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## Some WTC Workers Return to Job

By **JOSEPH DE AVILA**

Hundreds of unionized concrete workers returned to work Wednesday at the World Trade Center and other projects, but many remained off the job as a three-day standoff between union officials and management continued.

Two independent arbitrators, in separate cases on Tuesday and Wednesday, found workers at Two World Trade Center, the new Barclays Center in Brooklyn, Madison Square Garden, the Weill Cornell Medical Center and a new development on West 57th Street were violating a no-strike clause in their project labor agreement.

But hundreds of cement workers at One World Trade Center and its transit hub continued to refuse to work. They have no project labor agreement and their contract expired more than a month ago.



Larry Silverstein, the developer rebuilding part of the World Trade Center site, on whether the area will still be referred to as Ground Zero in the future.

The work stoppage has brought construction on the 800,000-square-foot transit hub to a virtual halt and slowed progress on the tower.

Mayor **Michael Bloomberg** addressed the job action for the first time Wednesday, saying the city wouldn't take a position and noting it would not affect the scheduled opening of the 9/11 memorial next week.

"They have to go and work this out themselves," the mayor said during a news conference Wednesday. "Nobody should be forced to work or not work. It's a dispute between private labor unions

and private employers. They have a right to do that."

Contractors have insisted that concrete workers accept 20% less in wages and benefits for residential and hotel construction relative to commercial construction, and the union hasn't budged on that demand so far.

The Cement League, a contractors' association that represents management, and the Cement and Concrete Workers District Council, representing concrete workers, both declined to comment.

Contractors recently filed complaints with an independent arbitrator over stoppages by concrete workers at the four construction sites with agreements that forbid strikes or job actions.

An arbitrator issued a cease-and-desist order Tuesday in favor of the contractors at Two World Trade Center, Madison Square Garden, Atlantic Yards and the 57t Street development. The arbitrators instructed the workers to return to the job.

"They are back working [at those four sites] to my knowledge. And that's helpful," said Steven Spinola, president of the Real Estate Board of New York, a lobbying group.

The Weill Cornell arbitration decision came down Wednesday afternoon.

There is no clause that forbids strikes or job actions at the World Trade Center's transit hub and at One World Trade Center where concrete workers have refused to work since Monday. Both projects are being built by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

The dispute has centered on contractors demanding that concrete workers accept wage and benefit cuts for residential and hotel work. Non-union construction workers are controlling a larger portion of those markets, Mr. Spinola said.

"We are basically saying that in order to be competitive in residential development, we need to bring the cost down," Mr. Spinola said.

Louis Coletti, president of the Building Trades Employers' Association, said concrete workers shouldn't use the World Trade Center projects as bargaining chips. "No one on that job site was asked to take a 20% pay cut," he added.

It's unclear how long the standoff at the World Trade Center could last. If it goes into next week, up to 1,000 construction workers could be forced to stop work because no one will be there to pour concrete, Mr. Coletti said.

"These things have a life of their own. Sometimes you can resolve insurmountable differences pretty quickly. Other times no," Mr. Coletti said. "It's really hard to speculate."

—Lisa Fleisher contributed to this article.

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