

New York Governor Cuomo rejects Wall Street protest demand over “millionaires’ tax”

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New York’s Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo has rejected a demand raised in the Occupy Wall Street protests for the reinstatement of an income tax surcharge on the state’s wealthiest residents.

The so-called “millionaires’ tax”, imposed on New Yorkers making more than a quarter of a million dollars a year, is set to expire on December 31, depriving the state of close to \$5 billion. The money is to go back into the bank accounts of the state’s richest 2 percent, paid for through sweeping budget cuts in education, health care and other vital social services.

A group of unions and political organizations close to the Democratic Party sought to make the restoration of the millionaires’ tax a centerpiece of the month-old anti-Wall Street protests in lower Manhattan. It was raised prominently in a march staged last week past Fifth Ave. and Park Ave. homes of some of New York City’s billionaires, such as Rupert Murdoch, Jamie Dimon, David Koch, and John Paulson.

Virtually all of these organizations, including the 1199-SEIU hospital workers union, the Communications Workers of America, the New York State Union of Teachers, had backed the election of Cuomo and, in 1199’s case, actively collaborated with his administration in drawing up plans for slashing Medicaid funding.

The attempt by these organizations to foist onto the anti-Wall Street movement the tactic of using the protest to pressure the state’s Democratic administration has quickly proven bankrupt.

Speaking Monday, after the release of a poll showing that 72 percent of New Yorkers favor the extension of the tax, and in the wake of news conferences held by the unions and the other Democratic-aligned advocacy groups, Cuomo flatly rejected restoring the millionaires’ tax.

“The fact that everybody wants it, that doesn’t mean all that much,” he said at a press conference in Albany. “I represent the people, their opinion matters, but I’m not

going back and forth with the political winds.”

Cuomo recycled the myth that maintaining the little more than 2 percent surcharge on New York’s wealthiest would send the billionaires and multi-millionaires scurrying from their Upper East Side apartments and townhouses across the border to Jersey City or Bayonne. A recent study by New York City’s comptroller’s office showed that those making \$250,000 or more a year are the least likely to abandon the city over taxes.

“I think you are kidding yourself if you think you can be one of the highest taxed states in the nation, have a reputation for being anti-business and have a rosy economic future,” Cuomo said.

The Democratic governor went on to make an obscene comparison between his defense of the privileges of the richest New Yorkers and the stand taken by his father, former Democratic Governor Mario Cuomo against the death penalty, which at the time polls showed was backed by a majority of the state’s voters.

Cuomo’s purported “profile in courage” only demonstrates that the Democratic Party is the party of Wall Street and defends its interests against the social demands and needs of working people, the vast majority of the state’s population.

Meanwhile, a section of the anti-Wall Street protesters marched on the offices of Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. Tuesday evening to demand an investigation into continuing acts of police brutality against demonstrators.

The march came in the wake of the release of more videos showing a high-ranking police supervisor using excessive and unprovoked force against a protester.

Deputy Inspector Johnny Cardona is reportedly being investigated by the city’s Civilian Complaints Review Board over the video, which depicts an incident last Friday in which he grabbed a demonstrator from behind, spun him around and punched him in the face, knocking him to the ground.

He is the second senior police commander to be investigated by the panel. Deputy Inspector Anthony Bologna is facing a probe over his vicious pepper-spraying of a group of unresisting female protesters after they had been restrained in police plastic netting used to “kettle” the demonstrators.

A video over the weekend showed that Cardona had also participated in this earlier attack, manhandling one of the protesters before Bologna moved in with his pepper spray canister.

The NYPD has retaliated against the demonstrator punched by Cardona by issuing an order to arrest him on trumped-up charges of “attempted assault on a police officer, obstructing governmental administration, resisting arrest and disorderly conduct.”

Liberty Plaza, the site of the anti-Wall Street protest, remains full of people – among them the unemployed and the underemployed, orchestra musicians and other artists, teenagers, and the older generation –who have come to find out more about the occupation and to show their support for a struggle against the ruling elite.

A wide variety of people joined in conversations with WSWS supporters about the need for a socialist political program and a turn to the working class to fight for social equality. People raised dozens of crucial issues, such as the nature of the historical development of society, Trotsky’s fight against Stalinism, and the class character of the Democratic Party, often in the most animated manner.

Anthony Rizzo, an undergraduate from Rutgers University in New Jersey, studying the sciences told us “I’m gong to have to be going on the job market soon. How am I going to get a job in this climate? Am I going to be working at ‘Toys R Us’ for the rest of my life?”

Speaking of the relationship between the top one percent and the rest of the population, he said, “We’re working in their factories and stores and basically getting suckered.

“Obviously, Obama does not represent our interests. He kind of screwed us over with the bank bailout. The system is deeply flawed. You’ve got to have no corporate interests whatsoever in the government.” Asked if he thought that was possible, Anthony said, “Probably not, not outside of a whole new system from the ground up.”

John, a young, unemployed worker from the Bronx said, “I’ve been coming back here for a couple of days now to show my support. What’s going on with society now just doesn’t work. They’re trying to take pensions and healthcare away from so many people. We, the working class, are playing by their rules, but the higher-ups don’t bother. We still have a war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Why is that? You just can’t keep up this slavery over the people.”

Phillip Grayson is English as a Second Language teacher at the Kaplan International Center. He told the WSWS, “I usually get off of work at 2 PM, and I have come down here every day for the last two weeks. This is something whose idea and time have come. I kept wondering why things were the way they were, and why things that were wrong and so obvious to me never came up.

“It was obvious that the large corporations had undue power in government. The illogical way the bailout was handled was never really discussed. The government is focused on it, and everything else seems like it is aimed at cutting social programs. They are gutting the education system and the infrastructure to pay off today’s bills. Everything is run with the corporate mentality that this quarter’s profits are more important than the future.

“I am not in the public school system, and I don’t know everything that is going on, but it can’t be in the interest of the people or the future to destroy education the way it is being done.

“We have been talking about adopting demands for a while. Right now, I don’t know honestly, whether we should have demands or not. One idea is that without them Occupy Wall Street lacks focus. While I don’t think this is a valid point, people do have a lot of complaints and grievances. But you do see a fundamental cause for them, like the budget cutbacks and economic inequality. Wall Street was not chosen as the target arbitrarily.

“Making these demands would separate us from various parties like the Tea Party and the Democratic Party. But at the same time, it feels like we are the ones with the momentum, and I don’t know if we want to confine what is happening here without first seeing what will happen and how much the movement would grow. We want to see how much of a voice it would have on a national and international scale.

“I think it is great that this has gone international. It is not surprising because from the start there was always reference to the Arab Spring and the British riots. In fact, this was specifically modeled on the demonstrations in Spain and Greece about a couple of months ago.

“I think choosing the 99 percent versus the 1 percent was a good slogan because people have been frustrated with this for a long time here and everywhere. I think everyone here is open and looking to communicate with each other in a lot of ways.”



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