

SEIU trade union supports California budget cuts

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After months of back-room deals with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and various other public-sector employee unions, California's Governor Jerry Brown announced in his May budget revise new demands for austerity.

Brown's budget proposal attempts to cover up a regressive sales tax increase and massive cuts to social services with a token increase on income tax for those making over \$250,000 a year. In short, it is merely a tactic used by the Democrats and the unions help push through a massive attack on the working class. The major trade unions worked closely with Brown to draft the current tax proposal, and now they are preparing their members to accept whatever cuts are necessary to help the financial elite ease the California State debt crisis.

Included in Brown's cuts are severe cuts to the state's social programs like \$1.2 billion from Medi-Cal, which provides health coverage for poor people, and \$880 million from CalWORKs, the state's welfare-to-work program. Schools aren't spared, with \$1.5 billion being cut from proposition 98 spending on K-12 education and \$290 million cut from the Cal Grant Program. In total Brown's budget calls for \$8.3 billion in cuts, even if his \$5.5 billion in taxes is passed.

Yvonne R. Walker, President of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1000, headquartered in Sacramento, California, sent a memo to members saying that the SEIU is going to "stay engaged" and "identify reasonable solutions" to help Governor Brown "achieve a specific dollar amount in savings as it relates to state employees." The memo outlines the union's "reasonable solutions," which include eliminating retired annuitants from the state payroll, reducing outsourcing by cutting private vendor contracts, and, if necessary, implementing a four-day,

40-hour work week.

Brown took up the SEIU's offer of a 4-day week and requested cutting the hours to 38.5 as part of a furlough program to save 5 percent on payroll costs. In a May 24 letter to members, the SEIU Local 1000 responded by stating, "We could have said 'no,' and demanded that the governor honor our contract. By staying engaged, we minimize the potential for a huge number of layoffs and even deeper cuts in vital services, like education and the programs that serve California's most needy."

Walker continues in her memo, "We have always said that state employees are reasonable people. We understand that these are tough economic times and that, given the opportunity, we think we can come up with solutions. It is important to note that we now have this opportunity to have a seat at the table to offer solutions. If we are part of the solution, we will keep as many of our members working as possible during these tough economic times."

The reference to maintaining a "seat at the table" has become standard for union executives when referring to their efforts to preserve their own role as facilitators in the attack on workers. That is—cuts can go forward, but the union officials want to be involved.

By referring to union members as "reasonable people," Walker and her fellow bureaucrats wish to imply that it is unreasonable to fight against wage cuts, that it is unreasonable to demand that the wealthy, instead of the poor, should pay for the economic crisis.

The SEIU's acceptance of pay cuts and furloughs is intimately tied to its endorsement of Brown's tax proposal. The tax proposal would only cover around \$5.5 billion of the \$16 billion deficit, and half of that \$5.5 billion would come from the regressive sales tax. The SEIU has gone beyond simply endorsing Brown's proposal.

The head of SEIU California, David Kieffer, called on all the other tax proposals, including one based solely on an increase in taxes on millionaires, to be withdrawn from the ballot. The California Federation of Teachers (CFT), the California Nurses Association (CNA), and other unions have taken the same position. In supporting Brown's proposals, the unions are agreeing that the vast majority of the budget deficit should be paid for in cuts to social programs and increased taxes on the poor.

The unions are bolstered in their betrayal of workers by a broad array of pseudo-left pro-Democrat organizations, whose central purpose is to block any independent political mobilization of the working class.

In an article published on March 20, the Internationalist Socialist Organization (ISO) bemoans the decision by the CFT to abandon a "millionaire's tax" in favor of Brown's proposals. The main theme of the article, however, is the necessity of preserving the organizational domination of the unions, closely allied to Brown. Against those who would argue for a break with these organizations, the ISO insists, "It is important for activists to understand that unions can be important tools to defend our rights—if we can organize rank and file pressure."

The political program of the ISO and similar "left" groups, does not pose any real, or imagined, challenge to the status quo. Rather, by unreservedly supporting the unions, they serve to maintain the political domination of the Democratic Party, and therefore the assault on the working class.



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