



# Transport Workers Union of America, AFL-CIO

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International Administrative  
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International Administrative  
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***"AMERICA'S FIGHTING DEMOCRATIC UNION"***

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May 6, 2024

Minouche Shafik  
President  
Columbia University  
202 Low Library, Mail Code 4309  
New York, NY 10027

Dear President Minouche Shafik,

I'm writing about the appalling mistreatment of Transport Workers Union members, including at least two Custodians who were held against their will, when protesters stormed Hamilton Hall on April 30.

Columbia University epically failed to protect the safety of these university employees, who were forced to fight their way out of the building. Columbia also failed a TWU-represented Security Officer who was subjected to verbal abuse by aggressive and threatening protesters who broke into the building.

There is no doubt that the university was aware that outside agitators were operating on campus and posed an increased risk to university employees, yet the university continued to assign their work routines as if it was "business as usual."

Columbia knew, or should have known, that there would be an attempt to occupy a campus building and that Hamilton Hall would for historical reasons be a prime target, as protesters have occupied and blockaded this building in the past. Your negligence as an employer is largely responsible for the dangerous situation and debacle which unfolded for TWU members in your employ.

At the moment Hamilton Hall was breached, TWU Security Officers and Custodians were performing the work assigned to them inside the building. The Custodians directly informed the occupiers that they wished to immediately leave the building and were informed by at least one smarmy, sanctimonious, elitist, shite occupier, in a direct reference to the Gaza protests and subsequent occupation of Hamilton Hall, that there was no chance of leaving because "this moment is bigger than you." The Custodians then had to courageously fight their way towards one of the exits (photos enclosed), which were barricaded from within, and escape out of the building.

The TWU Security Officer, an African-American woman, managed to leave the building before the barricades went up. But she remains shaken by her encounter with the occupying protesters (aka privileged kids) who verbally attacked her in a very aggressive and extremely offensive manner.

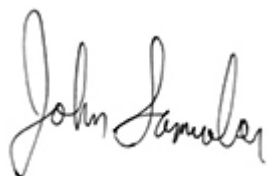
President Shafik, imagine for a moment being in the boots of the blue-collar Custodians and Security Officer. They came to work to earn a day's pay so they could take care of their families and ended up being held against their will while being subjected to physical and verbal abuse. Imagine yourself coming to work and being the victim of a serious crime because Columbia University didn't care enough about you to engage in common sense protective measures.

Transport Workers Union members, and all workers, should be able to come to work each day without fear of getting dragged into factional, ideological, and dangerous political contention, nor should they ever be put in situations where your students, or those you allow to be on Columbus University property, verbally, physically or emotionally torment them. Shame on you and on Columbus University that you allowed your employees to suffer these indignities.

In response to the egregious acts committed against our members, the TWU demands the following information:

- 1) The names of the occupiers arrested inside Hamilton Hall.
- 2) Access to the CCTV footage from Hamilton Hall during the relevant period of time.
- 3) Directives/information provided to Columbia by the NYPD and/or other law enforcement bodies regarding the composition of protesters.
- 4) An Immediate meeting with you and my office regarding mitigation steps necessary to avoid future placement of members in harm's way if the protests resume, and recompense to the TWU members who were subjected to this despicable conduct.

Sincerely,



John Samuelson, International President  
Transport Workers Union

cc: Alex Molina, President, TWU Local 241  
Liz Shuler, President, AFL-CIO  
Mario Cilento, President, NYS AFL-CIO  
Vincent Alvarez, President, NYC CLC