

After sham vote, SEIU claim ratification of contract for 100,000 California government workers

Our reporters
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The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1000 has declared the ratification of a contract covering over 100,000 California government workers, following a vote held last week. But workers have reported many irregularities in the vote, which would have functioned to artificially suppress turnout.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has written in detail on the contract here. The contract is a sellout which includes marginal wage increases of between 3 and 4 percent each year for the next three years, well below inflation. It also includes additional increases for a small portion of state workers through what is known as Special Salary Adjustments (SSAs), a tactic to ensure upper administration obtains substantial raises while the majority of members remain in poverty.

SEIU dishonestly marketed the total raise as 10 percent over three years. In reality, a 4 percent raise in 2025 is only guaranteed at 3 percent for the year. It would be increased to 4 percent only if the state budget “allows” for it.

In addition to substandard pay, the union touted a so-called “Wage Equity Adjustment” that will grant an additional 4 percent raise to all workers that are paid less than \$20 an hour, a large section that covers some 150 job classifications. In reality this will continue to leave the lowest paid employees in poverty. Even with all combined wage increases, many of these workers will continue to make less than \$20 an hour.

For California government workers, one of their most prominent demands was bonus pay for having continued to work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Only some small classes of workers will receive a one-time payment ranging from \$625 to \$1,450.

The SEIU claims the contract was approved with supposedly overwhelming majorities, ranging from 66 percent “yes” in Unit 17 and 76 percent in Unit 1, all the way up to 96 and 97 percent yes votes in Units 15 and 14 respectively. However, many workers are reporting there has been no transparency about how many votes were cast, nor the breakdown of turnout across the nine bargaining units, across job types, within District Labor Councils or any other category. In other words, there was no means through which workers could independently verify the integrity of the vote.

To prevent a widespread turnout which would increase the likelihood of the contract’s rejection, the union limited in-person voting to take place during normal business hours, while most members were at work. Voters in the Bay Area in Northern California, with a population of 7.75 million, had to travel over an hour to Sacramento or two-and-a-half-hours south to Fresno in order—during work hours—to cast a ballot.

For much of the voting period, there were only two active voting locations within San Diego and Imperial Counties, a region that is approximately 60 miles (97 kilometers) north to south and 160 miles (257 kilometers) from west to east. The two counties include approximately 3,300 workers in the bargaining unit, of which 2,000 were eligible to vote. Workers told the *World Socialist Web Site* that when they reached these voting locations, they were unable to find the meeting location where voting would take place.

Workers also told the WSWWS that before they were allowed to cast their vote they were subjected to a propaganda campaign to convince them that they would be unable to win better if they voted the deal down.

Workers could also vote by mail, but many reported significant difficulties in requesting ballots. On social media, some said it took up to an hour to finally speak to the SEIU's Member Resource Center to request a ballot be sent to their address on record with the union. Union members reported requesting a ballot the Monday morning that voting began and not receiving a ballot in the mail until Friday. If a ballot was mailed the following day, there was no mechanism to get any confirmation that their vote had been counted before the deadline. With the Labor Day holiday during the voting period, another day was lost in the critical window to have a ballot received at the Sacramento union office.

Lastly, workers were given a chance to vote online so long as they attended Zoom meetings where union officials tried to browbeat them into accepting the contract. A Staff Services Analyst told reporters, "I'm sure everyone who voted on-line probably voted yes because of the presentation they gave saying that we would lose the minimal gains that were in the contract [if we voted it down]."

Workers have flooded social media opposing the outcome of the vote. Any posting by the Local 1000 bureaucracy has been met with an overwhelming barrage of frustrated workers. One worker said, "I pay \$60 [a month] for parking to be at work. The raise is less than monthly parking."

The SEIU vote is only the latest in a series of contracts where voting was manipulated by the bureaucracy in order to produce the desired outcome. Last month, the Teamsters union declared workers "ratified" a contract at UPS by a wide majority, following months of propaganda lies designed to get in front of rank-and-file anger, and in spite of the emergence of significant opposition.

In last year's leadership election in the United Auto Workers, hundreds of thousands of members never even received ballots in an election overseen by the Department of Labor which "cut out the membership," in the words of one federal judge. The purpose of this vote suppression was to prevent Will Lehman, a socialist autoworker running on a platform of abolishing the bureaucracy and restoring rank-and-file control of the UAW, from gaining a hearing. Lehman has filed a lawsuit against the Department of Labor over the election.

Workers have little faith in the SEIU and have long been voting with their feet and refusing to pay dues. Tellingly, of the over 100,000 Local 1000 members, only half pay dues and therefore have voting rights. The union itself admits that so many of its own members can't afford to live—on contracts they agreed to—that it is no wonder so many have refused to pay dues out of their poverty paycheck.

The ratification vote was also rushed in order to meet the schedule of the California Legislature and the appropriations committee in Sacramento, to ensure that legislators' recess was not disturbed.

The SEIU bureaucracy functions as an extension of the Democratic Party. The most influential bureaucrats within Local 1000 sit on a committee known as COPE, the Committee on Political Education, which serves as a pipeline of member dues to the Democratic Party.

The primary job of these bureaucrats is to tamp down any dissent from workers and enforce sellouts which allow the siphoning of wealth to the ruling elite to continue.

To fight against both management and the corrupt union apparatus, workers in industries across the world are forming rank-and-file committees. Such a committee is currently being formed by California state workers. The first order of business of this committee is the fight against this sham contract. No contract "ratified" in such a fashion, which resembles the sham elections organized in dictatorships, can be considered legitimate. Workers have every right to consider the contract null and void, and to call for a new contract, worked out by a new bargaining committee elected solely from the rank and file, not union bureaucrats.

The WSWS encourages all California State workers interested in joining and building a rank-and-file committee to contact us today by filling out the form below.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact