

County workers on strike in Los Angeles

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Los Angeles County workers have begun a series of partial one-day strikes this week to demand a 15.5 percent wage increase over three years and the rescinding of plans to impose co-payments on their medical insurance. The workers are also demanding the county improve child care and retirement benefits.

According to the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 660, each day a different group of employees will walk off the job. If no agreement is reached on October 11, all 47,000 members of the local will launch an indefinite strike.

LA County officials have offered a 9 percent wage increase over three years. Since this is less than the current rate of inflation of 3.4 percent, the county's offer represents a cut in real wages. In addition, the county authorities propose to shift health care costs to employees by imposing a co-payment of \$15 to \$20 for medical visits and \$10 for prescription drugs.

On Monday, October 2, 1,500 employees—those working for the Registrar-Recorder's office and Animal Control, walked out. Hospital workers are scheduled to strike Thursday and Friday.

The SEIU said that their members' wages are 10 to 20 percent behind workers in other counties in California. Given that fact, it gave no explanation why its wage demand is so modest, particularly considering that for the last two contracts the SEIU has accepted wage and other concessions in an agreement to prevent the county from closing hospitals and clinics.

The current financial health of the county is reflected in the 15 percent raise that the county supervisors gave themselves this year, a \$15,000 increase to \$113,000 per year.

While Local 660 members have participated in demonstrations of bus operators and mechanics during the three-week transit strike, SEIU leaders are anxious to prevent county workers from joining the transit workers in a total strike. Thousands of LA teachers

have also just voted to authorize strike action. But the uniting of these workers in a common expression of class determination and solidarity is anathema to the labor bureaucracy. Local 660 officials insist their tactic of one-day strikes is aimed at lessening the financial hardships on their members. For its part, the United Transportation Union leaders who represent striking bus operators and mechanics have made it clear they are ready to settle the strike as soon as possible.



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