



Local 1277

News

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President's report

Thinking About a Dark Day And All the Days Since Then

It was Wednesday, May 26, 2021. It was supposed to be just another workday. Another series of shifts during which our hard-working, skilled, and dedicated brothers and sisters serving the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (SCVTA) and the mass transit-dependent public that relies on its service were set to go about their work in their usual professional way. *Another day on the job, that's all.*

But it *wasn't*, was it? It *wasn't* another day of service and achievement. No, it turned into an obscene, horrifying day of terror, heartbreak, and loss. It was a Pearl Harbor and 9/11 attack on our brothers, our sister Union, ATU Local 265, our sense of safety and everyday normality, *and on the very fabric of our lives.*

The senseless, completely unprovoked attack that took the lives of *eight* ATU brothers, along with an AFSCME brother, brought home to Local 265's members and their families—to *all of us* in the coast-to-coast and Canadian ATU family—the harsh, bleak reality of life in 2021 America and, by extension, the rest of the world.

First, we bow our heads and remember:

- **Abdolvahab Alaghmandan, 63**
- **Adrien Balleza, 29**
- **Alex Ward Fritch, 49**
- **Jose DeJesus Hernandez, III, 35**
- **Lars Kepler Lane, 63**
- **Paul Delacruz Megia, 42 (AFSCME)**
- **Timothy Michael Romo, 49**
- **Michael Joseph Rudometkin, 40**
- **Taptejdeep Singh, 36**

Rest in eternal peace, brothers.

What Created May 26?

Of course, there was the sadly misguided, lost individual who planned his deadly mission and pulled the trigger. Why did he do it? We'll never know. Was it because of an out-of-control state of depression? A dissatisfaction with his job, his co-workers, his life in general? We'll never really know.

What we *can* pretty well know is this: *Violence has become an all-too pervasive part of American society and life.* And that depressing fact certainly *didn't* begin right before May 26, 2021. Violence, an attitude of “might make right”,

has been in human beings forever, and a factor in American life since there *was* an America. After all, our country was born in violent revolution against a colonial occupier.

As I noted last year (see July 2021 paper), I am *not* commenting on Second Amendment rights or the on-going, passionate debate over “gun control” or what kind of weapons should be allowed in people's hands. I fully realize that millions of Americans, including, I am sure, many thousands of ATU brothers and sisters, are legal and responsible gun owners.

But I am sure that even the most avid gun-rights supporter must realize that we are more than just armed to the teeth: We are flooded with *hundreds of millions* of firearms throughout our country. Many are illegally bought and sold. And many—*far too many*—are military-grade, mass-killing guns which simply do not belong in the hands of civilians. This isn't an anti-gun, anti-Second Amendment protest; it is a simple, undeniable—and deadly—fact.

The problem with all these guns, with too many in the wrong hands, is that it heightens another series of national realities: *The alienation, despair, and subsequent violent reaction to those factors by more and more people.*

People are Losing Their Grip

Even before the Covid pandemic, more and more Americans have come to feel “left out” and ignored by their political leaders. They have seen their jobs, lives, and futures upended by new technology, and changing social and political values, economic uncertainty and upheaval. They have felt useless and unappreciated. They see no positive way forward. So besides being disappointed and depressed, they become something else: *Desperate.*

Mix desperation and access to firearms, and you get violence. Mindless, lashing-out-at-everybody-and everything violence that turns into school massacres, racial tensions, and law-enforcement overreactions, political deadlock/inaction and rioting (January 6, 2021), and...the tragedy of May 26 at the SCVTA Guadalupe Yard.

If people feel betrayed—by their elected officials, by economic and social injustice and inequality, and by a world they can no longer control or understand (a deadly, global pandemic, a brutal, senseless European war, income inequality, with the rich getting richer, more intolerant, and arrogant, and never-ending religious and sectarian fighting throughout the world), then their depression too often turns to despair, and despair to violence.

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As noted in the July 2021 paper, I certainly do *not* have the expertise to speculate about either mental health in general or, more specifically, the personal demons that drove this broken man to commit his atrocity against our brothers. Clearly, he was driven by impulses (perhaps from outside sources, perhaps from some inner motives, perhaps from both) to do what he did.

