

COVID-19 and the New York City Subway System

by Phillip W. Weiss

Because of the COVID-19 crisis, on April 29, 2020, the governor of the state of New York, Andrew Cuomo, ordered the entire New York City subway system to be shut down for four hours a night in order to “disinfect” the subway cars. This is a sweeping and unprecedented action, and one that is long overdue. Yet, the action does not go far enough. The governor should also ask the federal government to declare the entire New York City subway system a combat zone and deploy combat infantry personnel to patrol the entire subway system until such time that the city and state can adequately police the subway system which to date, despite the threat posed to national security in the post-9-11 era, is woefully, dangerously, and pathetically under-policed. Further, the governor should ask the state legislature to enact a law requiring every elected official in the city and state of New York to take an oath specifically swearing or affirming their commitment to protect the public, ensure public safety and prevent the New York City subway system, which is the largest city-based mass transit system in the United States and an integral part of the nation’s mass transit network, from being used for purposes for which it was not intended.

Governor Cuomo’s decision to curtail subway service is directly attributable to poor management of the system which allowed sewer-like conditions to develop, fester, and worsen. Such negligence is a disgrace and because of it the public now must put up with a reduction in mass transit service

that is supposed to be provided around-the-clock. Even with the system shut down for four hours per night, the record of failure to maintain satisfactory conditions in the subway engenders no confidence in any official pronouncements that the sanitization of the subway system will actually be DONE or if done, done thoroughly, efficiently, cost-effectively, and correctly. The overt negligence that allowed conditions in the subway to deteriorate to such alarming levels gives cause to consider two options: either placing the New York City subway under direct federal control or fully privatizing the system and thereby getting the government out of the transportation business altogether.

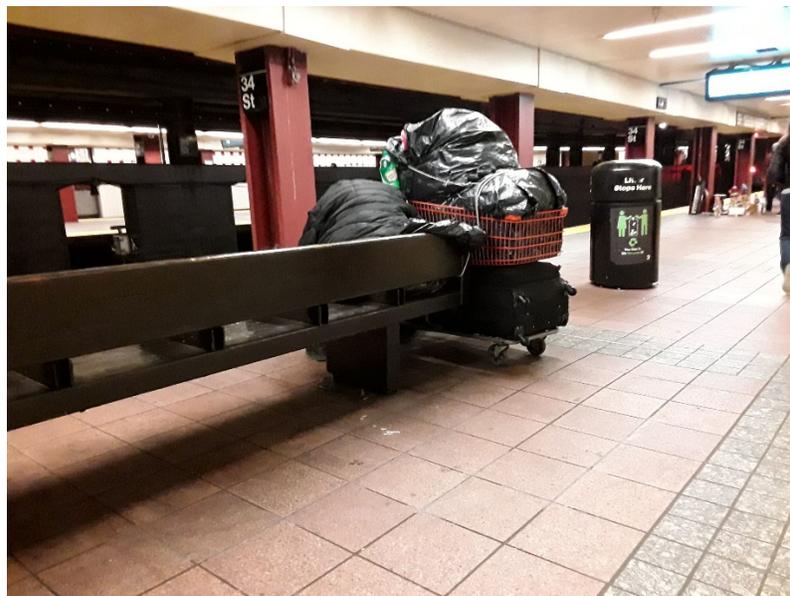
As for recruiting the workforce that will be needed to clean up the mess, in addition to the city and state governments providing labor, workers could also be drawn from at least two other possible sources: the huge pool of unemployed created in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, and the homeless themselves.

Employing the homeless would be controversial. Could they be trusted? Could they do the job? Should they do the job? Since they live in the subway, it would be perfectly reasonable and fair for them to be asked to help clean it up. Pay them well, treat them fairly and respectfully, provide them the necessary training, all of which would tap into their potential as productive human beings, and they will do the job, and do it correctly. But in the prevailing culture of permissiveness that condones irresponsible acting out behavior, and in the prevailing political culture that panders to those on the margins of society, encourages dependency, and rejects middle class values, to expect the governor

or anyone else in a position of responsibility to mobilize the homeless to perform useful, necessary and constructive PAID labor, which can benefit both the homeless population and society in general, may be expecting a bit too much.

Below are pics of homeless people in the New York City subway.

Pics by Phillip W. Weiss







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