

RETIREE

news & views



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Thousands Protest Budget Cuts: *'It's Time for Everyone to Do Their Fair Share'*

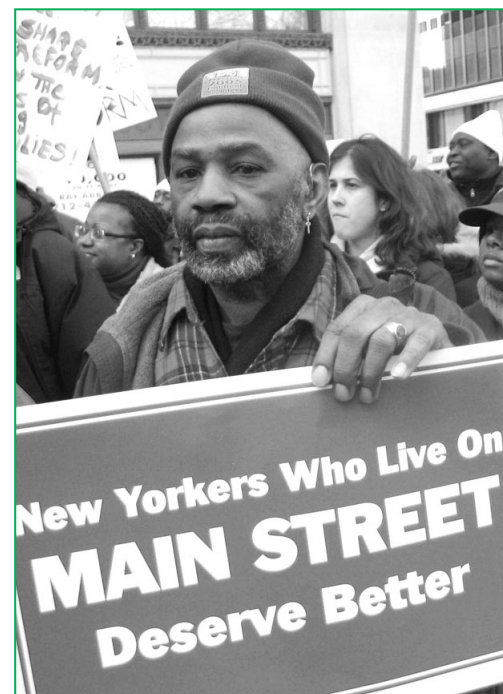
Union members, retirees, community groups, students, and other concerned New Yorkers filled Broadway from City Hall a half-mile north to past Worth Street March 5 to protest devastating state and city budget cuts and to demand "shared sacrifice" to close the budget gaps. Rally organizers from One New York, a coalition of more than 200 unions, community groups, and service agencies, estimated the crowd was as large as 75,000. Rallies were also held in other cities around the state.

"Slashing services, laying off workers, and balancing the budget on the backs of hard-working men and women is not the best way to solve New York's fiscal crisis," rally organizers said. "It's time for everyone to do their fair share."

Governor David Paterson and Mayor Michael Bloomberg have both proposed layoffs, steep cuts in education, health care, and other vital programs such as senior services, disability services, and housing assistance.

The speakers platform, adorned with banners saying "There Is Another Way," "Cuts Are Not the Answer," and "Protect Our Communities," was packed with representatives from unions, community groups, clergy, tenant organizations, day care centers, schools, and health facilities as well as elected officials from City Council, the state legislature, and the boroughs.

Speakers praised President Barack Obama for his proposals to increase taxes on those most able pay and for his stimulus bill, and urge local officials to use the stimulus funds "wisely." They called for the wealthiest New Yorkers to bear a fair share of the burden. Over the past 30 years, New York has cut its tax rate for the wealthiest residents by 50 percent. Workers earning \$40,000 should not pay the same tax rate as those with an income of \$400,000, speakers said, to shouts of agreement. A bill in the state legislature, the Fair Share Tax Reform Bill" (S.2021), would increase taxes on wealthier New Yorkers.



These are hard times, and no one knows when things will get better. President Barack Obama's stimulus package is a good first step. The package includes a one-time \$250 stimulus check for retirees, which you will receive in late May. We are also especially pleased that the plan will allocate up to \$300 million for public housing in New York. And we are proud that our efforts were a factor.

We held a rally for public housing last May that drew 10,000 people. In July, we bought radio ads during the All-Star game calling for federal aid to public housing, reaching over 2 million listeners. Later in the year, we wrote a letter and created a video detailing the desperate need for repairs in public housing and sent it to every city, state, and federal elected official in the region. These efforts helped convince our political leaders to include financial support for our public housing system in the federal stimulus package.

But the stimulus package is not enough to set our economy on a sound footing. We must continue to make our voices heard. The mass rally at City Hall March 5, called by One New York, a coalition of more than 200 unions, community groups, and service agencies to protest state and city budget cuts and to demand a fair sacrifice—a tax increase on the wealthy—is a good example. Governor David Paterson and Mayor Michael Bloomberg have both proposed drastic cuts in education, health care, child care, senior services, youth services, services for people with disabilities, immigrant ser-



A Message from the President

vices, and other programs, putting the primary burden of our economic crisis on working people, retirees, and the poor. That is not a fair sacrifice.

