

Los Angeles, California mayor orders elimination of 1,000 city worker jobs

D. Lencho
9 February 2010

On Thursday, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa ordered the elimination of 1,000 city worker jobs in order to close the city's \$218.5 million budget deficit.

The layoffs arrived on the heels of a rash of additional concessions demanded by the mayor and the city council. These included the granting of contracts to cheaper private contracting firms; increases in pension contributions from 7 percent to 9 percent; and the acceleration of the Early Retirement Incentive Program (ERIP) to quickly remove higher-paid veteran workers from payrolls. Villaraigosa has also pushed to privatize Los Angeles' parking garages.

Villaraigosa's plan would transfer more than 360 workers to agencies like the Department of Water and Power, the LA World Airports and others that do not derive their funding from the city's general fund. The mayor wants the transfers to be completed by February 12. In addition, due to the active promotion of the ERIP, more than 700 positions have already been vacated, and these too would be open to transfers.

After hundreds of city workers descended on City Hall on Wednesday, February 3, to plead for the preservation of their jobs, the city council voted to postpone a decision for 30 days.

Just two days after the city council's decision, Villaraigosa issued an order to city department heads to eliminate the 1,000 city jobs, "saying he was accelerating the effort to shift as many employees as possible to vacant positions not paid by the city's general fund and would impose layoffs where necessary," according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

As in the case of the mayor's demands, most of the additional measures being pondered by the city council would fall heavily on city workers. These include cuts in recruitment of firefighters; layoffs of police cadets

and "redeployment" of firefighters on a day-to-day basis; cancellation of firefighter classes; a 5 percent cut in the mayor's office budget, mostly to come out of gang intervention programs; and a 5 percent salary reduction in the City Council's budget.

On Friday, in a potential "showdown" with the City Attorney's Office, Chief Deputy City Attorney Bill Carter sent a memo to his employees, claiming that the mayor lacks the authority to impose layoffs on his particular office, which would be subject to around 100 layoffs. The basis of Carter's claim is that City Attorney Carmen Trutanich is an elected official and that the mayor's authority extends only to his own appointed offices.

The mayor's office counsel, Brian Currey, rejoined that the mayor, being the city's chief executive officer, does indeed have authority over general managers. The *Times* quoted Currey as saying that the mayor "has said he is going to work through his department heads to effectuate transfers and layoffs, and we fully expect those managers to comply with the mayor's wishes."

The Los Angeles Coalition of City Unions, which includes representatives from the AFL-CIO, Teamsters and AFSCME, claimed that Villaraigosa's layoff promise constituted a victory for membership. According to the coalition's web site, no one in coalition units will lose their jobs but will instead be transferred to positions based on special versus general fund appropriations. The union makes no mention on non-coalition city workers affected by the layoffs.

Last year, the coalition made an agreement to push the ERIP on its membership in return for a pledge from the city to spare it from layoffs until July 1 of this year. In addition, it agreed to \$78 million in concessions.

The union, rather than combating the attacks on its members, instead demands on its web site that "City

officials immediately and fully implement our agreement to achieve the maximum in savings” after the union “did our part—making real concessions” including what it calls “an innovative retirement program to move workers off the payroll with the least impact on services”—that is, the ERIP.

The web site effusively thanks members for applying to the ERIP: “Your willingness to move from City service to the next chapter in your life will leave a spot behind for someone else who would very likely have faced layoff this year or next.” Rather than call for unity with other workers, it attempts to reassure its members that the latest move by the mayor will have minimum effect on union members, while encouraging them to transfer or retire.

“We encourage people to take advantage of transfer opportunities to move into special funded and proprietary department positions, where funding is more stable. Next year will be just as difficult as this year, and members who move out of general fund positions now will secure positions on other funds while making next year’s budget picture just a little bit better.”

This hopeful scenario is contradicted by the words of City Administrative Officer Miguel Santana, who was quoted in the *Los Angeles Times*: “We won’t lay off any coalition members this year. But we plan to next year.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact