

# Con Ed workers rally against lockout

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On Tuesday afternoon, a large rally was held at Union Square in Manhattan in support of 8,500 Consolidated Edison (Con Ed) workers who have been locked out by the company since July 1. The rally was organized by the state AFL-CIO and the New York City Central Labor Council.

The crowd at Union Square, estimated at up to 5,000, consisted mostly of Con Ed workers, with small contingents from other unions, including teachers and transit workers.

Con Ed is determined to inflict significant cutbacks in the workers' pay and benefits. The company made strategic preparations, beginning a year in advance, to maintain the lockout for an extended period of time by training managerial employees as replacement workers and hiring outside contractors.

Talks between Con Ed and the Utility Workers Union of America Local 1-2 continue with no reported progress as another blistering heat wave, posing the danger of catastrophic power loss due to high demand and equipment failure.

Meanwhile, the locked out workers are forced to survive on meager unemployment benefits and no strike (or in this case lockout) pay.

Officials from more than a dozen unions spoke at the rally, but provided nothing except empty rhetoric and appeals to politicians for support. The bureaucrats from other unions repeated the slogan that they would do "whatever it takes" to defeat the attacks on the Con Ed workers, but in fact they have given nothing in the way of practical support so far and proposed nothing new at the rally.

The union bureaucrats who spoke framed the struggle as being purely one against corporate greed. They said nothing to link the Con Ed lockout with the systematic attacks on workers across the country and around the world by corporations and governments seeking to make the working class pay for the capitalist crisis.

Nor was anything said about the union's appeal to the Public Service Commission (PSC), the state's utility regulatory body, to end the lockout and return to work without a contract. None of the speakers, including Transport Workers Union President John Samuelson and Communication Workers of America official Chris Shelton, mentioned that workers at NYC transit and Verizon have been working without a contract for extended periods.

State AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento declared, "We expect the PSC will see through [Con Ed's] smoke-and-mirrors approach to corporate responsibility." Given that the commission has for decades been a compliant accomplice to Con Ed's wishes, there is no reason to believe that they will do anything now to assist the workers.

In a clear plug for the Democrats, Samuelson and UWUA Local 1-2 President Harry Farrell told workers to remember who their friends were in the November elections.

At the rally, supporters of the Socialist Equality Party presidential campaign talked with workers and distributed a copy of a statement issued by Jerry White in support of the locked-out workers. (See, "The Con Ed struggle and the fight for public ownership")

Myles, with nine years at Con Ed, spoke on the economic situation "The financial system is breaking down. Our contract is part of it. For Con Ed it comes down to our pension, and them hiring independent contractors."

Asked about the union giving money to New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, he said, "Everyone is in bed with each other. It isn't like the 20's and 30's when workers would come out in defiance. There is no middle class anymore; there is only the rich and the poor.

"The working class needs its own party. Even the Greens and the Liberal Party are infiltrated by the

Democrats and Republicans, because that is where they can get money.”

Jim, an electrician who came to support the Con Ed workers, said, “Why should a CEO make \$30 million? It is the old story of the big guy getting a larger slice of the pie.

“They just move everything overseas now because there slavery is legal. They call it low wages, but I call it slavery.”

Kevin Nest, a locked-out Con Ed worker, said, “I read an article in which Cuomo said, before the lockout, that he would intervene before anything like this would happen and hurt the public. However, he stepped back, and it seems like he’s taking sides with the non-union side.”

When the SEP campaigner pointed out the attacks on the working class being carried out by Cuomo and President Obama, Kevin replied, “It’s a degradation of standards. We should never, never, as a workforce, nationally, have to fight for fringe benefits. It should never come to this.”



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