

Fight the layoffs!

Direct action on the job...

...mass resistance on MUNI!

Stop the fare hike!

A 2005 wildcat social strike on San Francisco's MUNI

MUNI chief Michael Burns wants to fire several hundred MUNI drivers at the end of August – the first mass layoffs in MUNI's history. Burns also wants to impose more mandatory furlough days. Take-aways aimed at employees' health coverage and retirement benefits are being planned as well. *But large-scale on-the-job action, with MUNI riders and drivers acting together, can stop mass layoffs of drivers, sink schemes for a fare hike -- and derail subsequent plans by big business and their stooge Michael Burns to attack MUNI workers...*



CORPORATE AMERICA IN DOWNTOWN SF -- THE REAL FARE EVADER...

Burns says MUNI has a \$57.3 million deficit. This figure is presented in a vacuum, divorced from its social context, as if salaries and petty fare evasion were the cause. The real problem is that mass transit is a jumbo-sized free ride for bosses and billion-dollar corporations. San Francisco's private sector elite refuses to pay for what it squeezes out of MUNI. Running MUNI on the backs of its working class ridership guarantees a permanent fiscal crisis for MUNI -- and an endless series of demands from MUNI bureaucrats for fare hikes, service cuts, and contract concessions from MUNI operators. If MUNI workers don't stop Burns in his tracks right now, the sky's the limit for the stunts he'll try to pull next. And if MUNI riders go along with a fare hike, it will mean that the fare has gone up 50% in two years.

A permanent fiscal crisis is built into the system. And the erosion of working people's conditions of work and life will go on and on if it

isn't stopped by mass resistance. Collective action, on the job, outside of and against the control of the union, is the only way to stop MUNI management's rip-off of riders and drivers. We can all act together against our common enemies, MUNI management, City Hall, and their downtown pals.

WE CAN'T PAY, WE WON'T PAY

In Italy in the 1970's, wage earners and poor people fought back against wildly-inflated prices for goods and services in what became known as the "self-reduction" movement. Whole cities saw a mass refusal to pay increased prices. Bus and streetcar operators in many cities staged on the job wildcat strikes, where they kept transit rolling, but "forgot" to collect any fares. The same has been done in Nantes, France; Hanover, Germany; and Montreal, Quebec. Wildcats of this sort have been called "social strikes;" by avoiding hardship for working people, a social strike creates an immediate bond of solidarity between riders and drivers, often forcing management and politicians to beat a hasty retreat.

A threat of immediate, massive economic damage to the major corporations that own this city will bring attacks on riders and MUNI workers to a screeching halt. In the face of a big action the rich will back down fast.

Let's look at what happened recently in Chicago. In July 2004, the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) announced plans to impose major service cutbacks, beginning at the start of this year. The CTA was also going to jack up fares from \$1.75 to \$2.00, after the fare had just been increased in Jan. 2004 from \$1.50 to \$1.75 (does that sound familiar?) Bureaucrats gave the usual lame excuse -- a budget crisis.

A group called Midwest Unrest began to organize a city-wide fare strike, calling on drivers and riders to act together. They said, *"If drivers stopped collecting fares and riders stopped paying them we would have the economic power to pressure the transit agency without disrupting the daily commutes of all of us who depend on transit service."*

"...we started to flyer the eight bus garages in town, and talk to workers more about a fare strike...the drivers were all pretty pissed and stressed out. They had plenty to tell us about CTA management as well as their union reps...many workers were now telling us we should help them fight the CTA and the union (ATU local 241) at the same time because the union was a part of the company. Of the hundreds of CTA employees we have talked to at bus garages in the past six months, not one of them had anything but contempt for the union. When we brought up the idea for a fare strike, the response was usually quite positive..."

Fight or Walk: the Chicago Transit Fare Strike
at www.midwestunrest.net/fightorwalk

On Dec.15th, the day the fare strike was to begin, the Chicago Sun-Times reported that a deal had been struck with state legislators, and that any further decisions affecting service cuts and fare hikes would be delayed for six months.

The simple threat of a fare strike appears to have played a role in making politicians back off. This is a precedent in San Francisco as well.

Recently in Italy, a fare strike has been staged against the rail company Trenitalia:

"In Bologna, engineers and conductors have grasped the link between the fare strike and the ongoing labor disputes of the railway workers, speaking about it in assemblies and distributing the flyer..."

"This society runs on two tracks: one for the rich and one for the poor. While the trains are not adequate for commuters, stops are discontinued and discomfort increases...they would like to reduce us to nothing more than voters and consumers, but a great force is in our hands. It is up to us to use it.

"The fare strike is spreading to various cities. Let's all participate...the more widespread the strike, the more reasonable the managers will be about the demands and labor disputes of the workers."

from a leaflet distributed by participants in the fare strike, at senzabiglietto@libero.it

LOOK THE OTHER WAY WHEN PEOPLE DON'T PAY

Riders' time on MUNI is part of the time that working people are forced to sell to our exploiters. Paying to ride on mass transit is like having a parking meter mounted on the inside of a jail cell. The rich scum who own this city should be paying for MUNI and its problems, not MUNI riders and employees. In the event of a widespread fare strike, city bureaucrats will have no choice but to

keep MUNI running; the rich cannot conduct business in San Francisco if their employees don't have a transit system to get them to and from work and shopping.

There is a lot of potentially explosive anger in this city over the threat of fare hikes and massive service cuts -- MUNI operators can tap into that, and turn it to the advantage of both MUNI employees and riders. If riders engage in a mass refusal to pay, and drivers engage in a mass refusal to collect, the only ones who will be hurt will be the rich exploiters and politicians who make things rough for all of us. Bosses and politicians' power to mess up our lives is limited by our willingness to go along with their schemes.

MUNI operators have a tremendous potential power in this situation. If you take wildcat mass on-the-job action, characters like Michael Burns will fold -- and they'll have to think twice before trying to impose more layoffs, furloughs, and cuts in MUNI workers' retirement and health benefits.

Today the capitalist system is out to make all of us work harder for less pay -- then work harder still for even less pay, and on and on until we'll all be sleeping on soggy cardboard mats in doorways somewhere. Life under the dictatorship of the market means an unending downward spiral for working people -- until we make a conscious choice to stop playing the game and act around what we need. The rich want us to pay for the problems of their system. Let's return the favor. *It's not our system -- it's not our problem.*

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OUR PASSIVITY =



BOSSES' FAT SALARY

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