We don't know. We never will.

May 26 and Today's Reality

The despair and desperation that dominates too many American lives comes from many sources. Think about the tens of millions of working people and families—unionized and non-union—and the crises they face every day, real bread-and-butter, kitchen-table problems like providing shelter (rents and mortgages), adequate, affordable medicine and overall healthcare, food, financial security, their children's education, care for elderly family members, and so on.

Added to this mix of vitally important considerations is a spreading, nationwide fear of violent crime (almost weekly mass shooting, it seems), inadequate law enforcement, and a seeming failure to hold offenders accountable for their misdeeds. Throw in the out-of-control number of firearms—legal and otherwise—and the terrifying availability of military-grade weapons, and most people rightly are afraid of how devastating these guns can be when held in the wrong hands.

People are uneasy. For many reasons. It's as simple—and frightening as that. And when people are scared or feel they have nothing to lose or even *something good to live for*, they react, too often violently.

Finally, consider another reason for people's anxiety: Our political system is broken. Beyond repair? I don't know. I certainly hope not. But when our elected officials—at all levels of government—can't agree on basic, commonsense legislation that is vital for the economic, safety and social well-being of the people they are supposed to represent, then we are in trouble.

Benjamin Franklin, the revered Revolutionary-Era statesman and thinker, when asked by a citizen, what kind of government are you giving us, replied, a Republic, if you can keep it. In today's United States, we have a Democracy...*if we can keep it*. If we can keep it safe from political lies and posturing, from ambitious politicians who care nothing about principles, values, progress, and morality, and reckless "leaders" who praise and promote intolerance and con millions of people into believing their twisted, false version of reality.

No, gun control, even if adequate and enforced would not likely have stopped the May 26 massacre. Even a greatly troubled individual could find a gun somewhere.

But maybe, just maybe, an easing of fears, a return to civil dialogue and, yes, even civil disagreement, might make it a bit harder, or less compelling. For another despairing, troubled person to plan and execute another May 26 tragedy.

We can only hope and pray so. And work to make people less fearful.

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Notes from the Front Line

Riverside School District employees join our sister Union, ATU Local 1756 (Arcadia). Fed up with shabby treatment and disrespect from their employer, First Student, employees *overwhelmingly* voted to unionize. **Welcome!**

Further, Riverside School District bus employees were very impressed with Local 1756's skill and determination in securing a strong contract at First Student's facilities in Corona/Norco and Alvord. Working with the ATU International's experienced Organizing Department, Local 1756 member/organizers talked with bus employees about the benefits of joining a union and the power of collective bargaining and security.

"We are so happy to welcome these new members in our Union," said Local 1756 President Lorence Bradford. *"We are looking forward to working with these new members to bring them strong on-the-job protections, a fair seniority system, livable wages, and affordable healthcare."*

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Brother Calvin Wong's Achievements **Learning and Growth**

By Art Aguilar - President, Local 1277



Recently, I met with Brother Calvin Wong, an outstanding Maintenance Specialist Leader at LACMTA to discuss the extraordinary strides he has made in his career. He told me that a lot of his success is due to his membership in our Union. Further, I am pleased to report that Brother Wong's achievements have been recognized in the May 20, 2022, edition of the national ATU on-line newsletter.

He told me that, as an MTA and union member, he has been given many opportunities to succeed over the past 10 years.

"I began my career at Division 8, Chatsworth, as a Service Attendant, fueling and cleaning buses along with my union brothers and sisters. After finishing my probation period, I began taking electrical and automotive at the local community college, with the goal of becoming a bus mechanic. Attending school after work was made possible by MTA's Tuition

Reimbursement Program and the then four-day, 10-hour schedules .”

“Within a short time,” Brother Wong noted, “I was able to promote to Mechanic C, where I got to work on the buses I had previously fueled and cleaned at Division 15, Sun Valley. I found it exciting to work with a new set of friends; that experience created a lot of very nice memories.”

