

Thousands of New York City workers demonstrate against threatened layoffs

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22 June 2010

Some ten thousand New York City public sector workers rallied at City Hall Wednesday afternoon, June 16, against threatened layoffs and impending budget cuts to various city agencies.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg has proposed more than a billion dollars in cuts that would close a number of firehouses, libraries, senior centers, child care centers, swimming pools and after-school programs, and reduce the number of school nurses.

There has already been a steady cutback in services, together with growing public-sector layoffs. The city cut 20,000 jobs, or 4.3 percent of its workforce, from April 2008 to April 2010.

The billionaire mayor will slash \$12.8 million worth of funding to the Administration for Children's Services. Since the state matches the city funding by a ratio of 2 to 1, the agency would lose about \$35 million. This would result in the elimination of services for 3,000 families, about 25 percent of those in the system.

The mayor has recently reinstated his threat to layoff 4,400 teachers if Congress fails to rescind its \$600 million cut in federal aid. In addition, New York state's Democratic Governor David Paterson and the Democratic-controlled state legislature are on the verge of passing \$493 million of state cuts to the city's public school system.

About 1,000 city transit workers could receive pink slips before the end of the month, according to John Samuelsen, the president of Transport Workers Union Local 100, who spoke at the rally. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority is scheduled to implement reductions in subway and bus service effective June 27.

Despite its significant size, last Wednesday's rally was barely mentioned by the New York City media.

Speeches were made by union bureaucrats, Democratic Party politicians, and leaders of various community groups, all of whom urged the workers in the audience to

put pressure on Democratic and Republican politicians. While some condemned Wall Street for creating the economic downturn, all were silent on Obama's trillion-dollar bailout of these same financial institutions.

Supporters of Socialist Equality Party distributed a leaflet that called for policies to stop the cuts, including the nationalization of the banks, a massive jobs program to combat unemployment, the independent organization of workers apart from the unions, and strike action.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with a number of workers during the rally:

Margaret Rosen, a teacher in Manhattan with 20 years in New York City's schools, said: "Teachers went into education to make a difference, not to make money. The business model is being brought into public education. Charter schools only take general education students; the public schools take every child. This business model is coming into conflict with public education.

"New York City is being run by business people. I heard Mayor Bloomberg on the radio Saturday say that the BP CEO is not such a bad person. I think if the mayor can get away with it, he will close down more schools. And I don't know about the union leadership either. They say they are against the mayor, but I think it was after Edward Kennedy's funeral that [American Federation of Teachers president] Randi Weingarten flew on a private jet with Bloomberg. If you didn't like a person, what are you doing flying on a private plane with him?

"The budget cuts in Albany are outrageous. They are cutting funds so that class sizes will increase, libraries will shut, speech therapy, physical therapy, and occupational therapy will be cut. They want to get rid of minimum therapy requirements to reduce the long line of students waiting for these services instead of hiring more people.

"The Democrats and Republicans are in each other's pockets. They don't care about the people. I think that

Obama's Race to the Top supports charter schools which are like the Yeshivas and religious schools. They are for special people. Unfortunately, I think Obama is for the same thing as the other politicians. He sends his children to the private Sidwell Friends School just like the Clintons did. The school costs something like \$28,000 a year for their younger daughter and \$30,000 for the older one. How does he believe in public education? At that school there are 11 students in a class.

"I think people should have a choice and there should be a party that stands for the people. People are getting disenfranchised. There are a lot of people showing up at the demonstration today because they feel that things have to change."

Gloria Martindale, a teacher with 23 years, said, "The budget cuts unfortunately hurt kids and that is our future. How long are we going to pay for what the banks did? Bloomberg set up the Children First Network. How can you put children first when you are cutting their bus passes, cutting teachers and cutting services like the ones for special needs children? What this really means is *cut the children first*. It is obvious that New York will run out of stimulus money. The politicians in the city and state start with cutting the budget for education. But there are other solutions. We have made proposals like taxing the rich."

Yvette Warren, a teacher for 15 years in New York, told the WSWS: "Mayor Bloomberg wants an accounting from the teachers and administrators, but he won't be accountable himself. He is stripping everything from us, and all he cares about is making money in the city as the new Czar. They are paying the banks off of our backs, and people are still losing their homes. When do we stop bailing out the banks? They are living off us with their bailouts and high fees. The banks should have a tax attached to them for education in New York City and around the country. The rich can afford it right away.

"I went to school and got two masters degrees, and I am still struggling. This summer I have four jobs to make ends meet. I have a daughter in a university upstate because she has a right to make something of herself. When I look at my paycheck I cry.

"The politicians and media don't tell you about teachers. They don't tell you about the 2 AM in the morning lesson plans teachers have to make. This is not a 9-to-5 job. Teachers are social workers also. We have homeless and hungry students who we have to take care of before we can teach. I have had parents call me at 2 AM to find a child. I have to buy books and pencils for

my students. They give us \$150, but in my first year I spent \$1,500. If teachers spent only the \$150 there would be no education."

Kenneth Bezeal, a 20-year sanitation worker, said, "I came to the demonstration to give support because there are too many cuts in education and jobs. There have been a lot of cuts in sanitation since I started. There have been job cutbacks on the trucks. They have cut the tree trucks, the bolt trucks and the Moving Litter Patrol. I have heard about what the cuts are causing in Yonkers. The city is cutting trash collection back to one day a week for residents. This is crazy. In the summer there will be bad smells and rats. Here, depending where you are in the city, you get three times a week or twice a week trash pickup. We need more unity."

Kenneth Penn is a city worker with 27 years as a custodial assistant at City College of New York (CCNY) in the city university system. He explained, "The budget cuts are about people losing their jobs. We never know which workers with under five years seniority will be leaving us. We are already understaffed at CCNY. We have three shifts and I work the early morning shift starting at 6 AM. We may lose 15 out of our custodial staff of 62 workers. They may try to reduce us from three shifts to two. Without more and younger workers, there is no future. They are building more buildings at CCNY, which means more work. Places like the library where students are packed in are a mess every day. Other colleges like Brooklyn College have more part-timers than full timers.

"I don't see how you can have part-timers. At City College, everything went up for students even though there are more students enrolled. They came because they can't afford the upstate universities. Overtime has been eliminated for us. The Democrats are not helping us any more than the Republicans."



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