

New York City budget to cut services, lay off teachers

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New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced last week that the \$65.6 billion preliminary city budget for the coming fiscal year will close senior centers and fire stations, eliminate subsidies for day care and lay off over 4,500 teachers and another 1,000 other city workers, in spite of a \$2 billion increase in revenue from Wall Street business taxes.

The year 2010 was Wall Street's second most profitable in history, fattening itself on \$28 billion in profits.

The fiscal year 2012 budget, which begins in mid-2011, will cut \$27 million from the Department of the Aging, the result of a loss of state funding that the city will not make up. This will close over 100 of the city's 256 senior centers, which provide recreation and low-cost meals in a social setting for the elderly. About 10,000 elderly will be affected by the closures, in addition to staff that will lose their jobs.

Lillian Barrios-Paoli, the commissioner of the New York City Department for the Aging, noted in an interview with DNAinfo.com that over 30 percent of the city's elderly population lives in poverty and that closing centers would eliminate the single daily meal that many of its clients eat. "[T]he social isolation, the loneliness, coupled with poverty is very difficult," she said.

The Department of the Aging will lose a further \$38 million from its budget, which will eliminate funds to prevent elder abuse, along with the positions of over 110 caseworkers who visit over 8,000 homebound elderly.

Bobby Sackman, director of public policy for the Council of Senior Centers and Services (CSCS), expressed concern that the mayor might ask for even more cuts in services to the elderly and observed, "With a \$2 billion increase in tax revenue, there is a light at the end of the tunnel for the city, but it is still dark for older New Yorkers."

Some 17,000 slots for poor children in city-run day care centers will also be lost in the cuts, adding to over 14,000

lost since 2006. These slots are mandated by the Association for Children Services for parents receiving public assistance.

In another attack on the poor, \$192 million is being eliminated from the Advantage rent subsidy program, one of Bloomberg's signature programs designed to help homeless families leave public shelters. Also, over 20 fire stations throughout the city will be permanently closed.

The budget will also cut capital spending by the city by 10 percent, which will mean a reduction in the construction of new space in the city's already overcrowded school classrooms. Schools Chancellor Cathleen Black, a wealthy former executive with little experience in education appointed by Bloomberg earlier this year, announced that under the new budget, plans for an additional 30,000 seats would be reduced by 17,000.

In one of his most egregious actions, the billionaire mayor announced the elimination of nearly 6,000 teaching jobs, including 4,666 layoffs. This comes close on the heels of his shutting of 22 public schools and his increase in funding and space for privately run charter schools.

Bloomberg's proposals for layoffs have elicited almost no opposition from the Democratic Party or the trade unions, who have largely dismissed it as a ploy to get more funding from the state.

Michael Mulgrew, the president of the United Federation of Teachers, said, "I don't understand why the mayor continues to be talking about teacher layoffs. This is all a politically bogus game on their behalf."

Indeed, the state and the city are in conflict over funding as Bloomberg attempts to get over \$300 million in state aid restored, but this a tactical disagreement between two leading figures in the assault on working class living standards in the United States.

Mulgrew's attitude is designed to sow complacency. No doubt many teachers and other public workers were deeply and justifiably worried when they heard the mayor

announce these figures, and immediately thought of the state of affairs in Wisconsin today.

One teacher, Vonda Toliver, speaking to the WSWWS after a meeting to oppose a charter school co-location at an elementary school in East New York, explained, “The teacher layoffs that Mayor Bloomberg has just announced are frightening because they will increase classroom sizes to 35 to 38 students in one classroom with a single teacher.

“What is going to happen to the one-to-one individual instruction that everyone says they want? I am frightened, and I am upset about these budget cuts and layoffs of teachers. They have forgotten about the students. I think they want to limit public education if they don’t want to destroy it.”

The layoffs and the shutdown of social services, especially for the poor, are a part of the assault on public employees at the local, state and federal levels. President Obama has proposed the cutting of a host of federally funded programs ranging from heating assistance to the poor to PELL grants for working class students.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has proposed \$10 billion in state budget cuts, including \$1.5 billion in education. It is well known that Cuomo is preparing an assault on public employees and is working closely with a group of wealthy executives and former politicians called the Committee to Save New York to carry out this attack.

This committee, which has raised millions of dollars for a media campaign, includes Rob Speyer, co-chief executive of Tishman Speyer Properties, and Richard D. Parsons, the chairman of Citigroup, as well as Kathryn Wylde, president of the Partnership for New York City, the notorious proponent of making public housing stock in New York City available to investors.



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