We cannot cut our way out of this economic downturn. Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz pointed out in a letter to New York State leaders, "It is economically preferable to raise taxes on those with high income than to cut state expenditures."

Our voices are being heard. Democratic leaders in the State Senate are calling for a Fair Share tax plan, which would increase taxes on the wealthy, with the largest increase on those making more than \$1 million a year.

Another area in which we must continue to campaign is the **Employee Free Choice Act**, which was just reintroduced in both the House of Representatives and the Senate after Republicans blocked a vote last year. The bill would allow workers to form a union if a majority of the workers signed a union membership card, severely penalize employers for intimidating and firing employees for supporting a union, and impose a contract determined in mediation or by an arbitrator if employers stall in contract negotiations, a common practice.

Two hundred-twenty House members

are co-sponsoring the measure so far, more than enough to ensure passage, so everyone's attention is turned to the Senate, where there are 40 co-sponsors. President Barack Obama, who was a co-sponsor of the measure in the Senate, supports it.

However, big business and the Republicans have launched a \$200 million disinformation campaign claiming that EFCA takes away the secret ballot, in "violation of democratic principles."

"This is false." Workers have the right to vote on union representation by secret ballot. EFCA simply gives card check as another option. Employers regularly intimidate and fire workers who support unions, in violation of the law. They spy on workers and force them to attend meetings at which they describe unions as evil dues-grubbing outsiders and make other false claims. Does that sound like employers are concerned about democracy for their employees?

Retirees have a big stake in passage of the EFCA. Unions fight for a secure retirement for retirees, with health coverage and pension benefits. They also strengthen the nation's economy, because union workers have higher wages and are thus able to purchase goods and services. Retirees want this for their children and grandchildren as well as for themselves.

Talk to your children and grandchildren, because polls show that younger workers may not be aware of the benefits of unions. And contact your elected officials in Washington. (See page 4 for contact information.)



clockwise, beginning at left: Retiree Division Director Nancy True presents James Spicer with an award from the International Labor Communications Council for an Oral History Project interview, "James Spicer's Little League Football Team"; the event's organizing committee members receive certificates, l-r: True, Barbara Hazel-

WE CELEBRATE BLACK HISTORY MONTH

The Retiree Division marked Black History Month on February 26, and the local had a program for working members the next night. Photos,



wood, Carolyn Whitley, Spicer, Ken Fox, Doris Welch, Helen Mashburn, Laurel Eu-land, and Deputy Director Winston George; saxophonist Cecile Scott, a Local 237 retiree, and his band played jazz at the evening program; retirees play Who Wants to Be a Millionaire with questions on Black history, developed by the organizing committee and "hosted" by Welch (standing, far right) and Mashburn (standing at podium); guest speaker Laurie Cumbo, director of the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts; evening program: President Greg Floyd with jazz musician/community activist/97.8 KISS-FM radio talk show host James Mtume, who donated his honorarium to a scholarship program for young black women run by Local 237 member Monique Lauderdale (center), who received a President's Award that evening; Floyd presents a Lifetime Achievement Award to retired Local 237 President Carl Haynes

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WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH • WOMEN MAKING HISTORY

Frances Perkins & Hilda Solis, U.S. Secretaries of Labor

FRANCES PERKINS

First woman U.S. secretary of labor (1932-1945), under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt; first woman U.S. Cabinet member; first woman on New York State's Industrial Commission; first woman chair of the New York State Industrial Commission and its first woman commissioner



Frances Perkins

During Frances Perkins' tenure as secretary of labor, the longest of any in U.S. history, child labor was abolished, minimum wage and maximum-hour laws

were enacted, a massive public works program was created, and through the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, workers were guaranteed the right to organize and bargain collectively.

