

# Vote “No” on the Con Ed-UWUA contract! For an independent political struggle of the working class!

Socialist Equality Party  
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The Socialist Equality Party calls on Con Ed utility workers to reject the contract agreement proposed by the Utility Workers Union of America, which includes major concessions demanded by the company. A fight against this contract, however, must be part of an industrial and political mobilization of the entire working class against the corporate-driven attack, which is backed by both big business parties.

The proposed agreement, which comes after a month-long lockout, includes the elimination of defined-benefit pensions for new hires, increases in medical insurance premiums and co-pays, and wage increases that are unlikely to keep up with inflation.

The inferior pension system for new workers is particularly significant. Like other sections of corporate America, Con Ed is seeking to divide workers against each other, with the eventual strategy of driving out older workers to make way for more poorly-paid young workers. To a similar end, Con Ed is seeking to expand the use of temporary and contract workers, with limited or no benefits.

The contract agreed by the UWUA is only the beginning. The company has a long-term strategy that is ultimately aimed establishing a workforce with little or no benefits, earning poverty-level wages. The assurance given by the union that pensions for existing workers will not be touched for 25 years should be treated as empty promises that will be revoked at the first opportunity.

At the same time as it insists that workers pay, Con Ed is making bumper profits. The company, one of the largest utilities in the country, saw its profits increase in the second quarter of this year to \$214 million, up from \$165 million the year before. It made over a billion

dollars in profit last year, and a total of \$5.9 billion since 2008. Chairman and CEO Ken Burke received \$11 million in total compensation last year.

However, workers confront not merely the rapacious greed of this or that corporation or executive, but the failure of an entire economic system. What is happening at Con Ed is part of a national and indeed global process. Particularly since the onset of the economic crisis in 2008, the American ruling class, along with its counterparts in Europe and throughout the world, has pursued a systematic policy aimed at massively increasing the exploitation of the working class, while redistributing wealth to the financial elite.

Behind the ruthlessness of Con Ed management stand banks and hedge funds, which have a 42 percent stake in the company. The willingness of Con Ed to put millions of New York residents at risk of catastrophic power failures is clear proof that it has no regard for anything but the maximization of profit.

The corporations and their allies in government insist that there is simply “no money” to allow for decent paying jobs, benefits and social programs. Everything from Social Security to Medicare, Medicaid, health insurance, pensions, and public education is being slashed or are under severe threat.

The aim is nothing less than to return the working class to conditions of the 19th century, when workers had no social benefits and were completely at the mercy of their employers.

The corporations have the full backing of both big business parties, the Democrats and the Republicans. The coordinated campaign to impoverish the working class was set off by the Obama administration’s restructuring of the auto industry, which was premised

on slashing the pay of new hires by half and enforcing major cuts to health and pension benefits, especially for retirees.

This set the precedent that is now being followed by company after company. At the same time as Con Ed is seeking to attack workers' pensions, Caterpillar workers in Joliet, Illinois are on strike against attempts by the company to freeze wages and impose sharp increases in health care costs.

The role of the trade unions is to isolate any struggles that do erupt, while seeking to maintain the political domination of the Democratic Party. The attack on auto workers was overseen by the UAW, which is now one of the largest shareholders in the Big Three. The official unions are not "workers' organizations," but function as an arm of corporate management.

The UWUA has played a similar role in the Con Ed struggle, particularly through its slavish support for New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and other Democratic politicians. The union has heaped praise on Cuomo for his intervention in the dispute. In fact, Cuomo utilized an approaching storm—which threatened vast damage to the utility infrastructure—to quickly push through a deal, with the support of both the company and the UWUA.

Cuomo has been at the forefront of the attack on workers in New York. Last year he threatened state workers with 9,800 layoffs if they did not accept major contract concessions. Con Ed has donated a quarter of a million dollars to the Committee to Save New York, a group set up and funded by the city's financial and corporate elite, which has spent \$10 million to support Cuomo's anti-working class agenda.

A new perspective is needed, one that starts not from what the ruling class demands, but from what the working class requires. A serious struggle requires a break with the existing trade unions, through the formation of rank-and-file committees democratically controlled by the workers themselves. Such committees must fight to unify the struggles of workers throughout the US and internationally in a common fight against the banks and corporations.

The fight to defend the interests of workers is, however, fundamentally a political struggle, which requires a break with the Republican and Democratic Parties. The Socialist Equality Party insists that all workers have certain basic rights—including the right to

a job, to a pension, and to high-quality health care. These rights are not compatible with the continuation of the capitalist system, a system based on the subordination of the entire economic and political system to the profit demands of the corporate and financial elite.

The Socialist Equality Party and its candidates—Jerry White for president and Phyllis Scherrer for vice president—are intervening in the 2012 elections with the aim of building a socialist leadership in the working class. Socialism, the alternative to capitalism, means an economy in which the major forces of production—including the utility companies—are controlled democratically in the interests of social need, not private profit.

We urge all Con Ed workers seeking to take the struggle forward to contact the SEP and take up the fight for socialism.



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**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**