



Written by on January 8, 2011

City Hearings on Blizzardgate Get No Response from NY State Government

In response to evidence that rank-and-file members and supervisors within the New York City Department of Sanitation intentionally refused to carry out their duties after the recent blizzard as a way to protest Mayor Michael Bloomberg's policies, the New York City Council is launching hearings on Monday January 10 into the matter. Prompted by the uncovering of damning evidence by Queens Councilman Dan Halloran, the Council is holding two citywide oversight hearings, as well as a series of public hearings to fully gauge the impact of the sanitation department and union's failure to adequately respond to the crippling snowstorm.



The city's Department of Investigation, which is responsible for looking into allegations of corruption, is also launching its own investigation into the matter. Former New York Governor David A. Paterson, a Democrat, announced on December 30, 2010 that he would be launching an investigation into the Department of Sanitation and its leadership. Paterson's response to the poor Department of Sanitation response to the blizzard which piled as many as 20 inches of snow on some parts of the city follows the release of a report by Halloran, a Republican, alleging an orchestrated department-wide systematic breakdown in its response, organized by department supervisors and union bosses.

Paterson's call for a criminal investigation accompanies recent calls by other elected officials for probes into the matter. Bloomberg promises to investigate Halloran's claims by probing the Department of Sanitation and its union members, while the Democrat-dominated NYC Council announced earlier in the week that they were launching a probe of Bloomberg next month, in what will undoubtedly be a politically-charged episode, considering that the vast majority of council members oppose Bloomberg's budget proposals and rely on bloc votes from the city's various labor unions, who are hardly supportive of efforts to reduce the municipal workforce in order to balance the city's budget.

While the city's response, as well that of Paterson, were appropriately robust, the new administration of Governor Andrew Cuomo and Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman has been anything but concerned with investigating the matter. Both ran on distinctly progressive political platforms, thus under minding and shortchanging the city's efforts to seek justice for damages done by the union.

In what can only be described as a mutiny, members of the Uniformed Sanitationmen's Association Local 831 are believed to have purposely slowed down slow plowing and clean-up efforts as a means to express their displeasure with Bloomberg's decision to lay off over 400 workers and to freeze pay increases, as well as to maximize "time-and-a-half" overtime payments by deliberately slowing down their response, by unnecessarily raising plows, deliberately smashing plow blades, and by even refusing



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to take plows out of Department lots, according to various reports.

Further evidence has become available, as of Sunday, January 2, 2011, which indicates that the union revolt has also taken the form of an exorbitant number of [sanitation workers calling in sick](#) in the aftermath of the blizzard. According to reports, between 660 and 720 sanitation workers called in sick for the cleanup of the blizzard last Monday and Tuesday, more than double the usual rate, amounting to over 12% of the department's 6000-member workforce. In response to these allegations, the NYC Department of Investigation has also announced that they would be launching an investigation into the matter.

Adding insult to injury, allegations have also arisen regarding sanitation supervisors, who are represented by the Sanitation Officers Association Local 444 union, and are believed to have [purchased beer and sat in their department-issued cars](#) for hours, instead of working, claiming that their cars "ran out of gas."

Councilman Halloran, who is also an elected member of the New York State Conservative, Independence, and Libertarian Parties (as New York is one of a few states to allow fusion voting, in which candidates can run on multiple party lines), reports that several guilt-ridden sanitation workers visited his district office and confessed that union leadership and Department of Sanitation supervisors in the outer boroughs of Brooklyn, Staten Island, and Queens told workers that they must "take off routes [and] not do the plowing of some of the major arteries in a timely manner."

The workers told Halloran that the purpose of this gross dereliction of duty was to [protest Bloomberg's policies](#), which the union opposes, including demotions of numerous supervisors, reductions in salary and overtime hours, and overall budget cuts and restructuring of the department. As far back as 2002, Bloomberg, who prides himself as a fiscal conservative, has warned of [sanitation layoffs](#) as a means to close a budget deficit of over \$5 Billion, without union concessions and state and federal aid. Ironically, that same year, Local 831 [endorsed Republican Governor George E. Pataki](#) for re-election. In November, Bloomberg also announced that in order to close a FY 2010 budget deficit of \$3.3 Billion, there would be a [layoff of 8,264 municipal workers](#) by FY 2012, including the elimination of 200 supervisor positions in the Department of Sanitation and the redeployment of supervisors to frontline sanitation worker positions.

To date, no other municipal workers union has responded to these budget proposals with the type of egregious on-the-job insubordination seen by the sanitation union. While Bloomberg's budget calls for the layoff of 350 auxiliary positions within the New York Police Department (NYPD) and 51 officer positions within the Department of Corrections (DOC), no on-the-job insurrection of members of the Policeman's Benevolent Association or the Correction Officer's Benevolent Association (the respective labor unions of these two city departments) has yet been documented.

While Paterson was quick to caution against what he perceived as possible "rumor and innuendo which we should probably table until there are facts to back that up," he did admit that due to the horrific ramifications of the union mutiny, a [criminal investigation is not out of the question](#), and that "criminality is a heightened sense of wrongdoing and there are examples of people whose lives were threatened severely."

