

Union bureaucracy seeks to block strike action against ICE rampage in Minneapolis

Jacob Crosse
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An online question-and-answer event hosted January 20, 2026 by *PayDay Report* founder Mike Elk, ostensibly to discuss the general strike in Minneapolis on Friday, January 23, exposed the hostility of the union bureaucracy and its allies to the independent mobilization of the working class.

The event featured Communications Workers of America (CWA) Union Local 7520 President Keiran Knutson as a main speaker. The local has 500 members, including AT&T and other telecom workers in Minneapolis. As a whole, the CWA has 700,000 current and retired members throughout the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico.

The online meeting was framed as a response to the federal occupation of Minneapolis, the mass Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids and kidnappings, and the murder of Renée Nicole Good by Department of Homeland Security thug Jonathan Ross. In practice, the discussion made clear that while union officials and their political allies pay lip service to militant rhetoric, they are determined to prevent workers from exercising their collective power through strike action.

Under conditions where workers are demanding a general strike to drive federal immigration agents out of Minnesota, the bureaucracy is working systematically to confine opposition to an impotent protest, explicitly rejecting any action that would violate collective bargaining agreements and “no-strike” clauses negotiated by the unions themselves.

This reporter attended the meeting and posed the following question to Knutson:

The regional AFL-CIO has made it clear that workers must adhere to collective bargaining agreements and not engage in strike action. Brother Kieran, will you call a mass meeting of workers, including all union members, to decide on a course of action to be taken on Friday, January 23rd?

Knutson responded with open hostility to the proposal that the union leadership might actually hold a meeting of the workers it claims to represent to allow them to voice their opinions and decide on collective action. He replied:

Well, Brother, why don't you call a meeting? You know? You think you got a good idea for a meeting, why don't you call one? I'll just say this. Like, the effect of our, I mean, you're right in the sense that this will not in and of itself defeat the legal handcuffs that CBAs have on the labor movement. That sort of open defiance of those is yet to come. But I'd ask you this, are we going to be closer to overcoming it after Friday? I think we'll be a lot f***ing closer. And a lot f***ing closer than, like, you know, a meeting called by some lefties that promoted the idea.

Knutson offered no explanation as to how strict adherence to CBAs would protect workers and their families, many of whom are union members and have already been illegally attacked or kidnapped by ICE.

Nor did Knutson explain how blocking strike action would bring workers “a lot closer” to defying the very contractual restrictions he insisted were sacrosanct. As every worker knows, the fascist president in the White House has no concern for legal niceties and is openly violating both the Constitution and international law.

Knutson made explicit that January 23 was not to be a strike, stating:

It's actually illegal to declare a strike. People could get sued. You know, I could do that, and maybe it'd be politically right, but then if they sue our bank, then all of our members will lose, you know, potentially lose the money we have. So it's just like a matter of deciding what the step is to do at the moment.

This statement lays bare the real priorities of the apparatus. The overriding concern is not defending workers against state repression, but protecting the financial assets of the apparatus itself.

Those assets are substantial. An analysis of the latest LM-2 filings from the national CWA, found at least 118 officials and staff receive total compensation exceeding \$100,000 annually, with senior figures earning as much as \$180,000 to \$199,000.

These assets are not used for the dues-paying members, as Knutson claims. More than \$55 million was spent last year on

“representational activities” and staff payroll, while strike benefits totaled only \$10.4 million. For Knutson and the bureaucracy, these funds exist not to sustain a genuine strike, but to maintain a privileged bureaucratic layer materially insulated from the conditions faced by rank-and-file workers.

When workers ask how a strike would be financed, the answer is clear. The resources exist, but they are monopolized by an apparatus that views any independent movement of the working class as a threat to its own position.

Knutson further revealed the pro-corporate orientation of the bureaucracy by explaining that the strategy behind the January 23 protest is to appeal to wealthy executives to intervene with Trump. He stated:

One of the things that SEIU put forward, which I thought was interesting, was that in San Francisco, apparently, you know, I remember Trump had been talking about San Francisco’s one of the cities they are going to go to. But SEIU pointed out that I guess that one of the big Silicon Valley billionaire tech bros called up Trump and said, ‘Hey, we don’t need you in San Francisco,’ and Trump agreed to it. So part of the thinking I think behind this from SEIU’s point of view is that we’re gonna put pressure on the CEO of Target, of United Healthcare, of Delta Airlines, of 3M, of Medtronic, that kind of thing. And that that’s gonna be some leverage to try and get the dogs called off.

The orientation is unmistakable. The apparatus is seeking to smother growing opposition and redirect it behind an appeal to billionaires to persuade Trump to “get the dogs called off.”

Later in the meeting, WSWS Labor Editor Jerry White addressed Knutson’s response, stating:

I was somewhat taken aback by brother Knutson’s response to the question. I thought it was quite a legitimate question. Why shouldn’t the rank and file workers actually democratically decide in a mass meeting what the course of action should be taken? ... If the union apparatus is preoccupied with the danger of lawsuits and the danger of their financial positions being threatened, isn’t it the case that rank and file workers have to take matters into their own hands?

niceties about collective bargaining? In the view of the *World Socialist Web Site*, rank-and-file workers should build their own committees to take the conduct of this struggle into their own hands.

Knutson attempted to adapt rhetorically to this position before launching an attack on Trotskyism and the Socialist Equality Party, declaring that he had never seen “organs of popular power emerge” from “some sterile Trotskyist group making a call for it.”

When asked whether the Trotskyists who led the 1934 Minneapolis General Strike were “sterile,” Knutson offered no response.

The role of figures like Knutson, a supporter of the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, is to suppress the class struggle in defense of big business and the Democratic Party. Alongside the open violence of the ICE and federal police, the labor bureaucracy functions as a central mechanism for enforcing state repression by blocking independent working-class action.

But the development of events is escaping the union bureaucracies’ control. In Minneapolis, it has been the independent initiative of workers and young people that has led to walkouts, mass protests and the formation of neighborhood ICE Watch networks, not actions led or organized by the trade union apparatus.

This opposition must be consciously developed and organized through the formation of rank-and-file committees in every workplace and neighborhood. January 23 cannot be treated as an endpoint. Trump is not retreating but escalating, and workers cannot afford to wait on the union apparatus or Democratic politicians who seek to limit and dissipate resistance.

Rank-and-file committees must be established to organize discussion, share information, and plan and initiate mass action—independently and democratically—against the developing dictatorship and the assault on jobs, wages and living conditions. These committees should link up locally and nationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), providing the organizational framework to coordinate struggle in Minneapolis and throughout the country and to mobilize the collective power of the working class.



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White continued:

We are dealing with a totally unprecedented situation. Trump gave a speech today in which he doubled down on his defense of the killing of Renée Nicole Good, denounced Somalis, and threatened to invoke the Insurrection Act. And rank-and-file workers are supposed to accept that union leaders say we have to stick by legal