

Unions Focus Anger on Mayor They Say Slammed Door on His Workers

By DAVID SIMS | Posted: Monday, June 17, 2013 5:00 pm

Thousands of workers thronged to City Hall June 12 to protest Mayor Bloomberg's unwillingness to negotiate new contracts more than two years after their old ones expired, with one union leader accusing him of "turning his back" on the workforce.

"The past four years, he's been talking about a deficit," said Municipal Labor Committee Chairman Harry Nespoli, who also heads the Uniformed Sanitationmen's Association. "Each year, there's been a surplus. He just didn't want to settle the contracts."

Four Years Without Raise

Many workers have gone close to four years without a raise. Some unions, most notably the United Federation of Teachers, have not even received the pattern raises granted to other city workers covering 2009 and 2010 because their deals expired after the 2008 financial crisis.

Since then, Mr. Bloomberg has said he will grant raises only if unions can find savings to fund them, and he has recently called on them to contribute to their health-care costs in exchange for a contract.

"He has turned his back on the people who have always cared for this city," UFT President Michael Mulgrew said. "This is a very simple theme today: the Mayor who ran for a third term and decided to give the city away to his friends."

Union members packed Broadway from Barclay St. north to Chambers St. The Mayor has shown little interest in negotiating even as criticism of his strategy grows, claiming that raises that carried retroactivity would require either a massive tax increase or deep service cuts. His successor could face a tab of more than \$5 billion in retroactive raises, according to the Independent Budget Office.

'Our Bill is Past Due'

"You have a bill due for us; it's three years old," said Patrolmen's Benevolent Association President Patrick Lynch. "In my world, if you don't pay your bill, they take the house. Well, I'm here to say, we're taking back the house," pointing to City Hall.

The rally was a rare occasion for uniformed unions and civilian unions to unite in protest. Detectives Endowment Association President Michael J. Palladino recalled Mr. Bloomberg's lionizing of city workers not long after 9/11.

“They called us all heroes. How fast they forget,” he said. He pointed to the gap between the Mayor’s prediction of deficits every budget cycle and the resulting surplus, saying that over 11 years, the Mayor had some \$40 billion in surplus to work with.

“Where is this money going?” he asked. “Now they’re asking us to do more with less, for less. That’s unfair.”

UFA: Incompetence Costly

Uniformed Firefighters Association President Steve Cassidy slammed the city’s over-paying on private contracts. “CityTime, they flushed \$1 billion down the toilet. The 911 system: another billion dollars, thrown away. They say they don’t have money for us? Stop throwing money away,” he said.

District Council 37 Executive Director Lillian Roberts cited her union’s white papers on excessive contracting out. “All of the contractors, they got a raise every single year, and we don’t,” she said. “He’s got money to give us the contract...and we know we deserve it.”

Teamsters Local 237 President Gregory Floyd said the Mayor’s tactics relied on smearing city workers as greedy. “There was a time not long ago when you would say you were proud to work for the city. Try that today,” he said.

“We are not the problem with the city, but somehow we’ve become the enemy,” he continued. “We’re repeatedly blamed for everything going wrong short of global warming...but we count, we vote, and they will deal with us now or have to deal with us later.”

Union leaders were the only speakers, although elected officials and mayoral candidates milled around behind the stage the MLC erected on Broadway. Despite the ire focused on Mr. Bloomberg, his successor will likely be the one dealing with hundreds of expired contracts.

COBA: Won’t Take It

Correction Officers Benevolent Association President Norman Seabrook colorfully explained that the rally was as much about the future as the past. “Do you know why you don’t see any politicians on this stage? Because this is our rally. Yes, Bloomberg is going to be out of office,” he said. “But we’ve got to set the stage for the next Mayor, let him know, we’re not here to take your s—.

“Hurricane Sandy took down some of our homes. Hurricane government continues to take us down,” he added. “Our children are being shot in the streets. Our education system is falling apart. Yet they want us to continue to give more. We have no more to give. It’s time for them to give to us what we deserve.”

The rally attracted a sizable crowd, largely made up of non-uniformed workers, but media coverage after the event was limited. Professional Staff Congress President Barbara Bowen said unions had to show their might to continue to wield influence on such issues.

“This is about developing our power together, it’s about the power to win a fair contract for each of us,” she said. “The city’s attempt to deny us contracts is about money, but it’s also about power...this is the beginning of the fight.”