

Unions Rally in Midtown Against Gilbane Construction

May 23, 2016

By **Silver Krieger**



Hunter Bell

New York, NY – The second demonstration in a day took place on Thursday in Midtown Manhattan, as union workers met to rally against Gilbane Construction’s use of unsafe, non-union contractors, and to memorialize workers killed on construction sites around the city.

The first rally was at Fulton Street at lunchtime, while the second, at 3:30 pm, was at 59th Street and Third Avenue, at a Gilbane site currently under construction. The contractors hired by Gilbane use sub-contractors, and pay lower wages, lesser benefits, and do not provide adequate training and safety measures.

Chanting, “How many more of us die,” “Whose city? Our city!” and “The American Way, the Union Way!” a crowd of about two hundred workers, labor leaders, and supporters filled the block between 2nd and 3rd Avenues, stopping traffic and eliciting honks of support from some in the stalled cars. Workers carried black coffins and a man wearing a grim reaper costume held his scythe high.

The rallies, organized under the name, “Honoring the Dead; Fighting for the Living,” honored three construction workers who have died in recent job-related accidents, all at non-union sites; one in Harlem, one in Brooklyn, and at a building at Hudson and Clarkson streets in lower Manhattan. In the last 12 months, 16 construction workers have died on the job; 140 in work-related accidents since 2008.



Christian Mejia

As well as honoring the fallen workers, those at the rally need to protect their jobs. At 59th Street, an organizer told the crowd, “The reason we’re out here today is Gilbane Construction...they decided to go non-union – if they get away with it every contractor in the city will do it...Look around this city. We built this city...the only thing that matters to these developers is the money...make as much money as you want, but we’ll be damned if they’ll use non-union to build this city. Make some noise!”

Attendees at the rally voiced their support. Hunter Bell, a first-year apprentice at Local 79, LIUNA Mason Tenders, said, “we come out to job sites that aren’t supporting union workers, and we all know that New York City is a union town, and Gilbane actually has union workers in Boston, but he comes out here and doesn’t give New Yorkers union work, and we find that pretty unfair.” About the workers killed at the sites, he said: “It’s sad. If people practiced safety, while working, if you had union workers on the job, who knew what they’re doing, how things are supposed to be done, there’d be less tragedy.”

Christian Mejia, who isn’t a union member but who came out to show his support, said, of the fallen: “One is too many. The city needs to look into this and enforce laws to be able to protect workers’ lives.”

A 'Grim' Reminder of Non-Union Construction in NYC

May 20, 2016

By **Joe Maniscalco**



Death continues to loom large over NYC construction workers.

New York, NY - Hundreds of buildings trades people pounded on mock coffins and chanted “How many more must die?” outside a Gilbane, Inc. development at 118 Fulton Street on Thursday afternoon, in a mass protest aimed at both convincing the developer to stop using irresponsible contractors -- and honoring New York City construction workers recently killed on the job.

“Gilbane is playing both sides of the fence,” NYC District Council of Carpenters Organizer Tammy Rivera told LaborPress. “He knows that it’s better to have qualified, trained workers building safely -- but at the same time, it’s also about his pocket. He has irresponsible contractors hiring workers -- some of them are not getting trained safely, so they cut corners and there are casualties -- and it just becomes a domino effect.”

Gilbane’s decision to go non-union on Fulton Street and other building projects around the city is particularly galling to members of New York’s Building Trades because, up until now they say Gilbane has largely acted responsibly in the city.

“A company like Gilbane doesn’t care about anything except money,” Chaz Rynkiewicz, organizing director, Local 79 Construction and General Building Laborers, said. “So, they will do whatever they can to lower the standards of workers if it’s more profit in their pockets. But we will continue to bring pressure and I definitely believe that our pressure will prevail because what we’re doing is right. What they’re doing is wrong. There’s plenty of money out there to pay a fair salary with medical coverage and proper training. They’re not doing that, but they did it in the past.”

Founded way back in 1873, Gilbane, Inc. is considered a giant in the construction industry, reaping nearly \$4 billion in annual sales. With an estimated fortune worth \$1.4 billion, the Gilbane family itself is ranked among the 150 richest families in the United States.

Despite its much-touted “ethical culture,” however, critics insist Gilbane has a history of allegedly violating federal wage and hour laws, as well as other basic workers’ rights.

A non-union construction worker protesting on Thursday afternoon told LaborPress that he is owed overtime pay and feels unsafe on the job.



Construction workers pound on mock coffins on Fulton Street.

"Across the United States Gilbane has a pretty slimy record," Rynkiewicz added. "Now, he's trying to go that way in New York City, too."

A spokesperson for Gilbane told LaborPress that the company is proud of its successful work to prevent worksite injuries, and said that 95 percent of Gilbane projects had recorded zero lost-time injuries in 2015.

"Gilbane's overriding focus is on constructing quality buildings in New York State, with a safe, productive and engaged workforce," the spokesperson said in an e-mail. "We employ both union and non-union labor to meet this objective and successfully build projects according to the high standards clients and our partners expect from Gilbane."

The mock coffins and grim reaper that haunted Fulton Street during this week's rally, recalled the alarming number of construction worker deaths that have occurred at mostly non-union job sites around New York City -- some 17 fatalities over the last year.

"We don't want to go home in those boxes," Rynkiewicz said. "We work hard we want to work safe so we can get to go home to our families."

Two weeks ago, members of the buildings trades rallied outside a Gilbane construction site on Broadway and Exchange Place, in which they vowed to pressure Gilbane, Inc. principal William Gilbane III until he "comes on board and does the right thing by the workers of New York City." This week, Rivera renewed the promise.

"When push comes to shove, we're going to fight -- we're not going to back down," she said.

Building Trades Draw the Line against Bad Contractors

May 6, 2016

By **Joe Maniscalco**

New York, NY - Organized labor hit the streets around 1 Wall Street on Thursday to protest the 50-story bank building's residential conversion because the project's developer doesn't seem to care about the lives of New York City workers.

Gilbane Inc.'s insistence that its "overriding focus is on constructing quality buildings in New York with a safe and productive and engaged workforce" fell on deaf ears this week as hundreds of trades people gathered at Broadway and Exchange Place to instead chant, "Gilbane sucks."

"They're looking to break the middle-class in New York City and we won't let that happen -- not on our backs or the next generation," said Terry Moore, vice-president of the BuildUpNYC coalition for responsible development.



Workers carry mock coffin honoring those who died on the job

Moore promised to dog Gilbane, Inc. principal William Gilbane III until he "comes on board and does the right thing by the workers of New York City."

Last week, New York City observed Workers Memorial Day. As many as 17 construction workers lost their lives in 2015 alone. Numerous workers in other industries, too, have had their lives tragically cut short on the job. The Building Trades puts the number of construction workers killed on the job since 2008, at about 140.

Most of the fatalities have occurred on non-union job sites. Efforts to mandate union-level safety training and procedures, however, continue to meet resistance. Last year, DOB Commissioner Rick Chandler told members of the City Council that his agency doesn't even note if a site is union or non-union when investigating accidents.

The city, meanwhile, is experiencing a building boom in which developers continually turn to the kinds of suspect sub-contractors who have a track record of paying lower wages, offering fewer benefits, and foregoing lifesaving safety standards.