

Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never has, and it never will. — Frederick Douglass



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AFTERMATH OF THE 2005 NYC TRANSIT STRIKE:

DUES RESTORED, LOCAL 100 STANDS TALL

An interview in the Amsterdam News with Roger Toussaint after the NYS Courts reinstated automatic dues deduction rights for Local 100, as well as the U.S. Presidential Election.

AMSTERDAM NEWS: *The last time we spoke the U.S. elections were in full-swing and your Union was still without dues. A lot has changed in the weeks since.*

Roger Toussaint: Yes it has. What hasn't changed is this: we are still here and on our feet. The dues situation notwithstanding, TWU Local 100 was able to play a role in the Obama campaign. As one of the President-elect's earliest labor endorsers, we felt an obligation and we fulfilled it. We had teams in several battleground states. From home our new computerized telephone operation placed some 400,000 calls to voters in the battleground states. And on victory night, November 4, Local 100 co-sponsored the Harlem celebration.

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17 Months Fighting to **SAVE OUR UNION**



IN 2005 WE WENT ON STRIKE. We came through it all with our heads held high. We had penalties, jail sentences. But what did they think was going to sink us? Dues check-off. They thought that was going to be the fatal blow. But it didn't happen.

What did the judge say? You're going to lose check-off. Not for three days, or three weeks, or three months. He said, "You're going to lose it INDEFINELY."

What is the reason he said that? Because this was a targeted hit by the anti-union forces in this city and in the country. They wanted to take this union down. And YOU stopped them. Every brother and sister who paid their dues: YOU stopped them.

Why did they want to take this union down? Because it would send a crippling blow to all other unions:

"No speaking out. See what happened to Local 100. You don't want that to happen to you."

As it turned out, we went without check-off and survived. And we survived because good trade unionists like you put everything aside and paid dues.

When check-off was restored a few months ago, 60% of members had paid all or close to all of their

dues.

Those who have made some payment: 92%.

All told, members paid a total of 70% of the dues that were scheduled to come in during this time.

While we embarked through a period of austerity, we were never close to bankruptcy.

To accomplish this result, we had to develop new ways of doing business. We created the Dues Center. We rolled out dues teams. And we brought new forms of paying dues: automatic checking, credit card – places that we haven't gone before.

A small handful turned their noses up at this work and discouraged members from paying their dues. They are history. They should forever be remembered as traitors and collaborators. They will be remembered as those willing to do the work of the anti-union forces in this city and in this country.

DUES: 'IF YOU OWE, YOU OWE'

At the Mass Membership Meeting, Ed Watt's call of "If you owe, you owe" was met by an enthusiastic audience response: "No amnesty!"

In his speech, our Secretary-Treasurer explained that the Dues Center will remain open. One reason for this is to assist members who fell out of good standing to pay up.

Paying up is the only way back to good standing. You can call, you can send in checks, or you can pay by credit card. But you have to pay.

If you know someone who needs to pay up, encourage them to call the Dues Center and work out a payment plan.

(cont'd from p. 1)

Q: *Quite an achievement for a Union without dues.*

RT: I should make it clear that not a penny of dues money was used for this. It was funded by the contributions made every payday by tens of thousands of members to our COPE fund.

The dues situation was a real danger, but we never went under, thanks to members who kept two dues dollars out of every three still coming in even without check-off. Out of 35,000 members in transit, 31,000 made some dues payments after check-off was taken away. Of those, 12,000 plus had perfect payment records and another 12,000 plus are missing only a couple of payments. That was a core of over 24,000 that held together for almost 18 months. We went from bringing in \$1.8 million per month to bringing in \$1.2 million. We sacrificed, cutback, went lean. As a result, we did not have to touch Local 100 reserves from the sale of our Union building. That's remarkable by any account.

Q: *With automatic check-off about to begin again, can we say that the 2005 strike is at long last over for your Union?*

RT: In an important sense, yes. For our members, the strike did not end when we returned to work, or a year later, when the arbitration panel finally awarded us the terms we won during the strike. The open question was this: what will be the aftermath? Will the Union get crushed? The answer was written by turning challenge into opportunity. The loss of dues check-off sorely tested us, but we turned it into an exercise in union-building.