Calvin originally thought that he’d ultimately retire as a Mechanic, until co-workers around him began leaving Division 15 to join the Los Angeles Metro Rail Department as Maintenance Specialists who work on the light and heavy rail coaches. *“I applied, tested and, at first, failed to qualify as a Specialist. So, I simply studied harder at community college, building up my skill set so I could join my friends.”*

“Finally,” he continued, “I was able to join my co-workers as Division 11, Long Beach, working on light-rail coaches. Since I had never stopped my schooling and desire to learn more, I was able to earn my Digital Electronics Certificate while working at night.”

With the opening of Phase 2 of the Expo Line, Brother Wong and his fellow co-workers found that they had an unusual opportunity to start up a division from scratch and set up both the working atmosphere and conditions at the new site. *“I tested for Shift Leader because I wanted to impart to others my work experience at other divisions and my experiences with management, so we could build a great work environment,”* he said.

“Thanks to everyone at Expo Line, we have been rated Division of the Year four times out of the past six years,” Calvin noted with pride. *“I have continued to attend school at the vocational college, earning my certificate in rail-vehicle maintenance. When I can, I volunteer time tutoring student at Los Angeles Trade Technical College, encouraging students to enter a public-transportation career.”*

Above and Beyond

Because of MTA’s Career Pathway and strong, continuing help from ATU Local 1277 whenever he needed it, Brother Wong has been fortunate to reach some other goals.

He was one of just a few front-line employees to be part of the *First Leadership Academy*, a 12-month program that helps one understand the complete business of LACMTA and the overall transportation industry. Following that, Brother Wong was able to represent the ATU as the first contract member to attend the William Phelps Eno Multi-Agency Exchange Program. *“This Program allows transit employees to visit other public-transit agencies to share ideas on efficient and safe worksite practices. I offered my front-line work experience to management at other agencies and also learned to see problems from management’s point of view.”*

“I have been able to team up with my Division 24 brothers so we could compete at the American Public

Transportation Association’s (APTA) International Rail Rodeo in Toronto,” Calvin told me. *“We placed for rail maintainers. Additionally, I had the chance to “shadow” our Rail Fleet Service Senior Executive Officer so I could learn about daily operations in Rail Fleet Management.”*

Brother Wong has worked with MTA union and nonunion departments to help advance women in our workplaces and industry. *“Because of my schooling, I was awarded the American Public Transportation Foundation Scholarship, which enabled me to earn a Master of Science in Transportation Management from San Jose State University, which I will receive later this year. Further, I am in the new APTA Emerging Leaders Program, discussing electronic vertical take-off and landing aircraft’s future as a contributor to the public-transportation network.”*

Summing up, Calvin emphasized this point: *“None of the above would have been possible without my union brothers and sisters who have helped me along every step of the way in my career. They have inspired me continue to better myself every day. I thank my Union, ATU Local 1277, for all the help it has given me, and I hope I can share my experience and knowledge with the next generation as I continue to grow in my own career.”*

Congratulations, Brother Calvin Wong, on your outstanding career, and continuing efforts to better yourself, your co-workers, and the critical profession you serve so well!

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Drug and alcohol testing **An Important, Friendly Reminder**

By John DiRito
Executive Board Member-at-Large

Good morning, afternoon, and evening, brothers and sisters. As always, I hope this newsletter finds you and your family well. If you are reading our fine periodical, chances are you perform (or did perform) some function of safety-sensitive duty in the transportation industry.

Some 30 years ago, the federal government recognized that there are several industries that in their core function would require a level of safety not only for the employees at the workplace, but for the mass transit-dependent public they serve as well. From this, was born the Omnibus Transportation Employee Testing Act, which was passed by Congress in 1991. In 1994, the alcohol-testing regulations added to the Act by the Department of Transportation (DOT).

These two sets of regulations are an important part of our society, as they are the groundwork for providing safety. They also are also important when it comes to understanding how they impact your workplace. *Every transit agency is required to test their employee force by the standards set forth by the DOT and Federal Transit Administration (FTA).* This

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results in what we commonly refer to as “random testing”. Unfortunately, even though most of you understand that this testing occurs and is necessary, some of our brothers and sisters don’t always get that they need to comply with *all* testing procedures and, as well, what the consequences are when they don’t!

Ground Rules

The DOT will only accept a urine sample as a test specimen to determine if there is drug use within your system. Likewise, a breathalyzer is currently the only test accepted to determine alcohol levels present at the time of testing. Please don’t make the mistake of thinking you have a chance to rectify a positive random test by going to your personal doctor, or that you don’t have to submit to the clinic’s procedures by saying, “I will do it later.”

