Outpouring of sympathy for Moet McCullum, New York City transit worker killed on subway tracks

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Transit workers: Tell us what the conditions are like where you work by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept confidential.

Hundreds of transit workers packed the Lawrence H. Woodward Funeral Home in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn on Friday afternoon and Saturday morning, filling it wall to wall to honor the life of Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) conductor Moet McCullum. The 41-year-old mother of three was struck and killed by a D train on September 3 while working as a construction flagger on the tracks near the 161st Street-Yankee Stadium station in the Bronx.

Workers braved a weekend Noreaster rainstorm that brought flooding across the city to attend the wake and funeral. The overwhelming turnout reflected the deeply felt conviction among transit workers that her death was entirely preventable and due to years of cost-cutting and the erosion of safety standards by MTA management.

Many attendees wore custom-made T-shirts bearing McCullum's image and tributes designed and produced by workers themselves. The Transit Workers Union (TWU) Local 100 union distributed pins bearing the words of Mother Jones, "Mourn for the dead, fight for the living." While TWU honor guards stood watch and wreaths bearing the TWU and TWU Local 100 logos surrounded Moet's casket, the outpouring of sympathy and solidarity from co-workers far outweighed the performance of the union bureaucracy.

The genuine expressions of support extended beyond the funeral home. A GoFundMe organized for McCullum's family two days after her death raised nearly $22,000 from over 260 donations in 22 days. Most contributions were under $100, underscoring that it was rank-and-file workers, not union officials or politicians, who took up the collection to support her family. "No one goes to work expecting not to make it back home to the people who love them," the fundraiser page text stated. "Moet deserved to make it home."

In addition to being a mother, McCullum was also a grandmother, sister and sister-in-law. She left behind her mother Elizabeth, her twin sister Monet McCullum—also an MTA conductor—and three children: 19-year-old twin boys and a 21-year-old daughter with a 2-year-old child of her own. Her brother-in-law, Thomas Tyrell, told the *New York Daily News* in the days after her death, "We just want justice and the truth... There's just no way a person can go to work and just [get] killed at work." Her twin sister wrote on Facebook, "I'm sooo hurt, angry and confused. My heart is literally shattered into pieces."

In the three weeks since McCullum's death, the corporate press has treated the killing as a tragic "accident" to be noted and forgotten, with no serious examination of the conditions that led to this tragedy.

McCullum was only on the job 11 months before her death. She was a conductor by classification but had been assigned additional duties as a flagger, which is widely recognized by transit workers as the most dangerous position in the system. She was setting up colored warning lights on the tracks to alert approaching train operators that workers were on the tracks, when a southbound D train came around the curve and struck her.

Workers have told the WSWS that newly hired employees are routinely drafted into flagging work without adequate training or being told they have the right to refuse. Her death is part of a recurring pattern. In November 2023, Hilarion Joseph, 57, also in his first year on the job, was killed by a northbound D train at 34th Street–Herald Square while flagging for a track-cleaning crew. In November 2016, construction flagger Louis Gray Jr. was killed by a G train in Brooklyn while placing warning lights on a curve.

These deaths occur as thousands of workers are killed on the job every year across the United States. The US Labor Department counted 5,070 fatal workplace injuries in 2024, the last year of available figures. With the Trump administration slashing funding to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and inspections, the toll is set to rise sharply.

TWU Local 100 President John Chiarello attended the wake Friday, telling the gathering, "God needed an angel." The remark, which was dutifully reproduced on the union's social media, completely papers over the injustice of McCullum's death with vague religious nostrums. The union's Instagram post noted that New York State Governor Kathy Hochul, New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, State Attorney General Letitia James, MTA Chair and CEO Janno Lieber and New York City Transit (NYCT) President Demetrius Crichlow "paid their respects." This only underscores the cozy relationship between the union bureaucracy and the very figures responsible for the conditions that killed McCullum.

