

Who Was Looking Out For School Bus Drivers?

International Union Dons Fiddled as Big Apple Local Was 'Fleeced'

Rank-and-file school bus drivers in New York City are publicly blasting the top bosses of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU/AFL-CIO), the largest transit union in America, for long covering up evidence of rampant corruption at 15,000-member, Big Apple-based ATU Local 1181.

Reports of racketeering, extortion, and obstruction of justice by Local 1181 bosses have for years been making headlines in New York City newspapers.

The scandal-plagued union was once again in the news last month after former Local 1181 President Salvatore "Hot Dogs" Battaglia copped to three racketeering counts in a plea deal with Manhattan prosecutors.

In exchange for admitting that he or his accomplices cowed bus owners into making payoffs by threatening to harm them financially or physically, for which he faces a likely sentence of between 57 and 71 months in prison, Mr. Battaglia avoided prosecution on a host of other charges.

For example, Mr. Battaglia and his accomplices allegedly extorted a medical center in Jamaica, N.Y., into providing them with cash payments in exchange for receiving inflated reimbursements from Local 1181's welfare fund.

Former Union Boss Recounts 'Chronology of a Disaster'

Mr. Battaglia's guilty plea shouldn't have surprised anyone who was paying a modicum of attention, argues Eddie Kay, a former union official who is currently assisting rank-and-file Local 1181 members who are seeking to have the local's remaining board members ousted from office.

Mr. Kay points out that Mr. Battaglia was first indicted for obstruction of justice back in the spring of 2005, but was not removed from office by ATU international bosses, as is authorized by the union constitution, for another 17 months.

"These guys [the top ATU brass] waited a year and a half as [Local 1181] continued to be fleeced and disgraced . . .," Mr. Kay told reporter Richard Steier of the *Chief*, a weekly newspaper for New York public employees, in late 2006.

Mr. Kay now adds that a report done by outside attorney Richard Mark at the international ATU's behest, declaring that



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Top ATU bosses let Salvatore "Hot Dogs" Battaglia (right) stay in power until long after he was indicted.

the union was mob-infested and that the remaining board members had refused to appear before him to say what they knew about corruption, was submitted in January 2007.

Mr. Kay explained what happened next in what he calls the "chronology of a disaster" at a protest rally union dissidents held outside Local 1181 headquarters last month:

"What did the International do? They buried the report until May of '07, and then what did they do about it?" "Nothing!" the crowd responded.

"Big Labor apologists insist, naively or cynically, that bosses of big, well-heeled unions like the ATU can be trusted to police their fellow union officers," recalled National Right to Work Committee President Mark Mix.


Union Bosses Can't Be Trusted to Police Themselves

"For example, a recent report issued by the forced dues-funded Center for American Progress in Washington, D.C., vociferously made this claim," Mr. Mix continued.

"But union insiders like Eddie Kay know this is nonsense. In reality, rank-and-file unionists who try to get union bosses who aren't personally on the take to do something about their corrupt colleagues are regularly accused of 'badmouthing' or 'disrespecting' the union.

"Long experience shows union bosses can't be trusted to police themselves. But Congress and state legislatures could strike formidable blows against union corruption by passing a national Right to Work law and more state Right to Work laws.

"National and state Right to Work legislation empower employees to cut off their financial support for a union as soon as they see their money being misspent by a corrupt union boss.

"And that would really give ATU and other union bosses a motive to get more serious about policing corruption within their ranks." 

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