

Minneapolis park board strike at the crossroads following overwhelming rejection of latest contract offer

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The strike by 200 workers at the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) reached a new stage on July 19 when workers voted by a 91 percent margin to reject management's latest offer.

Their strike, which began on July 4 and is now well into its third week, must break out of the isolation being imposed upon it by the union bureaucracy, and make appeals to workers across the city and the country to rally to their support.

The MPRB has made it clear that it will not budge and aims to starve out the strikers. They want to maintain a permanent cheap labor force on the city's nationally acclaimed 185 parks and other properties such as beaches, pools, trails and golf courses.

Workers are fighting to establish comparable living standards with other park board workers in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan region. Laborer's International Union of North America (LIUNA) Local 363, which covers the workers, found in a regional survey that MPRB workers' wages are underpaid by between \$8 and \$15 an hour.

The resounding "no" vote by the rank-and-file shows that workers are not intimidated and are determined to keep up their fight until they win their demands. LIUNA, meanwhile, is preparing the way for a sellout to shutdown the strike.

The union bureaucracy has stated that the board's 10.25 percent wage offer in the latest contract proposal is acceptable, despite the fact that it is spread out over three years and does nothing to combat inflation. The union's eagerness to end the strike as soon as possible was evident in bringing this proposal to a vote in the first place.

AJ Lange, business manager of LIUNA Local 363,

declared, "This overwhelming vote leaves no room for doubt. We're ready to end this strike today, but management needs to stay at the table and show real commitment to bargain. If they step up, we'll have this resolved in no time."

This amounts to a plea to management to "come together" at the table to end the strike with a sellout deal. Countless strikes across the US and the world have been shut down in this fashion, with the union claiming that management has finally "negotiated in good faith," while concealing major concessions until after the deal has been ratified.

MPRB workers must be on guard against both attempts to prematurely end the strike and against attempts to soften workers up on the picket line before ramming through a sellout. To countermand any decisions which undermine workers' strength or violate their democratic will, they must form a rank-and-file strike committee to assert control over the struggle.

In addition to the below-inflation pay increase, the contract proposal which LIUNA put to a vote was filled with other concessions. Management wants to reduce the scope of seniority; step wage increases, which normally apply to all workers, are to be turned into merit increases awarded at management's whim. As MPRB superintendent Al Bangoura revealed in a letter to the Minneapolis City Council, "Such increases may be withheld or delayed in cases where the employee's job performance has been of a less than satisfactory level..."

Meanwhile, management is digging in its heels. Last week, the MPRB filed an unfair labor practice charge against LIUNA over strikers urging truck drivers to honor their picket lines at two parks and at the MPRB's

Southside Operations Center. Minneapolis Park Police were brought in to aid the transfer of food deliveries to one of its park concession facilities. The MPRB has also threatened to seek a restraining order against pickets.

Leading the charge against striking workers is the state Democratic Party, known as the Democratic Farmer-Labor Party (DFL). All nine commissioners and the superintendent for the MPRB are Democrats.

The Democrats, like the Republicans, represent the city's corporate interests and their agenda. Tens of billions of dollars are being squandered on the Biden administration's war in Ukraine and the Gaza genocide.

No one should be fooled by the recent DFL-dominated Minneapolis City Council resolution claiming to support strikers, or the offer by DFL Mayor Jacob Frey to involve himself in the contract talks. These stunts were only fabricated for public consumption, while they prepare through the MPRB to break the strike.

The Minneapolis park board strike is at a critical point. In order for strikers to open up a new path of struggle, they must take the conduct of the strike into their own hands by forming rank-and-file committees that will break their isolation by turning to the power of the working class and forging a united front, combining all the struggles of the working class into one.



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