

Public meeting in Los Angeles

The way forward for California grocery workers

Socialist Equality Party
3 August 2011

The following statement will be distributed by supporters of the Socialist Equality Party to grocery workers in California. A public meeting will be held on August 13 in Pasadena (see below). For more information or to become involved, click here.

Grocery workers in California are once again facing demands for major cuts in benefits, including increased health care premiums and deductibles. The cuts amount to an effective pay cut for the more than 64,000 supermarket workers in Southern California, who are already grossly underpaid.

The corporations are demanding revisions that could mean workers would be forced to pay more than half their wages on health care. The trade union executives in the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), which have made clear their opposition to any serious struggle against the demands of the companies, have already accepted increased pension contributions.

These demands come after the defeat of the 2003 strike and lockout, which culminated in the imposition of health care and pension increases and the introduction of a two-tier wage system.

The attack on grocery workers is part of a much broader campaign by the corporations and banks, backed by the entire political establishment, to use the deepening economic crisis as an opportunity to drive down the living conditions of the entire working class.

Unemployment is at record levels, with more than 14 million officially without a job throughout the US, and more than 2.1 million jobless in California alone. Recent economic figures make clear that the economic situation is getting worse, with no end in sight. Wages are falling sharply, as corporations exploit the fact that

workers know how difficult it is to find a job, even at a minimum wage.

There is not a single proposal coming from Sacramento or Washington to address a social crisis that is without precedent since the Great Depression. Instead, the response of the entire political establishment is focused on one thing only: cuts in social spending.

At the federal level, the Obama administration has reached an agreement with Republicans to cut nearly \$3 trillion in social programs over the next decade, with not a single dollar in tax increases for the wealthy. In California, Democratic Governor Jerry Brown has followed up the cuts by Schwarzenegger with billions to be taken from education and health care. And this is only the beginning.

Meanwhile, as the politicians speak in one voice that there is “no money” for decent wages and benefits, the profits of the corporations are at record highs and the rich are wealthier than ever.

Workers must and will resist this attack. If a struggle is to be successful, however, it must be based on a new program and perspective.

It is first of all necessary to understand that the UFCW is incapable and unwilling to fight. While the mood among workers is militant, the UFCW has made clear that they do not want a strike. They have already agreed on pension cuts and are planning a further sellout on the rest of the demands as soon as they think they can get a vote through the membership.

Accepting the framework in which the issue is presented by the corporations, Mickey Kasparian, president of UFCW Local 135 in San Diego, said, “We don’t want our members out on the picket lines. Times

are tough today. The economy is not exactly at the healthiest.” The unions are planning a reprisal of their role in the 2003 strike, which was isolated and ultimately defeated.

The response of the trade unions flows from their support for the Democratic Party and the capitalist system. The UFCW, along with the trade unions throughout the state, supported Brown’s candidacy and now bear responsibility for the policies he is carrying out. They are above all opposed to a political struggle by the working class against the demands of the corporations.

The Socialist Equality Party urges grocery workers to carry out a determined struggle. All cuts must be rejected. Instead of slashing health care and pensions, the wages of grocery workers must be sharply raised and the concessions imposed in 2003 overturned.

A fight by grocery workers can win widespread public support. There is a growing mood of resistance to the unending demands for givebacks and budget cuts.

Such a struggle, however, requires the building of rank-and-file committees independent of and in opposition to the UFCW. Preparations for a strike must be taken out of the hands of this corrupt union bureaucracy and organized instead by the workers themselves. An immediate appeal must be made to other workers under attack and the public at large. Nothing can be won without a fight, but this is the last thing that the UFCW is prepared to carry out.

Above all, what is required is a political struggle against the Democrats, the Republicans and the entire capitalist two-party system. It is high time to reject an economic system in which the vast majority of the population must accept its own impoverishment—and the destruction of every social gain made in the course of decades of struggle—to satisfy the demands of the corporate and financial aristocracy.

On August 13, the Socialist Equality Party is holding a public meeting to discuss the situation facing grocery workers and a new program of struggle. We urge all grocery workers and their supporters to contact us and make plans to attend today.

Public Meeting

Saturday, August 13, 3:00-5:00 p.m.
Neighborhood Church of Pasadena
301 North Orange Grove Boulevard, Room 21

Pasadena, CA 91101



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact