

# New York City limousine driver kills himself in protest over poverty wages

By Sandy English  
8 February 2018

On Monday morning, Douglas Schifter, a career limousine driver, shot and killed himself in a rental car in front of New York City Hall in lower Manhattan. A suicide note explained his act was a protest against the political and corporate establishment for systematically lowering the standard of living of professional drivers.

In a defiant note posted on his Facebook account before his suicide, Schifter observed that he had been working nearly 100-120 consecutive hours a week for the last 14 years, up from 50 hours weekly in 1981 when he started to drive professionally.

“Companies do not care how they abuse us just so the executives get their bonuses,” Schifter wrote. “They have not paid us fair rates for some time now. Due to the huge numbers of cars available with desperate drivers trying to feed their families they squeeze rates to below operating costs and force professionals like me out of business. They count their money and we are driven down into the streets we drive becoming homeless and hungry. I will not be a slave working for chump change. I would rather be dead.”

Referring to Mayor Bill de Blasio, Governor Andrew Cuomo, and former Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Schifter wrote, “I have been financially ruined because of these three politicians.” He called on his readers to “wake up and resist!,” adding, “We are on an increasing downward spiral toward loss of liberties and happiness.”

Schifter was deeply in debt and blamed not only e-hailing services, but the dramatic increase in New York City of licensed cab services under Bloomberg and the pernicious fines from the notoriously corrupt Taxi and Limousine Commission, a city agency. He told friends that he was about to lose his home and was living with extended family.

Schifter had previously railed against these

conditions in articles *Black* wrote for where he was a regular contributor. In November, he discussed the fleecing of drivers in suburbs of city boroughs with illegal fines, as well as the city’s plans for a surcharge on drivers to reduce traffic congestion, especially in Manhattan. He blamed politicians of both political parties, as well as the judiciary and the police.

“The government is continuing its strong drive to enslave us with low wages and extreme fines,” he wrote in one article. “It’s a nightmare, and one can’t help but wonder: When will this stop?”

Schifter’s tragic decision to end his life testifies to the tremendous pressures felt by taxi and limousine drivers. Schifter himself estimated that more than 100,000 drivers and their families were being reduced to poverty by the combined assault of corporations and their servants in City Hall and the state government.

On his Facebook page and in the media, Schifter’s fellow drivers echoed the same concerns. One told the *Daily News*: “It’s a horrible life. You maybe make \$500 a week. I used to make a grand [\$1,000] easy.” Another said, “There are more than 100,000 for-hire drivers in NYC alone that are facing the same crushing and dire pressures that caused Doug Schifter to choose death over life.”

Schifter’s death is also a byproduct of the transportation crisis that has seized New York. The city’s working class majority, which faces a situation the same as or close to Schifter’s—a daily struggle to make ends meet—must ride severely delayed, crowded, and accident-prone subways and public buses to work. If they live further away from the city (as Schifter did), they face excruciatingly long and expensive commutes.

Workers employed in the mass transportation system are under the constant threat of injury or death. Budget shortfalls and profit crunches are regularly taken out of

their paychecks and working conditions, much as they were for the city's school bus drivers, whose strike in 2013 to defend their living standard was betrayed by their union, ATU local 1131, and the false promises of mayoral candidate Bill de Blasio and the whole Democratic Party.

Though Douglas Schifter could see no way forward, the sentiments in his suicide note are left-wing and oppositional. He saw the enemy as not only the corporations, but the politicians of both capitalist parties. In similar straits, millions of workers in New York City have also begun to understand these undeniable facts. Increasingly, they will not respond with acts of individual desperation and despair, but mass struggle against the common enemy: the capitalist profit system.

To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**<http://www.wsws.org>**