LA County workers must reject sellout agreement!

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Are you an LA County worker? Contact us and tell us what you think of the SEIU contract proposal.

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) announced Monday that SEIU Local 721 had reached an agreement with Los Angeles County officials for a new contract covering 55,000 county workers. These workers provide important services for the population, from health care to social services, homelessness outreach and custodial services, public works and library administration.

The three-year contract proposal is a frontal attack on the living standards of county employees that workers should reject with the contempt it deserves.

Thousands of LA County workers marched in downtown Los Angeles on the last day of their contract, March 31, demonstrating their determination to win substantial improvements in wages and working conditions. At the time, the county offered a yearly 2 percent raise as part of a three-year contract. In April, the union took a strike vote and three weeks later announced that 98 percent of the membership had voted to strike.

A few days later, 1,300 resident physicians at LAC+USC Medical Center, Harbor-UCLA Medical Center and Martin Luther King Jr. Outpatient Center threatened strike action. The physicians have been working without a contract since September and are demanding a 7 percent raise.

Ignoring the strike mandate of its members, the SEIU stalled and then brought back a deal that is an insult to the intelligence of workers. The new wage proposal, outlined with great fanfare by the SEIU as "The biggest one-year general salary increase in LA County history," offers an insulting 5.5 percent the first year of the contract, and 3.25 percent on the following two years. This is far below the 8.5 percent rate of inflation in Los Angeles County.

In other words, the "biggest one-year salary increase in LA County history" would result in a huge cut in real wages for workers already struggling to get by in one of America's most expensive cities.

The new wage rate will not become effective until October 1. In an effort to exploit the economic hardship of workers, the SEIU is dangling a signing bonus of $1,375 to get workers to swallow this sellout.

When the last contract expired on October 2020, the SEIU negotiated a six-month contract which expired on March 1, 2021, in return for a $1,000 "hero's bonus." There has not been a wage increase since. The current $1,375 bonus offer is being offered as "compensation" for a wage freeze which lasted a year and a half between March 1, 2021 and October 1, 2022.

In April, SEIU Local 721 President David Green acknowledged the impact on inflation on Los Angeles County workers, without noting the union's own role in reducing workers' living standards. "The sharp and steady increase in the cost of living is squeezing working families," he said. "Now we face the worst inflation in generations, eating away at our paychecks and threatening our ability to make ends meet."

The SEIU bureaucrats who are trying to impose this lousy contract have no worries about making ends meet. SEIU national President Mary Kay Henry pockets at least $279,044 a year, according to the union's most recent filing with the US Labor Department.

Less than 24-hours after the announcement, over 200 workers commented on the local's Facebook page, overwhelmingly calling for a no vote on the rotten deal. Below is a selection that reflects those sentiments:

"… peanuts for inflation and ridiculous gas prices. Most county workers live outside the county for

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affordable housing. The small ‘bonus’ is a slap in the face for working under an expired contract,” said Jeff Jensen.

“We deserve better. We need not ratify and force union to bargain for a better raise for our public service. A 98% vote to strike deserves more respect and better union representation,” wrote Rob Correa.

“AWFUL!!! DISGUSTING!! Inflation at 8-9 percent, and the Union comes back with 5.5% and a ‘bonus’ less than a net amount of a paycheck? Terrible negotiation!” said Lawrence Carnow.

“VOTE NO! What a bunch of sellouts. Don’t be afraid to strike this is our only chance to squeeze the board who’s about to approve a $40 BILLION budget!!! Don’t let them call your bluff get a mob of real fighters inside the bargaining cage who don’t lowball. 35% or get the hell out! Go back and SQUEEZE HARDER! This is not how you wage combat in an inflationary environment,” Timothy P. Lozano posted.

Workers must prepare now to counter the efforts by the SEIU to ram through this rotten deal. SEIU officials will use every dirty trick in the book—lies, intimidation, rushing a vote before workers have sufficient time to read and discuss the proposal—to get this passed.

That is why workers should form a rank-and-file committee to mount a campaign to defeat this deal and prepare an all-out strike to win a substantial increase in wages to make up for years of union-backed concessions and protect workers against surging inflation. In every county worksite, workers should elect rank-and-file committees, made up of the most militant and trusted workers who will fight for what workers need, not what the big business politicians claim is affordable.

The SEIU is deeply integrated into the Democratic Party, which controls every level of government in California, from the governor to both houses of the state legislature, to LA County and the City of Los Angeles. After handing trillions in pandemic relief to Wall Street, further enriching billionaires like Elon Musk, the Democrats claim there is no money for county workers to live decently. Tens of billions more are being wasted on the US-NATO proxy war against Russia, which threatens to erupt into world war.

If LA County workers reject this sellout, they can join the growing wave of struggles against austerity and social inequality. California and the West Coast more broadly is heating up quickly for what is going to be a summer of major class conflict.

• 2,000 nurses went on strike for improved staffing levels, higher pay and better protections against the COVID-19 pandemic. Their strike last week at the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center was brought to an end by the SEIU-UHW without a contract. This followed the strike by 5,000 Stanford Health Care nurses, also sold out by the union.

• 25,000 dockworkers throughout the West Coast are facing a major battle when their contract expires July 1.

• 500 Chevron oil workers in Richmond, California, are still on strike since March.

• 34,000 Los Angeles teachers and support staff face a contract expiration on June 30.

County workers must take the struggle into their own hands, begin organizing a rank-and-file committee to prepare for a strike and reach out to other workers in the county and nationally. Uniting in a common struggle will put workers in an enormously powerful position.

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