

# **New York City: Con Ed workers locked out for second day**

**A WSWS reporting team  
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The energy giant Con Edison, which supplies electricity to New York City and surrounding communities, and the union that is negotiating on behalf of 8,500 workers, the Utility Workers Union of America Local 1-2, agreed to resume talks under government mediation on Thursday.

According to the New York Times, several Democratic Party mayoral hopefuls, including City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, intervened to get the union and the company to resume negotiations. In a letter to both sides, Quinn called on Con Edison to end the lockout and the union to provide advance notice of a strike. The company has claimed that the refusal of the union to agree to give seven days' notice of a strike is what caused it to lock its workers out early Sunday morning.

At issue are the workers' pension and health benefits, which Con Ed is seeking to drastically curtail.

In the second day of the lockout the utility company has stopped meter readings, closed walk-in centers, and halted major infrastructure projects. According to media reports, electricity demand is high, as many of the company's 3.2 million customers have sought relief from a heat wave by operating air conditioners.

According to Con Ed's website, the company has been "preparing for the possibility of a union work stoppage for months." It has management personnel, including former retirees, attempting to fill the jobs of the highly skilled workforce. It was reported on Monday that one manager suffered burns from an accident in Brooklyn.

On Monday, the World Socialist Web Site spoke to many of the approximately 200 Con Edison workers behind metal police barricades on Irving Place in Lower Manhattan, in front of the company's corporate headquarters.

WSWS reporters distributed an article about the Con Ed lockout and another, which was met with great interest among the New York City workers, about the lockout of the Entergy workers at the Massachusetts Pilgrim power plant.

Most workers had not expected a lockout and did not know how the situation might develop. While many workers wore union t-shirts that said, "If we go out, the lights go out," there were few placards in evidence. Many motorists honked their horns in sympathy.

James Larroca, who has repaired electric lines for four years, told the WSW: "We would have been okay with same as the last contract four years ago. Now with me having worked four years, they want to take away my pension, like with the new hires. They want to take from medical. That would be an increase from \$28 to \$40 for co-pay to visit a doctor. They want to charge \$133 per week for the family plan. Before the last contract, it was \$20. If you have five years or under, they take your pension away.

"Con Edison made \$7 billion in profits last year. The CEO makes \$5,000 an hour. They hired Craig Ivy from Virginia because he was known for busting unions and that's what they want to do now. We are forced to work in all kinds of disasters. Two years ago, two men were burned to death in a manhole fire and now they don't even want to give us a contract.

"In Hurricane Irene last year, I had to work on Water Street where they were evacuating for fear of floods. Everybody they have working on the lines now is management right out of college with no experience. They have no business working on the lines."

The WSWS also spoke to Crissy Martinez and Karina Perez, who have worked as bilingual customer service representatives for three and a half years. "We were not expecting a lockout," said Crissy. "We don't even

know what is going to come of this. We are just kind of waiting it out now. A lot of us don't know the difference between a lockout and a strike.

"We see the main issues as pensions and health. They want to change the way they pay sick time in order to decrease the percent of your paycheck. After a certain number of days worked, we get 2 sick days and beyond that we are disciplined.

Larry Dwyer, a worker with nine years experience at Con Ed and 27 years working in the airlines, told the WSWS, "This is another example of corporate greed. Normally when you have a lockout or strike it only affects the workers. This is different, it puts the whole city at risk.

"This never should have happened. The company is making record profits. They want to take our normal retirement and exchange it for a 401(k). The family medical costs would be raised \$133 a week, and no wage increases.

After some discussion about the recent lockout by Entergy of workers at Massachusetts's Pilgrim Power Plant, and the Verizon strike last summer, Dwyer added, "This is a progression since Reagan when they fired the air traffic controllers. That was the first wave of union busting; this is the second wave of union busting. They want to have us go back to the 1920s.

"The corporations pressure even organized workers now. They want to deregulate everything except labor.

"I met Michael Moore at Occupy Wall Street. I remember a reporter asked him why they are protesting here instead of in Washington, and he replied 'Washington is just the middle man.' I really agree with that."

Abe, who has worked for Con Ed for eight years, said about the lockout: "It is terrible for the city, and for people living in the city. They [Con Ed] think they can run the system, but one manager working the power lines already got third-degree burns.

"We have no future without the pension. They won't give us a raise, but they want to raise our medical payment.

Asked about living conditions before the lockout, Abe added, "My family has been making cutbacks. You pack your lunch and your breakfast because you can't afford to go out to eat."

Elliott, a worker with seven years experience, said, "The benefits they said they would give me when I was

first hired are now being taken away. The big issue is the pension. A lot of companies want to only have 401(k)s. [Con Ed CEO] Kevin Burke is making millions of dollars, and he wants to give people a lump sum instead of a pension for life. Most people don't want that.

"My grandfather had a pension but my parents don't. My mother is in her 60s and my father just turned 70, and they are still working. We should all be expected to work the same amount of time."



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