

Razzle Dazzle

Unions Emulate Mike On One-Shot to the Kiss

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By RICHARD STEIER |

For many of the union leaders who have problems with a city proposal to tap into their Health St company closings, the impetus may have been consideration of the financial implications followe Mike Do?

The answer would have been obvious. Mr. Bloomberg over the years has expressed a disdain for produce recurring savings, and of late has grown fond of the phrase, “We can’t just keep kicking t belief that a hard choice deferred is a solution denied.

And so he may have felt a grudging admiration for labor leaders like Norman Seabrook, Pat Lync temporarily derailed a potential deal involving hundreds of millions of dollars in stabilization fun and that of City Council Speaker Christine Quinn in reaching a budget deal without taking huge t

Some of the friction at a contentious Municipal Labor Committee meeting in District Council 37’ Accounts given by several participants—including some who favored making the deal—indicatee between the Bloomberg administration and the unions made several labor leaders, especially thos proposed budget cuts, wary of using the health-fund money for this purpose. Their misgivings we proposal appeared in the Daily News before it was broached at a June 13 meeting of the MLC ste

‘Leak Meant to Box Us In’

That leak, Teamsters Local 237 President Greg Floyd said in a phone interview the day after the l and the confusion” about what the proposed deal entailed. “It hampered Harry Nespoli’s ability to chairman. “I believe they were trying to box us in, and it backfired. This was an amateurish way t

But Mr. Nespoli, who caught a certain amount of heat from fellow union leaders over back-chann weeks earlier with Ms. Quinn, maintained the mistrust had deep-enough roots that it would have l appeared.

Dating back to last fall, he said, when he was apprised by administration officials of plans on labo

looking for help from the MLC? They would say, ‘No, this is what’s gonna happen.’”

During a day-after meeting with Deputy Mayor for Operations Steve Goldsmith, he said he emph come home to roost. “You can’t come in and say ‘bleep you,’” was his characterization of what h be done to build up the credibility of City Hall.”

But one veteran union official, who spoke conditioned on anonymity, said that even if the admini: there was no reason to seriously consider the proposal.

‘Stupidest Deal We Could Make’

“This is the stupidest effin’ deal I’ve ever seen the unions make,” he remarked a day prior to its b the belief that they were being asked to buy back services that neither the Mayor nor Ms. Quinn r he continued, it would take the two budget decision-makers off the hook on tough choices without long-term relief.

He is among those on the union side who believe Mr. Bloomberg has boxed himself into a corner hoped would persuade the State Legislature to abolish the use of seniority in making such cuts. H said, the Mayor was looking to the health-fund deal as a way to gracefully back away from a mov improve the school system.

“The layoff of Teachers is a red herring—it’s not gonna happen,” he said, questioning why Unitec Mulgrew had been pushing so hard for the deal to be made.

But the most vocal advocate against the proposal at the MLC meeting, Correction Officers Benev Seabrook, said he understood Mr. Mulgrew’s reluctance, and that of the fire union leaders worried Mayor’s bluff.

“Right now you have people panicking,” he said. “It’s like the serpent telling us, ‘go ahead, eat th in Mr. Bloomberg, faced with a choice between cutting off his nose to spite his face or being shov reach for the knife.

“He’s gonna do it; he will do it just to do it,” Mr. Seabrook said.

That can be a valuable reputation to have, from the standpoint of intimidation. The problem for th UFT, DC 37 and the fire unions, the other key MLC members don’t have severe pain hanging ove scuttled. Some of them wonder why, as one put it, “labor should be surrendering and paying for tl

that's fair.”

They tend to look at the plan dispassionately, informed by the history of a similar-but-smaller agr stabilization fund merely delayed layoffs.

Saved in July, Gone by October

Back then, the MLC used the stabilization fund to postpone 1,000 layoffs and provide an infusion deal that also involved imposition of hospital and emergency-room co-pays for their members. They improve enough over the summer to avert some of the layoffs, or at least buy time for the targeted was that by the beginning of October nearly all those workers had lost their positions.