Perkins proposed what became the Federal Emergency Relief Act, the first federal welfare program. Perkins chaired FDR's Committee on Economic Security, which developed the Social Security Act that was passed in 1935, and she helped win passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act, in 1938.

HILDA SOLIS

New U.S. secretary of labor; first woman elected to California State Senate



Hilda Solis

The third of seven children of immigrants from Mexico and Nicaragua, Solis comes from a union family (her father was a Teamster shop steward). She was the first in her family to finish college.

Solis was elected to the California State Assembly in 1992 and, in 1994, she became the first Latina to be elected to the state Senate, where she served as chairwoman of the Senate labor committee.

As a state senator, Solis advanced legislation to protect farm workers, garment workers and janitors; strengthened penalties against child-labor law violators; led the ef-

forts to improve minimum wage, unemployment insurance, workers' compensation and state disability insurance; and established the first study on the viability of a state-paid family leave program.

In 2000, Solis became the first woman to receive the John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award for her work on California legislation for environmental protections in minority communities.

That same year, she was elected to the U.S. Congress. During her four terms in Congress, she earned a 97 percent rating by the AFL-CIO and a 100 percent rating from the Alliance for Retired Americans. She was also the treasurer for American Rights at Work, an organization that promotes workplace democracy and workers' right to organize.



**First Lady
Michele
Obama**

Michelle Robinson Obama, the great-great-granddaughter of a slave,

raised on Chicago's South Side, is the first African-American First Lady of the United States. A graduate of Princeton University and Harvard Law School, she is only the third First Lady with a postgraduate degree.

The Union Advantage for Women

In 2007, women made up 45 percent of union members. If the share of women in unions continues to grow at the same rate as it has over the last 25 years, women will be the majority of the unionized workforce by 2020.

Union membership makes a big difference. According to a new study by the Center for Economic and Policy Research, "Unions and Upward Mobility for Women Workers," union women earned on average 11.2 percent more than nonunion women. The difference is even greater for women in low-wage occupations—14 percent.

The union advantage is even larger for women with respect to health insurance and pension coverage.

This is another reason to support the Employee Free Choice Act, which would protect the right of workers to organize.

Lily Ledbetter, Fighter for Equal Pay

It took ten years, but because of Lily Ledbetter courage and determination, Congress passed a law restoring the right of workers to sue employers for pay discrimination.

After working for Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company in Alabama for nearly 20 years, Ledbetter discovered she was being paid less than her male co-workers who were doing the same work. She sued.

A federal jury ruled in her favor, but Goodyear appealed, and the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Ledbetter vs. Goodyear* that Ledbetter—and other workers—had no right to sue over pay discrimination more than 180 days after the first paycheck—even if she didn't discover the pay discrimination until years later. The 5-4 deci-

sion basically overturned decades of precedent. Based on that ruling, hundreds of pay discrimination cases were thrown out of court.

Ledbetter didn't give up, and the labor movement and women's organizations made the cause a priority. The House passed a bill in 2007, but Senate Republicans blocked a vote and President George Bush vowed to veto it if it came to his desk. This year, despite Republican maneuvers, the bill passed easily.

The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 was the first piece of legislation signed by President Barack Obama. The president said, "While this bill bears her name, Lilly knows that this story isn't just about her. It's the story of women across this country still earning just



Melanie Ross Levin, Nat'l Women's Law Center

President Barack Obama signs the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. Ledbetter is standing, left. Behind Obama is Rep. Nancy Pelosi, the first woman speaker of the House.

78 cents for every dollar men earn—women of color even less—which

means that today, in the year 2009, countless women are still losing thousands of dollars in salary, income and retirement savings over the course of a lifetime. . . .

"Ultimately, equal pay isn't just an economic issue for millions of Americans and their families, it's a question of who we are."

Retirees to Receive \$250 Stimulus Checks in May

Retirees and other Social Security beneficiaries will get a one-time check for \$250 in late May as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 signed into law by President Barack Obama February 17.

