Unionized NYC Employees: We Need A New Mayor

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Thousands of union workers rallied yesterday at City Hall Park to demonstrate their frustration over the lack of contract negotiations between Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s administration and city employees.

"The people united will not be defeated," unionized teachers, firefighters, sanitation workers and police officers continuously chanted, their words echoing through the park as giant screens showed images of the protest.

The rally, coordinated by the Municipal Labor Committee, was touted by organizers as a vigorous response to Bloomberg's decision to allow city unions' contracts to expire, leaving over 300,000 employees without labor agreements.

Bloomberg presented his final $70 billion budget plan in early May, which marks his 12th budget in his 11-and-a-half years in office. Under the proposal, 20 fire companies would be closed and $135 million cut from afterschool and early-childhood education programs.

The budget also has no money allocated for city employees' backpay in case renegotiating contracts results in salary increases. The cumulative price of paying the city's workforce retroactively could be over $7 billion.

Bloomberg has said paying the wages retroactively could result in widespread layoffs and tax increases.

The mayor's office didn't respond to a request for comment about yesterday's rally.

Workers at the park said they were fed up with Bloomberg and that the only way to get new contracts might be under a new mayor.

Franklin Jones, a member of New York's largest municipal public employee union, District Council 37, said the unions needed to "put the right person in office, who truly cares about humanity."

Nick Hedge, a member of Local 1181 Amalgamated Transit Union, worked for the city as bus drivers for 33 years before his job was terminated just a few months ago. Hedge, who mentioned the mayor's inability to negotiate contracts when the ATU went on strike in mid-January, attributed his unemployment, along with 2,000 others, to Bloomberg's administration.

"They are decimating our industry," Hedge said. "He's not only destroying our union, but all the other unions that are here."

Bloomberg and the City Council have until July 1 to finalize the 2014 fiscal year budget and allocate money for union workers' contracts.

Photos by Latima Stephens.

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