[The Outgoing Governor](#) is particularly incensed over the fact that due to DOS negligence, there have been several cases where emergency vehicles could not reach critically ill persons, including newborn babies and the elderly, resulting in several deaths. In response, the city's EMS Chief, John Peruggia,



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has been terminated, and the sanitation supervisors responsible for the Brooklyn South area which was hardest hit, [Joseph Susol and Joseph Montgomery](#), were both removed earlier in the week.

Ironically, in 2009, the Uniformed Sanitationmen's Union, along with many other municipal unions, [backed Bloomberg's legislative push to abolish term limits](#), which enabled Bloomberg to serve for an unprecedented third term. One year after his reelection, Bloomberg reneged and supported a Ballot Initiative to restore term limits. Union Head Harry Nespoli, who also heads the Municipal Labor Committee, an umbrella group representing all major municipal labor unions, also [endorsed Bloomberg](#) in his 2009 mayoral election, citing the mayor's "flexibility at the bargaining table." According to Nespoli, "he's the best candidate to lead us through these tough financial times and into recovery."

However, the political alliance between Bloomberg and the sanitation union has come to an abrupt end with Bloomberg's budget cuts. The politically-charged nature of the sanitation mutiny is also well-supported by evidence that [particular neighborhoods were targeted](#) by the protesting sanitation workers. Middle Village, Queens, and Borough Park, Brooklyn, were specifically targeted by the union members, one of whom said, "Borough Park was specifically targeted because of its ability to sort of gin up the p.r. machine."

According to statistics, Borough Park, a community of Ultra-Orthodox Jews, [overwhelmingly supported Republicans](#) in the 2010 statewide elections, and went [97.6% to Republican Presidential Candidate John McCain](#) in 2008. Middle Village overwhelmingly supported Bloomberg in his 2009 reelection bid, and has a long history of sending Republicans to the NYC Council and State Legislature.

Borough Park Assemblyman Dov Hikind, a Democrat who endorsed Republican Congressman-Elect Michael Grimm, worked to elect Ronald Reagan, is rated "Anti-Choice" by NARAL Pro Choice New York, and has condemned Barack Obama, has also called for an investigation, and even called upon the [National Guard](#) to intervene in what he perceived as a "state of emergency."

Adding insult to injury, sanitation workers piled gargantuan mountains of snow against the fence of [Borough Park's Washington Cemetery](#), causing the fence to break, toppling dozens of headstones, many belonging to deceased Holocaust survivors and Jewish victims of the gulags. The same cemetery, earlier in December, was the target of anti-Semitic vandalism, as several headstones were toppled and smashed. Not even the deceased were able to escape the wrath of union negligence.

Calls to Hikind's office for comment on Governor Paterson's announcement of a criminal investigation were unanswered by time of publication, although NYS Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, dismissed Paterson's calls for an investigation as "[hyperbole](#)" and parroted the mainstream Democrat and Local 831 moniker that Bloomberg and his attrition efforts at balancing the city's budget are to blame for the tragic aftermath of the storm.

To date, Governor-Elect Andrew M. Cuomo, a Democrat, has not announced any plans to carry forth Former Governor Paterson's investigation efforts. Cuomo, however, did bring charges against former [Sanitation Deputy Chief Frederick Grimaldi](#), as New York Attorney General, as part of an anti-extortion sweep intended to weed out criminal elements within city departments. Attorney General-Elect Eric T. Schneiderman, also a Democrat, has not announced any efforts to launch a probe into Local 831 activities, and is not expected to, as he is a stalwart of the ACORN-linked Working Families Party and a self-described "Progressive Activist," who was endorsed by big labor, including Harry Nespoli, who said that Schniederman "will stick up for New York's working men and women, and will fight for equal justice under the law. He has a long record of reform, and I know he will continue that work as Attorney



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General." [Schneiderman](#) also intends on using his office as a means to enact and enforce policies directed towards "Economic Justice and Social Justice"

The governor never once mentioned the scandal at his State of the State address on Wednesday, January 5 in Albany, nor did the attorney general, who was sworn into office in an elaborate ceremony on Thursday, featuring bands, catered food, cocktails, dancing, and the presence of celebrities and a who's-who of Democratic Party politicians and union heads. He was, however, fast to bring an environmental suit against a Pennsylvania energy company, alleging violation of the federal Clean Air Act, while shrewdly avoiding prosecuting the true criminals in his own political camp. Paterson's call for an investigation, therefore, will most likely fall by the wayside, as Big Labor and its political allies were sworn in on January 1, 2011, as they continue to deflect blame away from the negligent and life-endangering actions of Local 831 members, who callously and selfishly threatened the lives of the citizens who pay their salaries for the sake of political expediency and making a policy statement.

Photo: Angelo Annunziata, 58, complains about the still unplowed snow in front of his house on 62nd Street and 23rd Avenue in Brooklyn, N.Y., Dec. 30, 2010: AP Images



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