Remember, failure to provide a sample, leaving the facility before providing a sample, or simply not showing up to the testing site will result in your termination! Many people will instinctively come up with “what-ifs”, other excuses and

sometimes even a refusal to test based on principle or pride.

Don’t go there!

Case in point, if the clinic technician receives your sample and determines that there is an issue with color, temperature, or amount, he or she can request you retest right then and there *and more than likely under observation*. Yes, that is correct, you will have a clinical-staff person of the same gender accompany you while you provide a second sample. Again, these guidelines are set forth by the DOT and FTA. They require your cooperation to remain employed in your position. And you owe it, not only to your own good health, but to the countless mass-transit riders who rely on your *substance-free ability* to do your job and do it well.

As we have often preached about questionable situations that come up, “Do now and grieve/or complain later.” It is much easier to rectify a poor or procedurally incorrect process, than it is to get your job back because you failed to provide a federally mandated sample!

To be continued in July

**Seventeen Local 1277 members have retired from MTA after productive careers.
They were hardworking employees and loyal members of our Union.**

Seventeen Local 1277 Members Retire from Careers at MTA

Eldar De Leon, Painter A, CMF, September 28, 2021, 10 years; **Eric Urena**, Signal Inspector, Signals/Rail, November 15, 24 years; **Vernell Lewis**, Mechanic A, Division 18, December 11, 46 years; **Jesse J. Quezada**, Sr. Service Attendant, Division 4, December 24, 31 years; **Roshaun Malone**, Sr. Service Attendant, Division 8, January 2, 2022, 12 years; **Jorge Hernandez**, Painter, Facility Maintenance, January 22, 17 years; **John Rodriguez, Jr.**, Maintenance Specialist, Division 24, January 23, 26 years; **Ernesto Gudino**, Mechanic A, Division 18, February 4, 40 years; **Michael Lajoie**, Mechanic A, Division 13, February 4, 25 years; **Manuel Martinez**, Mechanic A, Division 18, February 4, 38 years;

Robert Cheney, Mechanic A, Division 9, February 19, 30 years; **Michael Llamas**, Sr. Service Attendant, Division 18, February 19, 23 years; **Kon Pan**, Maintenance Specialist, Red Line Maintenance, February 19, 23 years; **Fernando Manlutac**, Signal Inspector, Signals/Rail, February 25, 22 years; **Jesus Bautista**, Facility Systems Technician, Facility Maintenance, February 28, 24 years; **Siu Wong**, Rail Warranty Equipment Maintenance Specialist, Rail WEM, March 1, 10 years, and **Amir Tahvildaran**, Maintenance Specialist, Blue Line Maintenance,

**Local 1277's Executive Board and members wish these brothers and sisters
long, enjoyable and healthy retirements. They will be missed!**

Here are the upcoming Local 1277 membership meetings for June and July. Please make every attempt to attend the meeting for your unit. It's your Union, and we need your participation at our meetings! All members will receive credit for the meetings.

Tuesday, June 7:	Los Angeles area members:
Tuesday, July 5:	L.A. Building Trades Council, 1626 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles. Morning Session 10:00 a.m. Evening Session 5:00 p.m.
Wednesday, June 8:	Metrolink Unit members:
Wednesday, July 6:	Local 1277 Office, 1744 North Main Street. Morning Session 8:30 a.m. Evening Session 5:00 p.m.
Wednesday, June 8:	Riverside area members:
Wednesday, July 6:	IELC Building, 1074 E. La Cadena Dr., Riverside. Morning Session 10:00 a.m. Afternoon Session 3:00 p.m.
Thursday, June 9:	SunLine area members:
Thursday, July 7:	Hilton Palm Springs, 400 East Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs. Morning Session 10:00 a.m. Afternoon Session 4:00 p.m.
Thursday, June 9:	Long Beach area members:
Thursday, July 7:	LBFA Local 372, 2201 Cherry Avenue, Signal Hill CA 90755. Morning: 10:00 a.m. Afternoon: 3:00 p.m. Evening: 6:00 p.m.