

Connecticut governor, unions to make state workers revote on concessions deal

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Last month, Connecticut's 45,000 state workers voted down a \$1.6 billion dollar concessions package that had been negotiated between public employee unions and the state. State workers faced down threats of mass layoffs to reject the deal because it would have altered their health plan, imposed a wage freeze and required them to pay more into their pensions.

After a barrage of public statements by politicians in both the Democratic and Republican parties making it clear such defiance will not be tolerated, the administration of Democratic Governor Dannel Malloy and the State Employees Bargaining Agent Coalition (SEBAC), which represents Connecticut's 15 public employee unions, have rolled up their sleeves and worked to find a way to force a re-vote by the workers on an agreement nearly identical to the one they have already rejected.

SEBAC took the first step toward a revote on Monday by rewriting its bylaws to allow for ratification of a deal by a simple majority. Under the unions' longstanding rules, in effect at the time of the initial vote in June, ratification required the approval of 14 out of 15 unions and 80 percent of the state workers. Only 57 percent voted in favor of concessions last month.

The day after bylaws were amended, meetings between SEBAC and the Malloy administration resumed. The aim of the talks is to hammer out and repackage an agreement that in all essentials will be the same as the one state workers voted down in June. Underscoring just how minimal any changes made to the deal will be, Malloy said on Tuesday, "I don't think there's any reason that we couldn't have a quick agreement in 24, 48 or some number of hours."

The main stumbling block in brushing up the agreement for a re-vote—as well a major reason Malloy

and SEBAC are in such a hurry to do so—is the fact that since the wage freeze called for in the original concessions package was rejected along with everything else, state workers are due to receive a raise this month. The administration and the union bureaucracy are anxious to find a way to recover the money going into this raise.

A sense of urgency has also been added to the talks by the rapidity with which hostility toward the unions and opposition to Malloy's austerity measures are developing among the workers. The *Wall Street Journal* carried a remarkable report on Wednesday ("Labor Deal Roils Connecticut Employees") to the effect that "members of at least two bargaining units are urging their colleagues to disband." Also on Wednesday, about 100 employees of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services held a rally at Connecticut Valley Hospital in Middletown protesting imminent cuts to drug rehabilitation services offered by the hospital and the elimination of 124 staff members.

Meanwhile, the state has begun sending out the layoff notices Malloy promised would ensue following a "no" vote on the concessions agreement. So far nearly 2,000 state workers have received pink slips. Just as the state sought to intimidate employees with the threat of layoffs during the first round of voting, the Malloy administration is now dangling the prospect of canceling the layoffs in the hope of forcing a "yes" vote on the repackaged agreement.

Malloy has also seized on the state workers' rejection of the concessions package last month to initiate sweeping new cuts to state government programs. While the pretext for the cuts, presented last week, was to close the budget gap created by the workers' "no" vote, the administration has made it clear that a number of the cuts will remain in place even if the updated

version of the agreement is ratified. Malloy's senior adviser Roy Occhiogrosso said many of the cuts "are just smart ideas."

Dannel Malloy's administration and the state employee unions are brazenly seeking to subvert the democratic will of Connecticut's state workers, as it was expressed in their vote against concessions last month. In doing so, they are setting themselves on a collision course not only with public employees, but with the working class as a whole.

Any repackaging of the old concessions agreement must be rejected. A rejection of the deal, however, must be seen not simply as an end in itself, but as the starting point for a counter-offensive by the working class in response to the attacks made on its living standards in the form of rotten concessions deals, layoffs and cuts to social programs. Such a counter-offensive must bring together private and public sector workers alike on the basis of their common interests in open struggle against the financial aristocracy, its political representatives in the Democratic and Republican parties and its agents in the union bureaucracy.



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