

## Drivers' Strike is a Success

San Diego Taxi Drivers were hit hard by the falling economy. Fewer visitors to the city meant less business overall, compounded by illegal competition by charter busses and TCPs. With lease prices higher than New York City, drivers working more than 12 hours in a shift might take home less than \$5 per hour. Thousands of diverse

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**UTWSD drivers communicate their lack of voice at a Metropolitan Transit Systems (MTS) Board meeting.**

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### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Looking back over the past year, there were many firsts for UTWSD. It was formed for the following reasons: high lease amounts, no health insurance, sick leave, or vacation, deteriorating and unsafe vehicles, harassment by police officers and MTS officials, escalated retaliations for the strike, excessive ticketing, a hostile and belittling attitude and treatment by officials. There was also a need for driver advocacy, education, organizing, and

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## United Taxi Workers San Diego is Born!

In February 2010, a core group of leaders from the taxi drivers' strike formed an organization to keep up the momentum of bringing the drivers together to fight for drivers' rights and a better, more equitable taxi industry. Patterned after groups in major cities nationwide, this became United Taxi Workers of San Diego. Although we are still in the process of building a foundation, we have already made many accomplishments in our two major areas of work: *professional development* for drivers and *advocacy and organizing* to improve the safety and viability of the taxi industry.

The mission and vision of UTWSD are both broad and relevant. In the short term, drivers need advocacy in working conditions that minimize take home income, increase work hours, and offer no job security. Contracts give lease drivers little voice in the face of rising costs, under-regulated vehicle safety, and punishment for speaking out when treated unfairly. Police and MTS officials developed a reputation for their hostile and belittling attitude and harassment through excessive ticketing and confiscation of sheriff licenses. In the longer term, drivers need an equitable, functional, and non-corrupt industry that provides them meaningful voice and opportunities for ownership.

Since the 2009 strike, UTWSD has assisted more than 500 drivers with claims, grievances, and individual situations, improved cooperation with M.T.S., earned recognition from City Council Members Todd Gloria and Marti Emerald, and other public officials, and coordinated legal representation for taxi drivers.

Our goals for 2011 include establishing the foundations of our organization. We work to:

- Build a self-sustaining membership base
- Board development
- Solidify business plan to increase effectiveness
- Expand network of supporters to ensure high-level professional services are available to drivers and their families

We also seek improvements to the industry:

- Increased driver representation on the Taxi Advisory Committee (see article on page 3)
- Oversight on enforcement of Ordinance 11
- Streamlining financial services to increase drivers' income

Empowerment. UTWSD has improved some of these conditions. Yet some of the conditions still do exist. So we need driver participation. We all know there's no drivers' voice in policy and planning. So, first we have to acknowledge and identify the problem we face—to admit we need to change and plan to change. If we fail to participate, we plan to fail! A healthy process of change requires planning and developing concrete milestones to measure our progress, and collective action to change the taxi industry. The lease agreement has been tested and we went to small claims court. But the judge did not respond to the "unconscionable contract" argument and sent us to arbitration. UTWSD is not resting. We are taking this to a higher court. My advice to all members and non-members is to get connected in order to build a strong and positive relationship with UTWSD. This supports our cause. Volunteer! Get involved! Join today! UTWSD fights for better treatment for taxi drivers in San Diego.

*We are not alone. We have rights!*

-Mikail Hussein, President

## EIN: Employee ID Numbers

An EIN is issued by the IRS to identify businesses, nonprofits, and trusts primarily for tax purposes. It is a nine-digit number in the format 00-0000000. When an IRS form asks for a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN), most businesses will enter their EIN, while individuals generally enter their Social Security Number.

Taxi drivers don't have to give their Social Security Number because they are self

employed or independent contractors. For your protection you should use your EIN.

Furthermore, the IRS requires you to issue a 1099-MISC if you paid \$600 or more to an individual or business for rent, services, royalties, or other various fees during the tax year. Request your company's EIN so you can report lease fees and any other payments you made to them in 2011.

**"A friend of mine worked last Sunday, and at the end of the shift he had \$12. That's a dollar an hour." –Ken Ifekam**

### Drivers Strike is a Success Continued from page 1

refugee and immigrant families who depended upon this income—with an estimated 75% of the city's 1,500 drivers being East African—found their opportunity to survive and to

organized a spontaneous strike in the days leading up to Christmas 2009. An estimated 300 striking drivers spoke on the over-enforcement of regulations on drivers, the failure to enforce regulations for owners, the virtual monopoly enjoyed by some owners, and black-



**Hundreds of drivers rally in downtown San Diego, Dec 2009.**

contribute to society sharply reduced.

With no healthcare, no vacation or sick leave, no job security, no protection from harassment for speaking out, and no voice drivers

market operations of the taxicab industry, and the mean-spiritedness of public officials who refused to recognize the dignity and rights of drivers. The drivers broke the strike just before New Year's Eve to restore their crucial service when the public was in greatest need.

The 12-day strike was a success! Several taxicab company owners temporarily reduced their lease prices, the broader public became aware of the plight of the drivers, leaders emerged from among the drivers to build on their self-empowerment, and supporters rallied behind the leaders to bring organizational expertise in workers rights and legal advocacy to all drivers.