Q: *There have been criticisms that the Union should have gotten dues check-off restored earlier.*

RT: It was not in the Union's hands. It was in the court's hands. We could not move until the Appellate Division modified the lower court decision from a year ago that effectively locked us out. Once we got the Appellate Division ruling, we promptly returned to the lower court and filed new papers.

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Q: *There have also been criticisms that those papers conceded too much.*

RT: Yes, and the people who say we waited too long are also happy to quote the people say we shouldn't have filed the papers at all. Isn't the world of imaginary politics wonderful? We live in a real world and we have to take account of it. The appeals court required us to put in a sentence that does not appear in the Taylor Law, a sentence saying we do not intend to strike. In point of fact, we do not intend to strike. In point of fact, we didn't intend to strike in 2005 either. I determined that in exchange for securing peace of mind for 35,000 families, we could live with such a statement, which after all is true.

Q: *And now, with automatic check-off about to begin again?*

RT: We have emerged unbroken and unbowed and ready to take on the key issues in front of us. Immediately after Thanksgiving we will be launching a campaign to address the MTA's financial crisis. Our message is simple: you don't solve the crisis on the backs of transit workers and you don't solve the crisis on the backs of riders.

Q: *Is this an Amsterdam News exclusive?*

RT: I guess it is. It will be good to read it in a weekly with journalistic standards you can take to the bank.

Q: *Could it have come out otherwise?*

RT: Yes. There was no guarantee that our Union would survive the loss of dues check-off. Quite clearly, there were forces who hoped we would not survive. It was reasonable to take an indefinite suspension of dues check-off as a death sentence. Most organizations might have been incapable of even mounting the organizational effort required to meet such a challenge, much less succeed.

Our officers and activists organized and worked all out to hold the organization together. The struggle produced new heroes. It challenged our entire membership to decide where the union stood among their priorities, every payday for 18 months! It redefined relationships, member to member, up and down Local 100. Its effects and lessons will last for a long time.

As I have said, the fact that we did survive is to the credit of the tens of thousands of members who rallied to pay dues in the absence of check-off.

Incredibly enough, in the course of this there were those in our own ranks who hoped we would fail. Some put out anonymous flyers openly calling for a dues boycott, a dozen such flyers appeared. Another ten such flyers were circulated saying well, in principle, of course you should pay your dues, but Toussaint will only waste your hard-earned money. From the standpoint of poisoning the well, the second approach arguably had a bigger impact than the first. The message intended which some heard with their "inner ear" was that it was justifiable, advisable even, to not pay dues. The impact was that it gave cover to less honorable individuals willing to take the easy way out, if offered the chance. This is reflected in the sharp differences in levels of dues payment among different divisions of the Union. When the loudest yellers are surrounded by the lowest level of participation, you have to concede that they have had some impact. I don't think that it's an impact anyone could be proud of.

UNBROKEN
and **UNBOWED,**
READY
to **TAKE ON**
the **KEY ISSUES**

Q: *In the period around the 2005 strike, your Union's internal disputes became a very public matter. At the time you remarked that a more united Union was less likely to be put to the test of a strike. Should we be braced for more of this strife in the future?*

RT: We are a hardheaded bunch and we have plenty of lively discussion. But there is strife and there is strife. It is one thing to argue over which direction the boat should sail in. It is something else to kick a hole in the bottom and hope the boat sinks. Had I not seen it with my own eyes, I would have found it hard to credit that some people were doing this.

As it turned out, they were just a few, although their access to a weekly newspaper magnified their presence. Most of our ranks rallied around the fight to save our union. In addition, the extent that we pulled together behind Obama was a real inspiration. For the present, internal strife is minimal. Some elements are unhappy we survived the dues challenge, some elements are unhappy about Obama, and some elements are unhappy about how well the Local and our parent International worked together on both these fronts. By in large, they are the same elements, and they are not very numerous.

But part of the outcome of the strike is learning how different tendencies played out their destiny. Who rallied to save the union? Who did not? That is part of the outcome that members need to etch in their memories. We will be put to new tests in the future. We cannot afford to forget the lessons of this round ●



United, Invincible.