

New York City mayor de Blasio threatens 22,000 municipal worker layoffs

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New York City mayor Bill de Blasio told a press conference on Wednesday that the massive cuts in tax revenues due to the COVID-19 pandemic would necessitate the layoffs of 22,000 municipal employees, as part of a 2020-2021 budget that must be agreed to by the mayor and the City Council by a June 30 deadline, according to state law. The current municipal workforce is 326,000.

“We have to talk about the last resort,” said the Democratic mayor. “The last resort would be layoffs and furloughs. We are running out of options here. That is the blunt truth.”

At the same time, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) announced that its massive and overdue \$51 billion capital projects program was now been frozen indefinitely. The capital spending had been suspended initially for 60 days when the lockdown of the economy began in March. MTA president Patrick Foye said the agency faced a “financial calamity” without federal help. Transit ridership, which had fallen to less than 10 percent of its normal level at the peak of the pandemic, has inched up by only about 5 percent in the last several weeks.

According to the *City* website, the suspension of capital projects will have dire consequences. Most immediately, it will entail an end to signal modernization, elevator installations to meet the needs of disabled passengers, and desperately needed structural renovation along the city’s busy 7 elevated line, which connects the borough of Queens to Manhattan.

De Blasio and other officials pleaded anew for massive federal aid, while admitting that none was in the offing. Neither the mayor nor any of the city’s union officials said one word about taxing the unheard-of accumulation of wealth on Wall Street.

The Wall Street-backed Citizens Budget Commission (CBC), a longtime “non-partisan” voice of the city’s corporate and financial establishment, issued its own

report two weeks ago, saying the city faced “hard choices” amidst the pandemic, and proposing 9,000 layoffs, the elimination of another 7,300 jobs through attrition, and increased health care premiums for city workers. The CBC also suggested a small property tax increase that would hit small homeowners. Again, any call for higher taxes on the wealthy, even a hypocritical one for “equal sacrifice,” was missing.

A number of Democratic city councilmembers issued blustery warnings against layoffs, without saying what they proposed to do about the threat. Some of the union executives also chimed in with phony displays of opposition. The most revealing comment came from the president of the city’s Municipal Labor Committee, representing 110 separate unions. All that Harry Nespoli, who is also head of the city’s Uniformed Sanitationmen’s Association, could propose was that the city offer early retirements, which might tempt higher-paid employees, providing savings at the expense of city services.

De Blasio’s latest layoff threat comes two months after he submitted a proposed budget for the coming fiscal year that had already incorporated huge cutbacks. At that time, the mayor spoke of a “wartime budget” and said spending would be cut from \$95 billion to \$87 billion, reflecting a loss of revenues of nearly \$8 billion. Now he says that the continuing pandemic and economic collapse have blown another \$1 billion hole in the budget.

The situation in New York City is being replicated in one way or another throughout the US, as states, cities and other jurisdictions face economic disaster and prepare for major cutbacks in jobs and public services.

States, facing huge budget shortfalls, are in no financial position to provide emergency aid to their cities. As New York’s Democratic governor Andrew Cuomo declared, the state is facing its own \$10-\$15 billion deficit and cannot provide a dime.

Layoffs and furloughs of New York City workers will

deepen a crisis that has already meant unemployment for hundreds of thousands in the city since March. Workers in the hotel, restaurant and tourism industries have been particularly hard hit.

The pandemic-induced cutbacks are being carried out by Democrats and Republicans alike. And the unions, thoroughly integrated into the capitalist political establishment and the state apparatus, are making noises and then negotiating pay cuts and other concessions, in the name of the “national emergency.” In California, the SEIU has just negotiated a furlough deal for state employees that will cut pay by 11 percent.

The capitalist media are generally downplaying the economic disaster that is about to hit the working class, especially after emergency assistance expires by the end of August. Vague forecasts of a “slow recovery” from a collapse that took place over a span of merely weeks in the spring hide what this “recovery” will mean for tens of millions of working-class families. As the economic crisis deepens, the Democrats and Republicans are jockeying in preparation for the November election; both parties are seeking desperately to cover up the political and social implications of the crisis by whipping up racial divisions while preparing ruthless attacks on jobs, wages and benefits.

By this time, six and one-half years after de Blasio was elected to the first of his two terms as mayor of the largest US city, workers need no lessons on the emptiness and fraud of his “progressive” promises. Young people protesting police violence and inequality know him as the defender of the cops and of Wall Street. The inability and unwillingness to demand even the smallest tax hike for the financial aristocracy is de Blasio’s admission that he represents a bankrupt and irrational economic system that can only maintain its house of cards of financial speculation at the expense of the most basic rights of the working class.



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