Each of these officials bears responsibility, and the funeral took

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place in the midst of ongoing contract negotiations that make that responsibility starkly clear. The TWU bureaucracy, working with the Mamdani and Hochul administrations, has kept 40,000 subway and bus workers on the job without a contract since May 15. The suppression of the resistance of transit workers—long one of the most militant sections of the working class in New York City—is aimed at paving the way for sweeping austerity measures aimed not only at transit workers but the whole working class.

Lieber, a Hochul appointee, spoke at a Citizens Budget Commission (CBC) breakfast on September 22, just three days before the wake. He demanded that workers more than double their health insurance contributions from roughly 5 percent to as high as 11 percent, while tightening restrictions on sick leave and overtime eligibility. He described existing work rules as "kooky" and insisted that wage increases must be traded for concessions on healthcare and attendance. The MTA has offered a paltry 2 percent annual raise for workers living in one of the most expensive cities on the planet.

The MTA's operating budget sends roughly $2.9 billion a year, or 13.5 percent of revenues, to principal and interest on Wall Street debt. The agency that killed McCullum is the same that is demanding that her coworkers pay more for their healthcare while it services bondholders.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA), for its part, has been in damage-control mode. After McCullum's death, the FTA threatened to prohibit all subway track work unless the MTA tightened safety protocols. This is a belated gesture from an agency whose own investigators had already documented 38 near misses involving track workers in 2023, up 58 percent from the prior year. The FTA knew conditions were creating a "substantial risk of death or personal injury," yet it took a killing to produce its warning.

Mayor Mamdani, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), has since taking office courted Wall Street, met with Donald Trump three times, most recently hosting him at Gracie Mansion just last week. He has retained billionaire heiress Jessica Tisch as police commissioner, and fired Haitian city workers after the Trump administration revoked their Temporary Protected Status (TPS). Last week, as Netanyahu delivered a genocidal tirade at the United Nations, Mamdani's NYPD arrested over 100 anti-genocide protesters. He has cited New York's Taylor Law, the same anti-strike statute that bars public employees from walking off the job, in suing to block $10,000 bonuses for public school paraprofessionals.

Chiarello, for his part, enforces the same Taylor Law against his own members, keeping workers on the job without a contract and blocking a common strike with 3,500 Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) workers who walked out in May. This has generated widespread opposition to the union apparatus as shown in workers' interviews with the WSWS.

The gulf between the officials' expressions of grief and the sentiments of the rank and file was captured in a comment posted beneath the TWU's Instagram announcement.

It read:

> Respect and condolences to the family but I'm going to say what I have to say. This family should NOT have to have been here today for a service. If only Transit bigwigs and all others involved were proactive instead of reactive, there wouldn't be a need to gather for such a sad event.

The comment named each official in turn, Lieber, Hochul, Crichlow, Mamdani, and Chiarello, and concluded: "This woman's blood is on THEIR HANDS."

Early Sunday morning, the user comment had been marked as "hidden" either by Instagram's algorithm or by the union account itself. By Sunday evening, the union's Instagram post on the funeral had been deleted entirely.

The comment expresses what transit workers have told the WSWS in the three weeks since McCullum's death. Workers have denounced the conditions that led to her death as entirely avoidable, citing faulty radios, poor staffing, inexperienced workers drafted into the most dangerous assignments, and the failure to stop or restrict train service when flaggers are on the tracks. Workers have called for an independent investigation and rank-and-file safety committees.

The hundreds of transit workers who packed the funeral home in Brooklyn understand that McCullum's death was not a mere "accident." It was the product of an agency that prioritizes debt service to Wall Street over worker safety, a union bureaucracy that collaborates with management rather than fighting it, and a political establishment, from Hochul to Mamdani, that serves the financial oligarchy while workers die on the tracks.

The fight for workers' safety requires building independent rank-and-file committees, outside the TWU apparatus and the Democratic Party, to conduct a genuine investigation into McCullum's death. These committees must take up the fight for what workers need: wages that provide a dignified standard of living, benefits that protect their families, and working conditions that do not sacrifice their lives. Workers who want to build the independent investigation and the rank-and-file committees are urged to contact the WSWS today.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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