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Unions: Don't Blame Us For City's Budget Woes

Prod Council to Head Off Cuts
By DAVID SIMS



THE GANG'S ALL HERE: Thousands of union workers lined Broadway along City Hall Park, reaching several blocks back to Federal Plaza, for the 'Save our City' anti-budget-cuts rally June 16. *The Chief-Leader/Andrew Hinderaker*

Municipal-employee union members turned out en masse for a rally June 16 where their leaders repudiated the notion that high salaries and benefits for public-sector workers were the cause of the city's fiscal problems, demanding that Mayor Bloomberg and the City Council rescind his proposed job cuts in their upcoming budget.

More than 5,000 employees from dozens of unions filled Broadway from Barclay St. all the way back to Federal Plaza in an effort organized by the Municipal Labor Committee, District Council 37, and the United Federation of Teachers.

'Don't Point Finger At Us'

"We've had it up to here," said MLC Chairman and Uniformed Sanitationmen's Association President Harry Nespoli, one of the organizers of the rally. "We're tired of reading about unions taking everyone apart. We did not cause this, but they're trying to make us the victims of it."

Although many of the Mayor's original cuts, such as the layoffs of 4,400 Teachers and 3,000 uniformed job cuts in the Police Department, are now off the table, there is still the possibility of 1,600 layoffs and the closings of 20 fire companies, which labor leaders at the rally decried.

Although Sanitation Workers were the only noticeable uniformed employees in the crowd, several leaders of uniformed unions besides Mr. Nespoli spoke, a major change from last year's budget rally.

"This is not your fault; this is Mike Bloomberg's fault," said Uniformed Firefighters Association President Steve Cassidy. "The Mayor flushed \$1 billion down the toilet on CityTime. . . we shouldn't have to pay for his mistakes, but he doesn't know how to say, 'I made a mistake,' " referring to the way-over-budget time-clock system that even the Mayor has called "a disaster."

"If the garbage piles up, if the trains don't run on time, if there's no one to teach your children, if you dial 911 and no one comes, you have a desert — you don't have New York City," Mr. Cassidy continued, provoking passionate cheering from the crowd.



'NOT OUR FAULT': Uniformed Firefighters Association President Steve Cassidy accused Mayor Bloomberg of misleading labor unions in his re-election campaign at a June 16 rally against budget cuts. "One year ago, when Bloomberg was running for re-election, did he mention any of this? No!" he said. "All of us together can deliver a message. . . this is not our fault. This is Mike Bloomberg's fault." *The Chief-Leader/Andrew Hinderaker*

PBA: 'Recipe for Disaster'

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Patrolmen's Benevolent Association President Patrick J. Lynch invoked the heroism of city workers on 9/11, pointing out, "there are [fewer] Police Officers today than on Sept. 10, 2001. That is a recipe for disaster." He added, "Now they say they don't need us, they cut us, they say they can do it without us. Well I say they're wrong."

Detectives Endowment Association President Michael Palladino, standing with other police union heads, said that unions had been unfairly "labeled as greedy," noting, "Every benefit that we enjoy today, we negotiated those deals; we didn't steal them. At times, we made concessions. But the editorial boards paint us as the villains."

Correction Officers Benevolent Association President Norman Seabrook added, "We are not your stimulus package, we are not your bailout, we are middle-class workers in this city and will be treated with respect or we will shut you down."

Many speakers also slammed the revelation at a recent City Council Finance Committee hearing that the city has a budget surplus of \$3 billion but is planning to roll that money over to deal with the following fiscal year's deficit, which the Mayor has estimated to be even worse. "You don't cut services and lay off people when you have a surplus of \$3 billion," Mr. Nespoli said.

DC 37: Contract Out Less

The city's large contracting-out budget, which has been highlighted by DC 37's publicity campaigns, was also excoriated by speakers.

"We're not going to step back and lose our jobs so that the Mayor can give them to people outside of the city," said DC 37 Executive Director Lillian Roberts. "I'm going to talk to the City Council; they have the power to stop these cuts. . . we'll be watching you from every community to stop this nonsense."

The leaders of the city's education unions, which have been spared layoffs but are still staring at further cuts to school programs, blasted the Mayor's priorities. "We are getting very close to a repeat of 1976 in our school system, where they cut it so deep it took 30 years to recover," said United Federation of Teachers President Michael Mulgrew, who also emceed the event.

"We should not be cutting back on our children because the adults did foolish things," said Council of School Supervisors and Administrators President Ernest Logan. "We should cut back on private contractors, and sending taxpayers' money out of the state."

'City Doesn't Need Layoffs'

Professional Staff Congress President Barbara Bowen added, "I keep hearing this is a time of economic crisis, but the truth is the city has more than \$3 billion [in surplus funds] . . . there does not need to be one single layoff in this city."

She accused the Mayor of taking advantage of the national fiscal crisis to take on organized labor. "It's disaster capitalism. . . you wait for a disaster to come along, and then use that to sweep away the public workers," she said.

Negotiations between the Mayor and the City Council on the budget, which is due by the end of the month, are ongoing, although the failure of Albany lawmakers to finalize the state's budget has complicated matters. The city may have to make guesses based on worst-case scenarios outlined under Governor Paterson's proposed budget.

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