

# Union March Heralds Need To Treat Workers Fairly

By DAVID SIMS | Posted: Monday, December 5, 2011 5:00 pm

A broad coalition of labor unions, under the umbrella of the AFL-CIO New York City Central Labor Council, marched thousands of workers down Broadway from Herald Square to Union Square Dec. 1 in a show of force intended to “highlight the need for job creation and demand an end to unfair economic policies that favor the nation’s wealthiest.”

CLC President Vincent Alvarez organized the march, which included community organizations, student groups and members of the Occupy Wall Street protests, but did not feature appearances by elected officials or speeches from union heads.

## ‘Empower Working People’

“It’s a show of union solidarity,” Mr. Alvarez said in an interview. “We’ve joined together to say enough is enough, and our expectation is that government and corporate America are going to participate in a way that’s going to empower working people and get this economy going.”

He said the CLC was seeking the broadest coalition possible for the march. “These issues affect all working people, not just the labor movement. And we need to get the economy working for all people, not just the labor movement...unions are fighting for the same issues that everyday working Americans are fighting for.”

United Federation of Teachers President Michael Mulgrew said that the format of the rally was intended to send a message. “There’s no politicians invited,” he said. “This is about, stop playing politics with all of this garbage. Stop with the agendas. If you’re elected to represent people, then represent them. Don’t be elected and then all of a sudden change what you were put there to do.”

Municipal Labor Committee Chairman Harry Nespoli, also president of the Uniformed Sanitationmen’s Association, said that the mix of public-sector, private-sector and building-trades unions was a vital component.

## ‘Too Many People Out of Work’

“United, we’re together, and we’re going to stick together. Whether you’re a uniformed force, or civilian, or anything, this is about jobs,” he said. “There’s too many people out of work, there’s too many people that can’t enjoy Christmas, and we have to get this country back on track.”

He echoed Mr. Mulgrew’s view that the rally was about union strength. “This is our voice, it’s what it’s all about today,” he said. “We want to be united, show everybody we’re not going away, we’re together and we’re going to stand together, and it’s about time the working person starts being recognized.”

Members of every major union in the city were at the rally, but District Council 37's contingent stuck out, since it had most recently suffered layoffs, with the cuts of 642 school workers in October.

Laid-off Community Associate Cliftonia Johnson said that she was trying to keep her head above water. "I went to Washington D.C. yesterday to be a participant in the movement in regards to Congress extending unemployment benefits," she said. "There's way too many of us that's unemployed in this country, and unfortunately Congress seems to think that...those of us collecting unemployment are being lazy and won't go out and look for work."

### **'Blatant Disrespect'**

She continued, "That is such a blatant disrespect to say that to the American people. We want to work, that's how we enjoy our lives—we put forward into this society and we give back...This march is about the American people, it's about fairness in this economy, which does not exist."

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June Gregory, a School Aide and shop steward at M.S. 390 in The Bronx, said she was at the rally "fighting for my School Aides...because we can't do without them."

"We don't want them to be laid off; they need their jobs, they have children," she said in an interview. "We already lost a [Substance Abuse Prevention] worker and a Parent Coordinator. They were the best...we hope this march will give us what we need. I need my School Aides back."

The march began at 4 p.m. and reached Union Square about 45 minutes later, but marchers were still coming down Broadway an hour after that.

Service Employees International Union Local 32BJ had a particularly large contingent of members, having held a strike vote at a meeting just before the rally. The union voted to authorize a walkout of its office workers on New Year's Day if a satisfactory deal with the Realty Advisory Board is not reached by then.

### **A Beacon From Albany?**

A day before the march, news broke that Governor Cuomo was considering a tax on higher earners in the state, after months of protests over his position that a tax on those earning more than \$200,000 should be allowed to expire at the end of 2011.

When asked about that possibility, Mr. Alvarez said only, "We're willing to talk about anything that's going to promote job creation and get the economy moving again."

Mr. Mulgrew said he now was more hopeful that progress could be made in Albany. "Everybody's been sitting back waiting for Washington D.C. to do it. And they're not gonna do it," he said. "So we've got to figure out a jobs package, we have to figure out a way to stop cutting all the services...I'm hoping New York can show everyone else how to do this, but we're not done yet. And

this is very tough stuff. But there's clearly a willingness for people to try and see if we can do this.”