing to provide personal protective equipment to those at risk and by failing at first to accommodate members forced out on sick leave. As a result, members died; thousands tested positive for the virus. It was only after the

Union and feds got involved that these problems started to get addressed. Why? Well, maybe because the aristocrats and their minions at 1234 Market Street stayed home the entire time.

“Zero tolerance” doesn’t apply to assaults against transit workers

Operators get spit on and punched, custodians alone in the subway get attacked. For years, Local 234 has been urging SEPTA to get serious about crimes committed against transit workers and the riding public. We even escorted top management to hot spots in the system so they could see what we are up against. Yet SEPTA continues to treat attacks against our members as “nuisance crimes”---no arrests, no prosecutions!

Remarkably, we recently had a case where *the assailant turned himself in*, yet SEPTA refused to arrest and prosecute him! Interviews with the riding public demonstrate that the dangers lurking in the system are the main reason people are reluctant to return, preferring to use alternative forms of transit. Still no meaningful action is taken.

At the very least, SEPTA needs to establish a beefed-up police presence *in the subway* and on SEPTA vehicles by reducing deployments on the commuter rail lines, if necessary, arresting and prosecuting offenders, and where the assailant is unknown, deploying wanted posters picturing riders caught on video attacking our members. Will the aristocrats address the problem, or will it take exposure in the press to convince them to?

The tail is wagging the dog

The AFL-CIO recently asked Local 234 to recruit four members to work on behalf of Josh Shapiro and John Fetterman in the November election, a critical election for Pennsylvania and SEPTA. Four Local 234 members came forward, their lost wages to be paid for by the AFL-CIO. However, SEPTA refused to grant them a leave of absence. With a former politician in the General Manager’s job, you would think that this would be a no brainer, supporting transit friendly candidates!

But guess what? The *Republican* Chairman of the SEPTA Board, Pat Deon, who holds the position only with the support of the Democratic majority on the Board, killed the plan and the aristocrats didn’t have the spine to push back and do the right thing. This is managerial malpractice for people whose job it is to be politically savvy. Bring back Lou Gambaccini!

Hi-Tech replaces tokens and common sense

For decades, people used tokens to ride the system, a convenient way for those without much spare cash, i.e. most SEPTA riders. Tokens also supported local businesses who carried them to get customers into their stores. Unfortunately, the aristocrats replaced tokens with key cards and credit cards, a disaster for riders. While commuters from the suburbs, where the aristocrats live, have money to spare, most transit dependent communities are having a tough time putting cash on their key cards.

When combined with the elimination of transfers and an increase in fares, SEPTA has lost countless riders for reasons other than the pandemic and crime, while damaging small businesses in the process. The aristocrats are clearly out of touch with the riding public, just like the French aristocrats were when they declared “let them eat cake,” days before the peasants introduced them to the guillotine.