

With New York transit struggle looming, Transport Workers Union tries to deny its support for New York's right-wing governor Hochul

Daniel de Vries
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A major struggle is looming Saturday in New York City, when a contract for 40,000 transit workers expires and 3,500 Long Island Rail Road workers will be legally free to strike. The struggle, in the center of world finance, is a fight by the working class against the financial oligarchy and its political representatives in the Democratic Party.

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges transit workers to prepare now for a direct confrontation against New York State Governor Kathy Hochul and New York City's "democratic socialist" mayor Zohran Mamdani. This means forming rank-and-file committees to gather support and retain the initiative from below which is needed to defeat attempts to block a struggle through the courts, including through the state's hated anti-strike Taylor Law.

This also requires a fight against the union bureaucracy, which is totally integrated with both levels of government and with management. What is taking place are not "negotiations" in the traditional sense but a three-way conspiracy involving the city and state governments and the Transport Workers Union (TWU) to impose concessions and prevent organized opposition.

The bureaucracy is eager to conceal this. At a rally last week, TWU officials held a banner reading "Will strike, if provoked"—in fact, TWU Local 100 legally repudiated workers' right to strike in 2008. TWU International President John Samuelson denounces Hochul as the "bosses' governor," and a "straight-up enemy of the TWU and a disaster for blue-collar New York." But, as the WSWs showed in an April 29 article, the TWU had actually "enthusiastically endorsed" Hochul for governor in 2022.

Samuelson wrote a response denouncing the article: "The article by Daniel de Vries has a significant factual error (perhaps more than one), but objectively, it is incorrectly stated that the TWU endorsed Hochul for Governor. This is factually, provably incorrect. We have not endorsed her for

Governor, ever, let alone 'enthusiastically [sic]' done so."

But it is Samuelson's rebuttal that is "factually, provably incorrect."

On April 11, 2022, TWU Local 100 posted a statement: "Union Endorses Kathy Hochul for Governor of New York State." Then-president of the Local, Tony Utano, gushed: "She has met every challenge and has done an incredible job. She has brought dignity back to the office of governor." He continued: "Her actions are enormous steps in the right direction for transit workers and transit riders. She's accessible. She gets things done. She's exactly what our state needs today and for the next four years. So without further ado, I am thrilled to announce that TWU Local 100 wholeheartedly endorses Kathy Hochul for governor of New York State."

Following Hochul's election victory, Local 100 made a celebratory post on its website and posted photos of officials attending the governor's victory party.

Perhaps he wants to draw a distinction between TWU Local 100 and the TWU International. He has, after all, sought to do so before. In July 2024, after Samuelson began publicly criticizing Hochul, news broke that Local 100 had contributed \$18,000 to her campaign. Samuelson attempted to explain this away by citing the Local's supposed "autonomy, and that includes the ability to make political contributions where it's permissible," according to *Gothamist*.

But TWU Local 100 is not just any local. It is the largest and most powerful in the entire organization, accounting for a quarter of the membership. The TWU itself grew out of the struggles of New York City transit workers. The top leadership of the national office of the TWU, from the founding president Michael Quill to John Samuelson himself, routinely come from Local 100. Utano himself was Samuelson's hand-picked successor as local president, after

Samuelsen rose to the post of International President.

During the 2021-2022 election cycle, the Transport Workers Union's PAC, ran by the International, gave \$50,000 to the Democratic Party of New York and \$47,100 to "Friends for Kathy Hochul," according to records tabulated by *Open Secrets*. In addition, Local 100 paid out more than \$69,000 to Hochul in April of 2022 and more than \$117,000 to the Democratic Committee in New York State in May.

On March 15th, 2022, less than a month before the TWU's endorsement, Samuelsen and Utano hosted Kathy Hochul at the TWU's Quill Connolly Day—the first time a governor visited the union hall in 30 years. Local 100 posted photos of the event, including a smiling John Samuelsen standing next to the governor. Both Samuelsen and Utano gave Hochul a standing ovation.

Utano gave Hochul a groveling introduction. Afterwards, Samuelsen gave a speech where he declared: "Certainly, anyone who listens to me—I spend enough time bashing the Democrats because I just don't think that they're doing as much as they can do to advance working people ... But in this case, if it wasn't for the Democrats, half of us would be out of a job. We'd be dead in the water."

Samuelsen lauded Democratic congressional leaders Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer for passing the Payroll Protection Program during the pandemic. Here, his choice of words ("dead in the water") was poorly chosen at best. More than 160 transit workers died in the initial stages of the pandemic due to working with inadequate protections.

At the time, the top legislative priority of Schumer (one of the top Senate recipients of Wall Street campaign donations) and Pelosi (a notorious insider trader worth approximately \$275 million) was rushing through more than \$2 trillion in corporate bailout money.

Samuelsen previously enjoyed extensive ties with former Governor Andrew Cuomo, who pushed through the hated Tier 6 pension system for transit workers and state employees. He was appointed by Cuomo to the MTA's board, a position he still holds to this day.

Samuelsen and the TWU have also offered their backing at times to the Republicans and the fascistic administration of Donald Trump. Samuelsen penned an op-ed in the *New York Daily News* last year backing Trump's pick for Labor Secretary, Lori Chavez-DeRemer, promising the potential for "incredible gains" and claiming, "she will put families' livelihoods ahead of enriching corporations and their lackeys."

Her "incredible gains" before leaving office in April included efforts to rewrite or repeal over 60 workplace regulations. OSHA's penalties for violations of federal labor law dropped a staggering 83 percent in the first nine months

of 2025, while wage theft enforcement cases declined by 97 percent.

Samuelsen was also appointed by Zohran Mamdani to serve on his transition team as a member of the Committee on Transportation, Climate & Infrastructure. Samuelsen's alliance with both is a sign of the seamless integration between the openly right-wing Hochul and the "socialist" Mamdani. He was elected on the basis of deep hatred of capitalism and Wall Street. He has since abandoned all of his campaign promises. He held meetings with Wall Street executives, visited Trump in the White House and entered into open alliance with Hochul, dropping proposals for even modest tax increases on the wealthy.

The issue is not a question of Samuelsen as an individual, and there is nothing about his activities that are unusual by the standards of the union bureaucracy. Rather, its integration with management and government is the logical outcome of its acceptance of the capitalist "right" to profit and, with it, the domination of Wall Street over the working class.

Not one of the demands transit workers are raising can be won without a redistribution of wealth and a direct challenge to the property "rights" of the oligarchy. That requires building the working class as an independent political force.

Attempts to fight union "corruption" while leaving the bureaucracy, and its allegiance to capitalism, intact have produced only new bureaucrats. Samuelsen is the end product of the New Directions caucus, whose local 100 President Roger Toussaint signed an affidavit pledging never to strike again following the 2005 strike. New Directions had collapsed by the time Samuelsen was elected Local 100 president, but he was a member of the caucus.

Transit workers cannot place their fate in the hands of this apparatus. The fight over the contract is a confrontation with the political representatives of the ruling class—the governor, the mayor and a union leadership integrated with both.

As Wednesday's WSWS perspective concluded: "The rank-and-file committees that transit workers build now are the organizational embryo of a broader movement, one that breaks politically from the Democratic Party, rejects every attempt to subordinate workers to Wall Street's 'budget realism,' and takes aim at the wealth and power of the financial oligarchy itself."



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