

# After the elections, New York Democrats step up attacks on state workers

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Following his election as governor of the state of New York, Democrat Andrew Cuomo has wasted no time in making clear that he plans to make the working class pay for the economic crisis.

After meeting with the incumbent governor, David Paterson, Cuomo spelled out the program of his incoming administration: “No new taxes. No new taxes. No new taxes. I think that would be counterproductive for the state. I think you will force an increase in the number of New Yorkers who are fleeing the state for different jurisdictions because they don’t want to pay the tax rate.”

Clearly, the rich who can afford to pick up and move wherever they find the most wealth-friendly environment are the constituency to which Cuomo is speaking. For those of more modest means the message is quite different. “Where do you cut the money? You’re going to cut the spending,” said the governor-elect. “You’re going to cut the funds where you spend them. You spend them on health care. You spend them on education. You spend them on state operations and that’s where you’re going to have to cut.”

The current governor, David Paterson, also a Democrat, has already begun this process. Paterson has ordered the layoff of 898 state workers by the end of this year. The biggest cuts will occur at the Department of Environmental Conservation (150), the Department of Transportation (140), and the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (130). There is speculation that Paterson is moving to carry out these layoffs during his term to take some heat off of the incoming governor.

These layoffs come as official statistics from the state Labor Department show that job losses continue in both the public and private sectors. From August to September, non-farm employment in the state decreased by 37,600. More than half of these losses occurred in the public sector, including among state, county and municipal employees. Published reports indicate that the state employee workforce is down by approximately 5,000 from last year.

The layoff process has already begun in some agencies, including the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Department of Transportation. Final notices will be issued by December 10, effective December 31.

State employee unions have largely acquiesced to the layoff threat. The Public Employee Federation (PEF), the second largest state workers’ union, has written letters to both Paterson and Cuomo pleading for an extension of the early retirement program offered earlier this year and has urged its members to do the same. Neither the governor nor governor-elect has yet responded. Cuomo has stated that he understands the basis for Paterson’s layoff order and would, as attorney general, defend it against any legal challenges. The union is also planning a “media blitz” against the layoffs.

The effective paralysis of the public employee unions in the face of this attack is illustrated on the PEF and CSEA (Civil Service Employees Association) web sites, which feature information for their members on “how to be laid off”.

The callous indifference of the Democrats, let alone

the Republicans, to the consequences of these layoffs, not only on the individual employees and their families but to the provision of key state services to the public, was highlighted by the recent firing of the commissioner of the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). An unsigned memo had been leaked to the press which warned that the loss of personnel due to the combined effects of the recent retirement incentive program and the newly announced layoffs would significantly impair DEC's ability to carry out its mandate of protecting the state's environment.

Among the key concerns is the likely permitting of "hydrofracking" for natural gas in the Marcellus Shale, which is already wreaking environmental havoc in adjacent states such as Pennsylvania. (See "Hearings expose health hazards in natural gas extraction")

The memo warned that the substantially reduced DEC staff will be incapable of adequately monitoring this activity. Governor Paterson summarily fired the commissioner for having the temerity to provide sound advice. Paterson subsequently announced plans to withdraw state participation in the federal Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund program that cleans up hazardous waste sites. Needless to say, the morale of DEC staff has been severely undermined.

Appeals to the "friends of labor" in the Democratic Party to halt the layoffs will fall on deaf ears. During the campaign, Cuomo said that he expected to "tangle" with the state employee unions. A recent article in the *New York Times* indicates that he consciously sought support from private sector unions during the election campaign in order to prepare for a divide and conquer strategy against the state workforce.

The union bureaucracies' principal goal is to maintain their relations with the government and the Democratic Party that help underpin their positions. They are offering their services in helping to "manage" the coming jobs and service cuts.

Current projections estimate cumulative state budget deficits of more than \$30 billion over the next three years. It is criminally naive, at best, to maintain the

position that an appeal to the "reasonableness" of capitalist politicians will do anything to avert the impending massive attacks on state workers and the entire working class.



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