This time around, the deal would put off layoffs for a year, but Mr. Seabrook was pessimistic that one-year guarantee only puts a band-aid on a major artery break,” he said. “And we will only be a point I believe [the Mayor] comes back to us and we have no money, and I believe he begins the j needs money, but not at the expense of suicide in the future. I have no intention of surrendering at

One thing that troubled him was the cost of buying the jobs until next July. It was reported city of \$400 million from the Health Stabilization Fund, counting another welfare-fund infusion, but Mr. \$750 million. Other union leaders agreed with one insider who said the withdrawal was likely to i

Not About the Money?

The COBA leader did not share the optimism of some colleagues that the economy might improve allow them to dodge the crisis, saying he believed Mr. Bloomberg would use a climate already set to make further incursions against the public-employee unions and their members. Referring to th Seabrook said, “He doesn't have the Peter Madonia's advising him now, who know what's going him to go the wrong way.”

He also argued that using the stabilization fund to postpone layoffs precluded it from being used t point. Most municipal employees have been working under expired contracts since last summer; ' more than 2½ years.

During the MLC meeting, Mr. Seabrook was joined by Mr. Lynch, the president of the Patrolmen the case against the proposal. One of those in attendance said the PBA leader argued that the heal gaps and that using it for that purpose would set a bad precedent, notwithstanding the reality that ago.

DC 37's Misgiving

Ms. Roberts, the executive director of DC 37, said relatively little, according to those present, and could save money by improving collections and reducing contracting. Those are ideas that, while major components of a budget deal this late in the process. But other union officials said she had millions of dollars from the stabilization fund should be devoted to averting fire company cuts that which more than 1,000 of her members in social-service jobs and public-school support positions extraordinary measures to keep them working.

Mr. Floyd was among the union leaders who, rather than accusing Mr. Bloomberg of capitalizing and Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, said the climate that allowed them to batter the unions had to be a mistake to be resistant to helping plug the budget deficit.

“We see what’s going on across the country,” the Local 237 leader said. “When people pound the pavement with a hurt hand. If the administration decides to talk instead of putting their viewpoint in the

‘We’re Not Quinn’s Bailout’

Mr. Seabrook was less encouraging, asserting, “Christine Quinn wants us to be her bailout package to negotiate a budget. She has to make the decisions on closing firehouses and layoffs.”

He was pinpointing the potential weak link in any plans the Mayor may entertain to play hardball in a budget stabilization deal. Mr. Bloomberg doesn’t have to face the voters again, and he and Deputy Mayor Zohar prevail in the Court of Editorial Opinion by making the case that the unions are responsible for what has been that Ms. Quinn took an active role in dealing with Mr. Nespoli because getting an agreement on the more-painful budget choices and establishing her as a go-to person for the unions in a way that was amassed by other potential candidates for the Democratic mayoral nomination in 2013. Since she has to succeed her, he has to be mindful of the potential consequences for her chances if she can be taken out by Teacher layoffs and fire company closings.

Detectives Endowment Association President Mike Palladino, once a solid Bloomberg ally, said during the hearing, “It seems like he wants to be remembered as the Mayor who reduced essential services and [budget] surpluses.”

But like Mr. Floyd, he acknowledged the importance of the unions not being perceived by the public as the ones who pulled the plug and done our share.”

And so it's clear that notwithstanding the angry rhetoric voiced at the MLC meeting, a deal is not

Larger Plan in Order?

The problem, according to the union official who did not want to be quoted, is that, perhaps owing city has not pursued a larger, more-complicated solution that could serve as more than just a stop-

“The stabilization fund is not a job-security fund,” he said. “It’s a health fund, and it shouldn’t be whole health paradigm and change it.”

Among the items covered by the stabilization fund, he noted, are the welfare-fund contributions for die in the line of duty. Yet the welfare funds themselves are potentially ripe sources for savings that would cost individual unions a source of patronage jobs.

All the funds, he noted, have different administrators and accountants, and so “there’s redundancy administration, look more closely at health-care and Medicare Part B reimbursement rates, he said

“The structural changes to health are what the unions and the city should be looking at,” he said, “what’s become a cash cow and milk it dry.”

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