

Los Angeles County strike erupts as officials threaten mass layoffs

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As the 48-hour strike by more than 55,000 Los Angeles County workers began Tuesday, it became abundantly clear that this is a pivotal battle not just for these workers' immediate demands, but for the broader struggle against inequality, state repression, and the bipartisan war on democratic rights.

Los Angeles County workers—nurses, social workers, clerical staff, janitors, and countless others—provide services to some 10 million people and sustain the most populous unit of local government in the US. They are demanding what should be basic: wage increases that keep pace with the soaring cost of living, safe staffing levels, and an end to privatization schemes that bleed public resources into corporate coffers. Yet county officials, backed by the financial aristocracy that rules Los Angeles with an iron fist, have responded with disdain, threats, and lies.

The warning by County Chief Executive Fesia Davenport this week that wage increases could create a “structural deficit” leading to mass layoffs is an open threat. She went as far as stating that the county may parallel the more than 1,600 layoffs proposed by Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass in her “State of the City” address last week.

The broader political context is a determining factor. Trump's ongoing assault on workers, immigrants, and democratic rights has emboldened all sections of the ruling class, including Democratic Party officials in California, to adopt austerity policies once associated exclusively with the far right.

In Los Angeles, this war on working people is unmistakable. While Mayor Bass proposes layoffs to deal with her own “emerging structural deficit,” county officials parrot her threats, blaming workers for the financial crisis produced by decades of corporate tax giveaways and subsidies.

Davenport openly stated that maintaining the county's AAA credit rating is a priority, even as essential workers are forced to work second jobs, skip meals, or live in their cars. This naked appeal to Wall Street over the lives of working people exposes the county administration for what it is: a loyal enforcer of corporate interests, despite the façade of public service.

At the same time, workers are not only confronting the intransigence of the county but the treachery of their own supposed representatives. Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 721 has made every effort to defuse and disarm the strike. Despite possessing the power to shut down one of the wealthiest and most important urban centers on Earth, and with the walkout enjoying overwhelming public support, union leaders have blocked county workers from linking up with broader sections of the working class, including in collective strike action.

Instead, SEIU officials confined the strike to a limited 48-hour action, even as their own members seethe with anger. An online exchange between two workers summarized this. “Where is SEIU National? Why are they so quiet as our governor, mayors and board of supervisors are ripping apart our contracts?” to which another worker sternly replied: “Because we ratified [a] bad contract...”. referring to the 2022 sellout deal SEIU signed.

Another worker questioned the union's toothless strategy: “I've just joined this union and feel really lost about what is happening. After the two-day strike what happens? Do we just go back to work? Wait for further instruction if it gets extended?”

Workers have not forgotten the betrayal of the 2022 contract, which delivered a measly pay increase far below the rate of inflation, effectively slashing real wages and deepening a crisis of chronic understaffing

and impossible workloads. That sellout deal, signed with great fanfare by union bureaucrats, directly paved the way for today's uprising.

The county's excuse that it cannot afford raises because of wildfire costs, a \$4 billion payout for decades of systemic child abuse in its juvenile facilities, and the loss of federal pandemic funding, only compounds workers' fury. These are crises created by the county's own corruption, negligence, and prioritization of profits over people. To demand that workers pay the price, by accepting poverty wages and mass layoffs, is obscene.

Los Angeles is awash in wealth. The city boasts one of the highest concentrations of billionaires on the planet. Downtown LA bristles with luxury condos, private clubs, and multi-million-dollar vanity projects, while county employees working two or three jobs can barely afford rent. Even as the county pleads poverty, it squanders public funds on massive new administrative complexes—monuments to bureaucracy—rather than investing in the workers who form the beating heart of public life.

This is why every serious worker must reject the SEIU's straitjacket and begin forming independent rank-and-file committees, organized democratically and controlled by workers themselves. These committees must reach out to teachers, nurses, transportation workers, and private-sector employees across the city and beyond. A unified general strike across Los Angeles and beyond—mobilizing millions of workers—would bring the county administration to its knees in days, if not hours.

The stakes could not be higher. The ruling class fears above all else the emergence of a mass working-class movement, independent of the two-party system and the corrupt union bureaucracies. They fear it because such a movement would threaten the entire rotten structure of inequality, exploitation, and state violence on which their power rests.

Workers should harbor no illusions: this struggle is not just about wages, staffing, or contracts. It is a battle against a political and economic system—capitalism—that has declared war on the working class. Trump's toxic agenda of repression, austerity, and corporate dictatorship threatens workers in Los Angeles, in California, and across the country, while the Democrats are its tacit enablers.

The fight in LA can and must become the spearhead of an industrial and political counter-offensive of the whole working class: against job cuts, unaffordable living expenses, the scapegoating and deporting of immigrants, the exiling of anti-genocide protesters, trampling of the Constitution and step-by-step erection of a fascist dictatorship.

As May Day—the day of international working-class solidarity—approaches, workers in the US must seize the occasion as a call to action: to unite with their brothers and sisters worldwide, especially immigrant workers, and to reject the toxic nationalism of “America First” being pushed by Trump and his accomplices.

The strike by Los Angeles County workers must not end in another betrayal. It must be expanded, deepened, and transformed into the spearhead of a broader working-class offensive against austerity, inequality, and dictatorship.

We urge workers to attend this Saturday's online May Day rally hosted by the International Committee of the Fourth International. As Trump's rise intensifies the global assault on workers, this rally will advance a socialist program to unite the working class against war, inequality, and repression—and to fight for a world based on equality and social need, not profit.

Register here for May Day event.



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