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#MayDay2020 Chris Silvera, Teamsters Local 808 & Million Worker March organizer speaks

written by Struggle - La Lucha
May 2, 2020



Chris Silvera is the Secretary -Treasurer and the Principal Officer of Teamsters Local 808 in Long Island City, New York. Local 808 represents a diverse group of workers including railroad, building maintenance, factory and public sector workers.

In 1982, Silvera and Ozzie LoVerme spearheaded an organizing drive that led their co-workers on Conrail to break away from the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees and join the Teamsters. Chris was then appointed Shop Steward on

Metro North Commuter Railroad in 1983.

Elected to the position of Secretary-Treasurer of Teamsters Local 808, Silvera took office in January 1990 and has been re-elected to that position to the present time. Currently, he is the longest serving principal officer in the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

During a four year long battle with Metro North, Silvera's bargaining and strike strategies led then AFL-CIO President, John Sweeney to comment in 1995 before the Association for a Better New York that Local 808's actions have re-energized the labor movement. In contrast, the MTA referred to Silvera in the New York Times as a labor terrorist. That struggle brought significant wage and benefit improvements to the workers at Metro North. Under Silvera's leadership, Local 808 is a beacon of labor activism and militancy, continuing a history of militancy since the Local was chartered in 1922.

As the leader of Local 808, Silvera is credited with negotiating a groundbreaking "shutdown agreement" with Swingline's parent company, Fortune Brands. This agreement gave the workers extended health coverage and enhanced pension benefits. Swingline workers however were victims of NAFTA and PNTR. In less than 10 years, the company moved from Long Island City to Mexico and then to China.

In 1999, Chris Silvera became the first chairman of the Teamsters National Black Caucus to be elected by membership. As Chairman of the Black Caucus, he was invited to become the Eastern region co-coordinator for the Million Worker March Movement in 2004. The following year he was a convenor of the Millions More Movement where he was one of the speakers. He called for a workers' blockade to force President Bush to rescind his Executive Order. This order suspended the Davis Bacon Act in the rebuilding of the Gulf Coast area in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Eleven days later the President rescinded the Order.

One of the goals of the Million Worker March Movement was to reclaim May Day. This is important in moving the working class back to their roots, an activist, militant movement.

With an effective date of November 1, 2017, a contract was ratified by the members of Teamsters Local 808 that gained them an additional holiday May 1. The holiday became effective in the year 2019. Those members work at Peter Cooper and Stuyvesant Town.

Local 808 continues to work on behalf of its other members in different shops to gain May Day for all of them. We will not switch holidays, we will gain a new holiday. We will reclaim May Day for our corner of the working class.

