

# a certainty

**W**ILLIE CASIANO and his fellow union members tried to keep warm over a trash-can fire yesterday morning while they walked the picket line outside the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's sprawling train-overhaul shop at 207th St. in Inwood.

Down at City Hall, Mayor Bloomberg was blasting the members of Transport Workers Union Local 100 as greedy, as thugs and criminals for daring to walk off the job for a decent contract, for creating massive inconvenience to subway and bus riders.

There is, of course, never a good time for any strike.

The timing was especially tough for Casiano, who landed his mechanic's job at the MTA after the 1980 transit strike.

On Monday, his doctor broke the news that the cancer in Casiano's spine had spread to his lung. He's already endured months of grueling chemotherapy. Now he faces applying to the MTA for disability.

What happened to this sick worker and to so many other employees at the MTA is as much the reason for this strike as a wage increase, pension or health care benefit.

"Ever since I started missing work for chemo treatments, my supervisor's been accusing me of chronic sick-leave abuse," Casiano said.

Nelson Rivera, shop chairman for the 300 mechanics and car cleaners at 207th St., says Casiano is not the only worker penalized for illness. Another mechanic with 30 years on the job recently had a heart operation.

"When the guy came back to work, the MTA demoted him to security guard instead of giving him light duties," Rivera said. "Since then, he's been disciplined twice and is now facing a possible dismissal in 30 days."

Local 100 President Roger Toussaint has repeatedly complained that the MTA issued a phenomenal 15,000 disciplinary actions against his members last year.

When so many workers are being punished and harassed daily by management, something is deeply wrong with the people at the top of that agency.

"We've been fed up with the MTA and wanted a strike for years," Rivera said. "But until

Roger got elected, no union leader dared to stand up to management."

All across this city, workers who have no pensions and who must pay huge premiums for health insurance hear about transit workers fighting to preserve pensions at 55 and employer-paid health insurance. They fall prey to the Bloomberg line of "greedy workers."

Have the rest of us been beaten down, exploited and abused for so long by our own employers that we will allow transit workers who dare to defend their standard of living to be

**JUAN GONZALEZ**



Painted as thugs?

To hear Bloomberg talk, the Taylor Law came down with the Ten Commandments — and wasn't a modern concoction by politicians to curb the power and influence of our city's municipal unions.

The mayor apparently wants Toussaint and the TWU to accept a two-tier pension system. Then he can get all the municipal unions to follow suit and accept a weak new pension tier in their next contracts.

Even then-Mayor Ed Koch, who presided over the 1980 strike, later admitted in his autobiography how worried he was that then-Gov. Hugh Carey and Richard Ravitch, the MTA chairman at the time, would set a pattern in their contract with the TWU that other city workers would want.

But Koch at least had the courage to act like a leader, not a bully. He went to the talks being conducted and urged round-the-clock negotiations.

Bloomberg and Gov. Pataki stay far away from the talks, but behind the scenes they order their messenger, Peter Kalikow, not to give any more ground to Toussaint and the workers.

Tragically, there was no need for this strike. Not with a \$1 billion surplus at the MTA. The agency's arrogant managers figured they could keep abusing their workers forever. They figured wrong.

For Casiano and his fellow transit workers, no matter what happens, no matter how much they end up paying in fines, the MTA and the leaders of this city will never treat them the same way again.

[jgonzalez@nydailynews.com](mailto:jgonzalez@nydailynews.com)