The hard work still lies ahead. Retaliation and



**Strike spokesperson Ken Ifekam addresses the press.**

blackballing of strike leaders and the again-rising costs of leases have not fixed the core issues, and in fact have compounded them. What the strike has made clear is that the drivers are the most dedicated leaders who are committed to bring about fair

**"The hard work still lies ahead."**

enforcement, equity, transparency, and collaboration for the overall improvement of taxi industry for everyone: the drivers and their families, the owners and their families, the public transportation officials, and most importantly the customers whose mobility and safety depend on exceptional and efficient taxi service. The strike set these improvements in motion, and now we must continue working for the benefit of all.



**Striking drivers speak out for opportunity.**

# Taxicab Advisory Committee

## A Primer for Drivers

The Taxicab Advisory Committee or TAC was established in September 1994 to provide feedback and direction for Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) board action on taxi-related concerns. The TAC reviews administrative hearings on penalties to owners and drivers, owner's grievances, customer complaints, vehicle inspection criteria, and MTS's work program concerning taxicab matters.

The TAC has 17 members—one each from the MTS Board, the San Diego Convention and Visitor's Bureau, the San Diego Regional Airport, the San Diego Chamber of Commerce, and the San Diego

Convention Center; two members appointed as hotel-motel representatives, nine owners, and one driver. Each serves a three-year term.

Since March 2010, UTWSD representatives have spoken at 5 TAC meetings. Our purpose has been to improve the taxi industry by 1) *increasing drivers' voice* through recognition of our organization and proposing changes to the composition of the TAC for increased driver participation, 2) *protecting business* through regulation of lease prices, vehicle safety, and illegal competition by charter vehicles, busses, and

TCPs, 3) *protecting drivers from retaliation* by owners, and 4) *challenging MTS's* lack of professionalism and oversight, and equal enforcement of Ordinance 11.

As you can see, the TAC greatly impacts the future of the drivers. UTWSD will continue to fight for these improvements, and all drivers need to show their support. If you show up, the meeting is only 1 hour or less. Drivers do not have to speak, but UTWSD and its partners will speak on your behalf. But your participation is needed, as when we show up in large numbers our efforts have more weight and get support more easily. We all know there is not enough drivers' voice in policy and planning. We have to participate in every meeting as it concerns our well being. If we fail to participate, we plan to fail. UTWSD believes change is coming, through the TAC. If you believe the same join us, and attend TAC meetings. We are not alone, we have rights!

**Next TAC Meeting:**  
Friday, June 17, 2011  
9am. 1255 Imperial Ave,  
10<sup>th</sup> Floor.

## ADVOCATE SPOTLIGHT

### Peter Zschiesche, *Employee Rights Center*

United Taxi Workers of San Diego is proud to honor Peter Zschiesche, Executive Director of the Employee Rights Center, for his inspirational dedication to the drivers and taxi industry.



Since day one, Peter and the ERC have been more than allies. The legal and technical support, consulting, and building of a resource network Peter has initiated has amounted to more than 2,000 hours of in-kind professional service. Peter and ERC staff have contributed to dialogue on fair treatment, policy analysis, and legal advocacy. A strong drivers' voice in political arenas, ERC has helped to ensure the drivers' legal rights are protected.

*The Employee Rights Center's mission is to provide education and advocacy to all workers, especially disadvantaged workers, regarding their workplace rights and benefits, as well as their immigration status. Since 1999 the center has been training law student volunteers to provide over 10,000 hours yearly to our low income immigrant communities in need of legal assistance.*



**UTWSD and partners speak at the Taxicab Advisory Committee meeting.**

# Upcoming Events

**April 28 – ERC May Day Event.** 5:00-7:30p. Alhambra Room at the Prado in Balboa Park

**May 17 – UTWSD Information Session.** 3:00p. 7364 El Cajon Blvd. Ste 108 San Diego, CA 92115

**June 21 – UTWSD Information Session.** 3:00p. 7364 El Cajon Blvd. Ste 108 San Diego, CA 92115

**Taxicab Advisory Committee**  
1255 Imperial Ave,  
10<sup>th</sup> Floor  
San Diego, CA 92101

**Meeting Dates for 2011:**  
•Friday, June 17, 9am  
•Friday, September 23, 9am  
•Friday, December 16, 9am

**Metropolitan Transit System**  
1255 Imperial Ave,  
Suite 1000  
San Diego, CA 92101

**Board Meeting Dates for 2011**  
•Thursday, April 28, 9am  
•Thursday, May 12, 9am  
•Thursday, May 26, 9am  
•Thursday, June 9, 9am  
•Thursday, June 23, 9am  
•Thursday, July 14, 9am  
•Thursday, August 18, 9am  
•Thursday, September 15, 9am  
•Thursday, October 13, 9am  
•Thursday, October 27, 9am  
•Thursday, November 10, 9am  
•Thursday, December 8, 9am

**United  
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Workers**  
of SAN DIEGO

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## Mission:

The mission of UTWSD is to unify taxicab workers, to improve working conditions through direct advocacy and empowerment, to increase education and civic participation by taxi drivers and their families, and to improve professional transportation services for San Diego communities and visitors.

## Vision:

We envision a driver-led taxi industry that provides exceptional, efficient, and safe service for residents and visitors, and that meets the comprehensive and diverse needs of taxi drivers and their families. We envision a professional working environment free from humiliation, intimidation, discrimination, and exploitation. We envision UTWSD providing strong and representative leadership in this healthy, productive, and inclusive taxi industry.