The "senior payment"—\$250 for individuals, \$500 for couples who both receive some Social Security benefit—will go to 55 million retirees, older veterans, SSI (Supplemental Security Income) beneficiaries, and people with disabilities

No action is required by recipients.

For more information, go to www.ssa.gov or call 1-800-772-1213 for automated service 24 hours a day, or 7 a.m.-7 p.m., Monday-Friday, to speak to a representative.

Nat Spero to Be Honored

Nathan Spero, who taught the Retiree Division's popular News and Views and labor history classes for several years and who died last year, will be honored May 5 at a Pillar of Labor event sponsored by the Wagner Labor Archives and New York Labor History Association. Local 237 retirees are invited to attend.

The program, to be held at 6 p.m. Tami-tent Library on the New York University campus, at 70 Washington Square South, 10th Floor.

Labor journalist Jane Latour, who conducted extensive interviews with Spero for the UE's Talking History Project and is organizing the program, said the event is an opportunity to "honor a great man who made significant, if largely unsung, contributions to the labor movement."

NO TIME TO WASTE!

The Employee Free Choice Act has been introduced in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. President Obama said he will sign it, but corporate special interests are spending millions to block it.

Your representative and senators need to hear from you NOW. Go to

action@americanrightsatwork.org
or **teamsters.org**

and sign an e-mail petition to your representative and senator. Or write or call them at:

U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510

**House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515**

Capitol Switchboard: 202-224-3121

Retiree Personal Notes

Congratulations to **Bill Sheptinsky** and his wife, Ruth, who celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary March 21. It's a busy spring for the Sheptinskys, with their granddaughter celebrating her Bat Mitzvah in April.

* * *

Local 237 mourns the passing of Trustee Evaristo (Abby) Pabon, special assistant to the President Gregory Floyd, in January after a long illness . . . Deepest sympathy to **Barbara Hazelwood** on the passing of her mother, Willie Mae-Josephine Brown Simpson on January 16 . . . Condolences to retired HPO Sergeant **Joseph Hayes** on the passing of his niece, Tammie Hayes, the daughter of his sister Juanita Hayes.

Alliance for Retired Americans Update

President Kourpias Retires; New President Elected

Alliance for Retired Americans President George Kourpias announced his retirement last month. Under Kourpias, who led the Alliance since its founding in 2001, Alliance membership grew to 3.5 million. There are now 30 state Alliance chapters in addition to many community-based affiliates. The ARA Executive Committee elected Barbara Easterling to replace Kourpias as president. Easterling, who retired from the Communications Workers of America in 2008 after 16 years as the union's secretary-treasurer, began her union career 35 years ago as a telephone operator in Akron, Ohio, and became an officer of CWA Local 4320. In 1995, she took a leave of absence to serve as secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO, becoming the first woman to hold that position.



Lobby Week, White House Summits on Finance and Health Care

ARA activists held 70 meetings with U.S. representatives and senators during Lobby Week February 16-20, when legislators were home for the congressional recess. Alliance members outlined measures to lower the cost of prescription drugs, strengthen the Medicare Trust Fund, and expand Medicare coverage for retirees age 55-64. They called upon their lawmakers to form Seniors Advisory Committees, and to support the Employee Free Choice Act to help workers organize and negotiate for higher wages and health care and retirement benefits.

ARA Executive Director Ed Coyle was invited to attend President Obama's Fiscal Responsibility Summit at the White House February 23. Later that week, Coyle represented the Alliance at the White House Health Care Summit, along with about 120 invited members of Congress, health care advocates, unions, and others.

CORRECTIONS: In last month's "Retiree Personal Notes" column, Robert Wolf should have been Robert Wilson and Anthony Cottone's phone number should have read 718-745-7565. Also, last month, in the article on p. 3 on the Retiree Division's Martin Luther King Tribute, quotes by Millicent Stewart and Mavis Andrews about experiences with people voting for the first time were reversed. We apologize for the errors.

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