

Union cancels strike by California state workers, seeks to impose concessions

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On Friday, Local 1000 of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) called off the strike by 95,000 public sector workers in California planned for Monday, December 5. In cancelling the one-day walkout the SEIU defied the membership, which last month voted by 92 percent to support the strike.

In a statement released by the union, President Yvonne Walker announced that a “pathway forward” had been reached with the state, indicating that an actual contract had not been reached. “Our goal has never been to strike,” Walker said. “It has always been to get a contract we can all be proud of.”

The sabotage of the strike followed the decision by the Sacramento Superior Court to postpone a hearing on a court injunction sought by Democratic Governor Jerry Brown to prevent a walkout.

No details of the agreement, if one exists at all, have been released. SEIU members and the state legislature must appeal the deal before it is adopted.

The last contract offer from the state that was made public contained a meager 2.96 percent salary increase during the first year following by a net 12 percent increase during the next four years. These numbers amount to an effective wage cut once inflation and a proposed 3.5 percent increase to retiree health care contributions are taken into account. Moreover, SEIU workers were forced to take unpaid furloughs and other wage reductions during the height of the 2008 financial crisis.

Throughout all of the cuts imposed on state workers, the union has been fully complicit with the state. In 2010, the SEIU rammed through a contract that imposed a three percent retirement contribution increase along with a two-tier pension system that increased the retirement age for all new hires.

After the 2010 sellout, the SEIU boasted that it has

helped the state save tens of millions of dollars at the expense of state workers. “We’ve done our part to get the state through this unprecedented budget crisis,” Yvonne Walker boasted at the time.

In 2012, Walker lent her support to the Brown administration’s Pension Reform Act, which lifted the minimum retirement age for state workers from 55 to 67. She called this plan “a good starting point for a new conversation about retirement security for all Californians.” Such statements echo the lies by both parties and the news media that austerity is necessary to “save” retirement benefits even as the state showers tax cuts and other subsidies on Silicon Valley, Hollywood and other multibillion-dollar businesses.

Earlier this year, during the passage of the Brown administration’s Secure Choice Pension Act requiring three percent contributions of workers’ wages into an Individual Retirement Account, Walker applauded Brown’s anti-pension initiative once again. “Governor Brown’s signature on SB 1234 will strike a significant blow against an epidemic of senior poverty and lift up those people most at risk: our state’s women, people in low wages and people of color.”

The SEIU and its liberal and “left” apologists actively used identity politics to cover up its betrayal of state workers. With more than 66 percent of Local 1000 members being female, the SEIU had hoped to highlight pay divisions between the local and predominately male bargaining units as the cause of an impasse in negotiations. Opposed to any genuine fight to unite all workers, the SEIU promoted internecine warfare among the various bargaining units over the miserable scraps being offered by the state.

The SEIU local is widely distrusted and often despised by workers, particularly after Walker and three other local executives demanded six-figure

salaries and stipends in exchange for their collusion with Brown and other state officials.

At the same time, the SEIU executives made it clear that workers would receive no strike benefits for a walkout on December 5.

Rank-and-file members filled up the SEIU Local 1000 Facebook page with comments expressing their anger over being kept in the dark while the union maneuvered with the Democrats behind their backs. Shortly before the strike was called off, one worker wrote, “We all know what the State is offering, but how come nobody seems to know what the union is countering with. I sent a message to SEIU and it seems to be some sort of secret.”

Another wrote, “Honestly explain to me why the union will not utilize the strike fund for this. The claim is we are already underpaid yet they want us to go on dock while they still get paid?!? The fund is made up of our money that we as a union have contributed.”



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