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## 800 employees face layoffs as union chiefs ignore city's inability to bear soaring cost of benefits

EDITORIALS

DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Saturday, September 03, 2011

The city is on the verge of laying off almost 800 teacher's aides - and they have no one but their own union leaders to blame.

The aides are forfeiting salaries that average a modest \$11,000 a year because District Council 37 President Lillian Roberts, like too many labor colleagues, refused to face reality:

The days when the city could lavish ever-increasing compensation on its workforce are over.

Revenue generated by New York's tax code - one of the very heaviest in the country - simply cannot keep up with the skyrocketing cost of overly generous pensions and health coverage afforded to government workers.

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Trimming those benefits to affordable size is the only way to preserve the jobs of civil servants and the services they provide.

Albany's labor leaders have begun to see that light. Contracts negotiated with Gov. Cuomo call for state workers to accept unpaid furloughs and chip in more for health coverage while going without across-the-board raises for three years.

Those sacrifices enabled Cuomo to cancel thousands of layoffs.

But when Mayor Bloomberg sought similar concessions, Roberts stonewalled, forcing him to order the most painful layoffs in years.

For the same reason, 465 Parks Department workers, also DC 37 members, may be cut to seasonal work for three years, then dropped from the payroll - the equivalent of slow-motion layoffs.

The teachers union, employing its considerable clout, managed to stave off 4,600 threatened job cuts - but only temporarily.

As the Citizens Budget Commission points out, the city is financing those positions mostly with fiscal gimmicks and one-shot sources of cash that will evaporate in a year. The salvaged jobs and more like them remain very much in jeopardy.

Worst is the posture of transit workers union chief John Samuelson, who ruled out a contract without pay hikes and raised the specter of an illegal strike.

"We're going to dig in and fight by every means possible," Samuelson told the Daily News' Pete Donohue. "The leadership of the union has no intention of striking. But when New York City transit workers get knocked to the floor and someone puts a foot on their throats, who knows what their reaction is going to be?"

Brazen words, given that his union has been under court order not to foment such tactics since the shameful walkout of December 2005.

Samuelson, Roberts and the city's other labor leaders need to wake up and smell the economy. The money spigot has run dry. Refusing reasonable cutbacks will only forfeit jobs - and decimate services vital to the lives of all New Yorkers.

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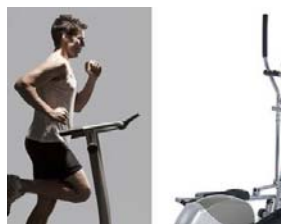
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