

# Transport Workers Union president threatens legal action against Columbia University protesters

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*New York transit workers: Send us your statements opposing the TWU bureaucracy's attack on the Columbia University protesters by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.*

On Tuesday, John Samuelson, the president of the Transport Workers Union (TWU), condemned the president of Columbia University for not calling in the New York Police Department (NYPD) earlier against students occupying a campus building to protest the genocide in Gaza.

In comments to Politico, Samuelson claimed that the actions of the protesters towards the staffers, including two custodians and a security officer who are TWU members, were an “outrageous affront to working people.”

He said, “We’re exploring every legal means at our disposal against Columbia against the individual occupiers ... [who] thought that they could hold our custodians hostage to their ideology.”

With this statement, the TWU bureaucracy has thrown its support behind the massive government crackdown on peaceful protests. In addition to sending riot cops, snipers and mounted police against students, this has involved a campaign by high-ranking politicians against campus administrators, such as Columbia University President Minouche Shafik, deemed supposedly “too soft” on the protests.

In New York City, the campaign Samuelson is joining is being spearheaded by Mayor Eric Adams, a former NYPD captain. But it has broad bipartisan support, including from actual fascist antisemites such as Marjorie Taylor Greene and Elise Stefanik, and is being coordinated from the White House, which has cynically tarred students as “antisemitic” even though

hundreds of Jewish students have been arrested.

In launching this provocation, Samuelson is acting completely outside of the will of TWU’s 155,000 members. As with workers across the world, they largely support the students and recognize the police crackdown as a major attack on their own democratic rights.

Rank-and-file TWU members have an obligation to mobilize to reject his slanders of students and to countermand the threatened legal campaign. Instead, Samuelson himself must be disciplined for making these statements, and the rank and file must organize actions in defense of the students.

In a separate letter to Shafik, Samuelson urged her to provide “[T]he names of the occupiers arrested inside Hamilton Hall.”

The letter also demands “access to the CCTV footage from Hamilton Hall” and “directives/information provided to Columbia by the NYPD and/or other law enforcement bodies regarding the composition of protesters.”

Finally, he calls for “An immediate meeting with the university president regarding mitigation steps necessary to avoid future placement of members in harm’s way if the protests resume.”

The chief TWU bureaucrat claimed that the custodians had to escape from barricaded exits to leave the building and deserve compensation.

Samuelson’s account is a lie. The real perpetrators of the violence were not the students but the police. *The Columbia Spectator*, which was on site, described in graphic detail what really took place on April 30:

Hundreds of police officers marched down a street next to the campus and ordered reporters to move out of

the way, pushing one of them, grabbing her and shoving her to the side.

They threatened bystanders with arrest. *The Spectator* noted, “Officers mocked our journalists and told them to run, swearing at them and laughing as students bolted away in panic.”

The reporters saw “one protester was thrown down the steps of Hamilton. Another protester lay on the ground, seemingly unconscious as officers stood over them. One protester was dragged away, crying, hardly able to walk; many more were aggressively pushed and handcuffed by the police. Officers busted down barricades and sawed through the chains locking the doors of Hamilton, threw flash bangs into the lobby, and hurled metal trash cans and tables down the stairs—without a care for whether anyone was in their line of fire.”

There is growing demand for strike action in defense of students. This is what happened on May 1, when approximately 300 faculty and staff in the City University of New York (CUNY) staged a sickout in an act of solidarity with the student encampment at City College.

In California, graduate student members of the United Auto Workers Local 4811 are set to vote on a strike against the police crackdown at UCLA.

But the CUNY faculty union, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), called the action an “unauthorized sick-out not sanctioned” by the union, and that it “does not condone this action and discourages PSC members from participating.”

In an attempt to cover its opposition to any struggle against the Gaza genocide, the PSC condemned the arrest of the City College students on May 1, a number of whom were body-slammed and pepper sprayed by NYPD officers.

The union bureaucracy is moving desperately to try to prevent workers from linking up with the student protests. Shawn Fain, president of the UAW, has combined bogus support for a “ceasefire” with the union’s endorsement and close ties to “Genocide Joe” Biden. American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, who has criss-crossed the world in support of US-backed wars, has joined the slander of protesters as “antisemitic.”

Samuelsen’s support for the police attack goes hand in hand with the TWU bureaucracy’s sellout of its own

membership. In July, the TWU executives pushed through a concessions contract for about 36,000 New York City transit workers. The deal is critical for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, the nation’s largest public transit agency, saving them hundreds of millions of dollars by increasing worker productivity.

The contract contained wage increases below the current rate of inflation. It also included a clause called “gainsharing,” in which the union bureaucracy agreed to help increase “employee availability” to more than five days on average for the entire workforce. The bureaucracy will receive a payoff in exchange for taking on this managerial function.

The transit agency will also save money when the union agreed to cutbacks in retiree health benefits. Retirees can no longer choose basic Medicare and now can only choose from two for-profit “Advantage” plans, which are notorious for denying necessary procedures. It has been estimated that this will save the agency \$40 million a year over a three-year contract, for a total savings of \$120 million.



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