

California: SEIU sabotages San Diego County workers' strike

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San Diego County workers have reportedly ratified a new labor agreement just days after the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 221 called off a planned strike of 10,000 workers set for September 12. The deal between the San Diego County government and the SEIU, reached on September 10, will give some workers a miserly 13 percent raise over five years.

The SEIU's sellout of San Diego county workers came in the midst of a two-day strike by SEIU Local 721 in Riverside County, part of the Greater Los Angeles area, leaving that struggle isolated. A powerful strike by public employees would have rallied the support of hundreds of thousands of teachers, hospital workers and others, and quickly developed into a political confrontation with the austerity program of both big business parties.

Politically aligned with the Democratic Party, the SEIU is determined to block any mobilization of public sector workers against Governor Jerry Brown's attack on public employee jobs and pensions and his administration's pro-business policies.

San Diego County workers had been without a contract since June 22. The union and the county had been negotiating over wages, health care, and an inferior "Tier D" pension plan for all new workers. The union responded to the county's intransigence by filing a toothless unfair labor practice (ULP) charge, while workers, determined to wage a serious struggle, voted by more than 90 percent to authorize strike action.

The county agreed to resume bargaining until August 22 when officials backed out of mediation, essentially holding out until the union capitulated to their demands. The SEIU has not called a strike by county workers in more than two decades. After a one-day strike in 1994, they obtained a three-year contract with

raises of 8 percent and 5 percent.

A vote was held this week to ratify the deal reached between the SEIU and the county, and despite widespread rank-and-file opposition to the deal on social media, the union announced a "significant majority" had voted to approve the tentative agreement on September 14.

The paltry wage increases are not even distributed evenly to all workers. Nurses received a 7 percent increase in the first year of their contract, while clerical workers got only 4 and others only the original 3 percent.

While there were token concessions on increased reimbursement for transportation and strengthened overtime rules, the county prevailed on pensions. All new hires will receive the inferior Tier D benefits, creating a wedge between older and younger workers.

On the SEIU's Facebook page, members pointed out that the deal was nearly identical to the one the county offered when negotiations began earlier this year. They said San Diego county workers are not paid the same as other counties, that the contract was for five years instead of three, and that the deal lacked a \$500 signing bonus typically used to bribe workers into accepting the sellout.

Many workers noted that there were a limited number of ratification sites—not even including all the places workers voted to authorize the strike—limiting the turnout by rank-and-file workers. Meetings to discuss the contract were also held on weekends, when some workers can't attend because of their jobs. As usual, union officials limited the description of the deal to bogus "highlights" concealing the myriad of backroom arrangements they made, which workers will only learn about later.

The SEIU leadership only had the strike vote because

of internal pressure from members, who threatened to leave the SEIU and represent themselves or join another union. Around 1,200 of the 10,000 SEIU members have begun moves to leave.

The sellout deal would “save” the county \$30 million, even though the budget has an annual surplus of \$100 million, bringing the total to \$2 billion. At the same time workers are asked to make sacrifices on pensions and living expenses, while the cost of living in San Diego keeps rising. Over 300,000 San Diego families can’t make ends meet without some assistance.



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