

California public employee unions line up against workers

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Last week, the administration of California Democratic Governor Jerry Brown, with the full support of both parties, passed a draconian package of \$8 billion in budget cuts. At the heart of the fiscal package are drastic reductions in spending for state welfare, health care and education.

While the state demands endless “sacrifice” from workers, both the Democrats and the Republicans have agreed that every effort will be made to protect the state’s super-rich and corporations. The single wealthiest resident of the state—Larry Ellison, the CEO of Oracle—could pay for the entire state deficit out of his own pocket and still have billions to spare.

A *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter recently asked Brown, “What specific sacrifices are you asking the wealthiest Californians and corporations to make?” Brown blithely responded, “We’re continuing the income taxes that exist.”

Meanwhile, the toll the budget cuts are taking on the lives of ordinary Californians was on vivid display week, when a Costa Mesa city maintenance worker, 29-year-old Huy Pham, took his own life by jumping off the fifth floor of the local Civic Center building after learning of his impending job loss (see “Facing layoff, California city worker commits suicide”).

In imposing his assault on the living standards of masses of ordinary Californians, the Brown administration is relying on the support of the state’s trade unions, which are working hand-in-glove with the governor to maximize concessions and minimize resistance.

For the first time in more than four years, all 21 public employee bargaining units have entered into agreements with the state government. Across the board, these deals enforce pay cuts, increased contributions to medical and retirement plans, and

unpaid “furlough” days.

The labor bureaucracy’s prostration before the Brown administration austerity program was clearly demonstrated by the decision last week of six major unions to drop a preliminary injunction they had won in court against the state. The injunction temporarily prevented the imposition of some unpaid “furlough” days.

Top union officials of California Attorneys, Administrative Law Judges and Hearing Officers in State Employment (CASE), Professional Engineers in California Government, the California Correctional Peace Officers Association, the California Association of Professional Scientists, the International Union of Operating Engineers and the Association of California State Supervisors all agreed to drop the injunction, which they had previously sought against the administration of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

In other words, once Democrat Jerry Brown moved in to preside over the imposition of the same concessions, the unions’ pretense of opposition evaporated; they handed over without any discussion a court order they had previously won that protected their members from further pay cuts.

State employee unions have also thrown their weight behind a regressive tax proposal offered up by the Brown administration as an alternative to further punitive cuts (see “California teachers unions back regressive tax proposal”).

In the city of Los Angeles, Democratic Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa announced last week that all of the major state employee unions have agreed to tens of millions in pay cuts. Under the deal, the Coalition of L.A. City Labor Unions will increase pension contributions from 6 to 7 percent of wages, and force workers to contribute an additional 4 percent of their

wages to retiree health care plan. This represents the first time that these workers have had to make any contribution at all for retiree health care benefits. In total, these concessions amount to a pay cut of no less than 5 percent for all workers

The total savings to the city of Los Angeles as a result of these concessions is estimated at \$70 million. Despite this, Villaraigosa warned that his proposed budget would still include significant reductions to city services.



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