

‘Bloombergville’ brings world attention to massive cuts, layoffs

By Dee Knight Bloombergville, New York City

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June 19 — Launched on the heels of a massive public workers’ rally on June 14, and inspired by gigantic occupations of public squares in Egypt, Tunisia, Spain, Greece and Wisconsin, the Bloombergville encampment near New York’s City Hall has withstood police intimidation and inclement weather to mount a spirited and sustained protest against the current onslaught of anti-people budget cuts in New York City and state.

Bloombergville harks back to the “Hoovervilles” of the first years of the Great Depression, which were a response to the cold indifference of the pro-rich president. Hoover ignored the suffering of millions who lost their jobs and homes due to Wall Street speculators driven by capitalist greed.

Bloombergville is also inspired by “Walkervilles” that have sprung up around the state of Wisconsin, protesting Gov. Walker’s attacks on workers’ rights to collective bargaining and efforts to impose austerity there.

Bloombergville’s second day was marked by a massive march of New York’s construction trades workers, more than 25,000 strong. They made history twice in a single day: first by enthusiastic solidarity with the Bloombergville protesters, and then by a bold breakout from police barriers meant to cage them in and blunt their protest. Both cases were a break from the past.

Observers compared this new mood to the days of Vietnam War-era protests, when President Nixon used a handful of right-wing, all-white construction workers to bash protesters and drive a wedge between them in the public eye. This time the workers were neither all-white nor right-wing and readily found common cause with the Bloombergville protesters.

Building solidarity at home, abroad

Workers World spoke with a participant in the construction trades march, Sherry Cruz, an apprentice member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 3: “This is so cool that we’re getting together with Bloombergville. If we can get united and stay united, we’ll win!”

Bloombergville protesters are mainly young students, but they have been supported by both members and leaders of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees District Council 37, the Professional Staff Congress of City University of New York, and the Transport Workers Union Local 100. Each group has provided food and other support to the protest encampment.

The activist group Picture the Homeless has played a strong, leading role based on its long experience with this type of protest. PTH has also helped keep the encampment legal in the face of police harassment.

Lynn Lewis, PTH director, made it clear from the start that as long as tents or other structures are not used, the protest is protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. She provided training for police negotiators, who have defended protesters’ rights repeatedly to members of the New York Police Department, with backing from lawyers and legal observers. The process is described on the BloombergvilleNow.org blogsite:



June 18, New York City Hall.

WW photo: Brenda Sandburg

“As our talented police negotiators have continued to protect the right of Bloombergville to exist, there is one thing that is clear. Bloombergville is more than just a location, it is an idea: an idea that everyone has a say in how the city spends our tax money. This is a fight against budget cuts that will lower the quality of life for all New Yorkers. Bloombergville has moved — or been moved — several times since the encampment started Tuesday. We may keep moving, but we’re still here.”

The blog introduction continues: “If you’re a parent whose kids’ school is closing, if you can’t afford medical care, if you live near a fire station that’s shutting down — you’re already living in Bloombergville — so you may as well join us. Come with a sleeping bag to spend the night or come for an hour. We’ll always be somewhere in the shadows of City Hall, 24/7, and we’re not leaving until the budget is defeated. If you’re a New Yorker who wants a city that’s healthy, educated and safe, you’re always welcome here.”

Today a noon-time solidarity delegation visited Bloombergville from Democracia Real Ya!, the group that has led massive protests in Spain for the past few weeks. Cesar Siroco, a spokesperson, told WW there is much in common between the two protests and that people in Spain look forward to the growing protests in the U.S., which will strengthen the global movement against right-wing austerity policies.

The Bloombergville General Assembly, which meets daily, announces plans for marches and rallies in the City Hall area at lunch time and again at 6 p.m. daily. Organizers are reaching out to affected groups and communities, such as daycare centers that are facing drastic cuts, schools and firehouses being shut down because of the Bloomberg budget proposals, and public sector workers facing layoffs.

On June 22 Bloombergvillers plan to join a protest on Wall Street sponsored by National Nurses United and the AFL-CIO. It is the third large-scale union protest in New York in eight days.

The growing intensity of popular resistance is becoming more united. As Cruz said, “If we can get united and stay united, we’ll win!”

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