

# 42,000 Los Angeles county workers strike as transit walkout continues

Carlos Menendez  
12 October 2000

Nearly 42,000 Los Angeles county workers began an indefinite strike Wednesday, October 11 to demand a 15 percent wage increase in a new three-year contract. The strike, which followed nine days of partial walkout by county workers, involves animal control, library, jail, sewer, beach maintenance, health clinic and other employees. Picketing is expected to take place at 250 locations.

The County Board of Supervisors had refused to negotiate with Service Employees International Union Local 660, which represents the striking workers, until union officials agreed to call off the strike. Over the weekend the Supervisors agreed to meet with the union negotiators, but negotiations adjourned Tuesday night with no agreement.

The average wage of a county worker is \$32,000, with many making as little as \$20,000, a poverty wage given the high cost of living in the country's second largest city.

The Supervisors' offer of 9 percent represents a loss of real wages, given current inflation rates. In addition, the county is demanding concessions on health care coverage, including \$10 to \$15 co-payments for doctors visits.

On Tuesday, Superior Court Judge Dzintra Janavs issued a temporary restraining order preventing 5,000 nurses, lab technicians, physical therapists and other medical employees from striking. The judge accepted the Supervisors' argument that a walkout by these workers would endanger public health. The SEIU indicated it would obey the injunction.

The country workers strike coincides with the ongoing walkout by the city's 4,400 bus and train operators, which marked its twenty-sixth day on Wednesday. On Tuesday night, the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) board made its "last, best and

final offer" to the United Transportation Union and demanded the union accept it before Thursday morning. If not, MTA CEO Julian Burke threatened, the board would take its offer directly to the drivers. "We believe this devastating strike must come to an end and we believe this can make it happen," Burke told reporters shortly after presenting UTU with the proposal.

The MTA's ultimatum creates the conditions for the possible declaration of an "impasse" by the state mediator, which would allow the MTA to impose its contract and to proceed toward the privatization of most of the bus system.

On Monday, October 9 the MTA carried out another provocation against the striking operators by initiating service on a line from west Los Angeles into downtown with nonunion operators driving five buses. It plans to increase service to eight buses by Thursday. The MTA then plans to open a bus line from south Los Angeles into downtown.

The MTA board is partially controlled by the same County Supervisors who are spearheading the attack on the county employees. Five Supervisors sit on the MTA board, including Democrats Gloria Molina, Yvonne Burke, and Zev Yarovlasky, all elected with union support. The Democrats have denounced the transit strikers for hurting poor and minority passengers. Also on the board is Republican Mayor Richard Riordan, a proponent of privatization who was reelected mayor with the backing of the AFL-CIO.



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