

“There has to be accountability... You can’t sweep this under the rug”

## Transit workers call for independent investigation into the death of subway conductor Moet McCullum

**Our reporters**  
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Last weekend, WSWs reporters spoke with New York City Transit (NYCT) workers in Brooklyn about the death of their coworker, 41-year-old subway conductor Moet McCullum. A mother of three with only 11 months on the job, McCullum was fatally struck by a moving D train late on September 3 near the 161st Street station in the Bronx while working as a construction flagger on the tracks.

Workers described construction flagging as one of the most dangerous assignments in the subway system. Several condemned the participation of Transport Workers Union Local 100 in the investigation alongside the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), arguing that the agency cannot be relied upon to hold itself accountable, and supported the WSWs’ proposal for an independent investigation conducted by rank-and-file workers.

McCullum’s death comes as more than 40,000 subway and bus workers remain without a contract. Their previous agreement expired May 16, the same day 3,500 Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) workers began a three-day strike against the MTA. Local 100 kept its subway and bus members on the job rather than mobilizing them in a common struggle with the railroad workers. In interviews with the WSWs, transit workers themselves connected the unresolved contract struggle with unsafe conditions, staffing cuts and the need for workers to act independently.

A conductor with two years of service told WSWs reporters, “What has happened [to Moet McCullum] is horrible. There is a need for real change.” He spoke about the dangers of the flagging position and called for an independent rank-and-file investigation by workers themselves.

“It is not fair for the [TWU] union to be investigating her death with the MTA. For safety reasons, service should be

stopped if flaggers are on the tracks. There has to be accountability if someone’s life is taken. You can’t sweep this under the rug. The MTA is not going to blame itself. I think this investigation has to be fair, and workers doing this investigation independently is the only way it will be fair.”

The conductor spoke on the contract struggle. “It would have been a good idea for us to fight alongside the LIRR workers. We are the backbone of New York City. We are the veins that connect New York City. The way all the trains connect the city, we are indispensable.”

Another conductor told WSWs reporters that construction flaggers are randomly selected for the position and that they cannot refuse it. “[Moet] was drafted into [flagging]. She had no choice. She was a newcomer.”

Another employee verified that the flagger selection process is effectively involuntary, commenting, “[y]ou get drafted [into flagging] or there is nothing left to bid on, and you take it.”

Sam, a conductor with four and a half years of service, spoke on the hazards of the job and the role of the union and its collaboration with management. He called for an independent workers’ investigation.

“[Flagging] is the most dangerous job in transit, and Moet McCullum was only on the job for 11 months. I’ve heard about the drafts that they have ... [but] I never had to face it directly myself ... why should this be added to conductors’ work at all?”

“It is not right that the union is investigating this death in partnership with the MTA, because the MTA is not going to hold themselves accountable. The union should be protecting us, not management. So the union here should be protecting our lives and health and holding management accountable ... but they are not. I think a workers’ safety

committee is the only way we will get an independent investigation that will [hold] management responsible.

“I’ve heard they are trying to increase our health premiums in our contract. It seems like the union and the MTA work together like peanut butter and jelly to sandwich us all the time.”

Sam continued on the broader issues across the entire system, including higher workloads and reduced staffing. “They are cutting jobs in transit. They are cutting jobs in Towers. [The ‘Tower’ position] is the next step up for conductors. They operate switches like dispatchers... Tower operators push buttons to line up trains. I don’t know the number, but they are cutting jobs. I paid the \$70 to take the test and passed. They created a list starting with the highest score to take the jobs. After a certain number, they stopped calling people. This was sometime around June. I didn’t hear the union say anything about this.”

On the overall political situation, Sam commented, “I feel like what they say about the working class being abandoned is true. No one cares about the working class. We are the ones struggling to pay our bills. All the politicians, including Mamdani, are out for themselves. What about us, the blue collar workers? What can we do? Some people work overtime and still can’t make ends meet. Prices go up, up, up; while wages are stagnant. There needs to be a complete change.”

He continued, “I think it is crazy we haven’t heard anything about our [contract] for four months. They are trying to demoralize us into accepting a bad contract.”

Nicole, a 20-year transit worker who had worked both as a conductor and as a flagger, spoke along similar lines, denouncing the partnership between the union and the state, as well as the political system which oversees the erosion of safety conditions in the workplace.

“In my view, there was miscommunication at every stage of this because it never should have happened. We have the tools, but this continues to happen. At the first stage, they should have stopped service. I thought that is what they [were] still doing. I’ve done construction flagging in the past. Where we set up flagging, they notify the train crews that are on the tracks, and they temporarily stop service.

“I did Flagging from 2011 to 2014. Stopping service shouldn’t have changed. It should be in effect today. I remember the death of Louis Gray in 2016. One change they made after his death was the point flagger. The point flagger would go to the location they were setting up and tell the train crews. The point flagger is the lookout.

“The D train operator [on the train that struck McCullum] said he knew there were flaggers but didn’t see any personnel or lights, so he thought all was clear... [W]henver you know that flagging is going on, you should stop service

or at least restrict speed. I don’t know if he was told on the radio to slow down.”

Pointing to the hazards of staffing inexperienced employees in dangerous positions, Nicole explained, “[t]his may have been because the [subway train] operator was in probationary status... [T]his shouldn’t happen. We receive construction flagging safety training and certification for construction flagging.”

She continued to comment on the importance of rank-and-file workers communicating with one another. “I speak to my construction flagger co-workers every day. Moet McCullum has a twin sister who is [also] a conductor. We are supporting her now.”

On the union and the New York state administration, Nicole said, “[I]t is not surprising Governor Hochul and the union have said nothing about where the failure is or any safety measures they will take. They won’t say or do anything until a wrongful death lawsuit is filed.

“I don’t like what is happening with the contract either. Four months ago, we didn’t mobilize around the LIRR workers’ struggle and strike. That is why we are in the position we are in today. There could have been a lot more done. They didn’t do anything, and now look where we are.”

Workers themselves must conduct their own investigation into McCullum’s death through independent rank-and-file committees, as the spearhead of a broader inquest into safety across the entire system. Such a struggle also necessitates uniting workers across the entire industry and beyond in the fight for better wages, working hours, conditions and benefits. This requires independence from the Democratic Party, including its “left” variant in the Democratic Socialists of America, as well as the TWU bureaucracy. Workers who want to take up this fight can contact the WSWs to build rank-and-file committees today.



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