

Riverside County Bargaining Update (October 2, 2017)

As most of you are aware, the County has declared impasse in our negotiations for a new contract, after which LIUNA requested that the County engage in mediation. The County refused which, while they were within their rights to do so, does provide yet another demonstration of the County's unwillingness to engage in any kind of good faith process.

However the County did agree to meet informally to discuss possible solutions to the impasse. The County submitted three ideas, two of which were described by the County HR Director as "non negotiable."

The first idea was that the County would provide additional money to the current health insurance subsidies offered to employees who take employee + 1 as well as those who take family coverage- \$25.00 more to the former, and \$100.00 more to the latter.

The second idea, and the first of the two "non negotiable" items submitted by the County, was somewhat less employee friendly. The County insisted that we reduce our merit increases from two steps to one. This provision would remain in place until we negotiated another contract. Frankly, we'd have to be idiots to agree to such a thing. Any time we have agreed to any similar sort of concession, we have included a very specific end date. For instance, when our wages were frozen in the 2010-2012 MOU, we made sure that that provision expired on June 30, 2012. In their MOU at that time, SEIU failed to be specific on when their wage freeze would end. That's why their wages were frozen for 3 1/2 years as opposed to the two years ours were frozen. Obviously, we would never deliberately put ourselves in that position.

Their third idea, and second "non negotiable" item was, and this is not hyperbole, the single most insanely unreasonable proposal I have ever received from any employer in any contract negotiation in which I have ever been involved. They wanted us to agree to reopen the contract whenever KPMG came up with another money saving (wage gouging) idea. The County would be able to bargain us to impasse and impose any cuts they wanted, anytime they wanted. That would render the MOU completely meaningless. Clearly, we would not agree to such a provision.

The fact that these ideas were presented by the County HR Director as being "non negotiable" clearly exposed his intent to dictate rather than negotiate.

We did ask him to take the following proposal back to the Board of Supervisors (BoS). First, we accepted their subsidy idea. Second, we proposed that we take our merit increases in increments of one step for 24 months, (and only 24 months), and third, in exchange for temporarily giving up the step, that every LIUNA represented employee would be given 40hrs, which would function like vacation time, in each year of the 24 month contract.

On Tuesday the BoS rejected that proposal. There was no counter proposal, just a flat rejection.

This proposal to my mind did not represent a particularly good deal for us, but was definitely preferable to having the County's Last, Best, and Final Offer (LBFO) imposed on us. In a very real way, the County could have claimed victory with this deal. Yet that wasn't enough. Their desire to savage your livelihoods and your families' futures can only be described as greedy, disrespectful, and rapacious.

This, of course, begs the question, "Why?"

So, why IS the County so hell bent on blowing up our MOU? The first obvious answer is that they have to feed the 40 million dollar beast. KPMG must be fed, and the majority of the Board seem willing to serve you up as dinner. (Oh, one fun fact- the County has given KPMG 40 million dollars. How much is the County's budget shortfall? 40 million dollars- just a coincidence, I know).

But it's more than that. And it's also darker than that. If this were only about the County's budget situation, then the LBFO would only contain proposals that were designed to curtail costs. However, many of these proposals are not budget related. The LBFO also represents a full frontal assault on your rights in the workplace. For instance, and I'll just give one example here, they want to take away our right to grieve Written Reprimands. That means any one in your chain of command can write up anything he or she wants, permanently place it in your personnel file, while giving you no opportunity to challenge the truth or validity of the contents of the reprimand. Everytime you are up for a promotion or a transfer the Written Reprimand would be viewed and would obviously have influence in the process. Yet, if they have their way, you would have no ability to contest this before a neutral party.

So this is about more than just money. This is nothing other than an attempt to bust our Union. The US Supreme Court will soon be hearing the Janus case, which will make Right to Work the law of the land for public sector employees. We can expect this decision in June, though the outcome is a certain and foregone conclusion. Many unions will see a drastic reduction in revenue. The County is certainly very much aware of all of this. They realize that if they can demoralize their employees, and erode any sense of hope for the future, then interest in Union membership will decline. Our Local won't feel the immediate impact as soon as some unions will- I am proud to say that Local 777 has the highest percentage of union membership of any local public sector, non-safety union in the state- but I do know that if people are beaten down enough, they lose their will to fight, and that ultimately some of our members may lose faith and drop their memberships. That is what the County is banking on. And that is why they want to eviscerate your rights and wages.

So, while the County engages in saliva drenched fantasies of a Union free workplace, we need to focus and prepare.

Since the County refused to engage in mediation, we will be going directly to Fact Finding. We filed that request with PERB this week. We also have an Unfair Practice Charge that will be filed with PERB this week. Fact Finding in California has been taking on average about three months from filing to finish. If after fact finding the BoS chooses to impose the LBFO, we are then legally entitled to strike. So, we are preparing for various strike actions, as well as other disruptive strategies and actions. There will be something for everyone to do, regardless of your ability to strike. This is why attending union meetings is becoming more critical. We discuss these items in much greater detail than we will go into on a public forum such as Facebook.

Obviously, our first concern is surviving the County's assault on our MOU. But that campaign is connected to staving off the larger and even more serious threats that are coming from the US Supremes.

We have never been faced with such serious attacks on as many fronts as we are today. Our resolve has never been tested to this extent, and the strength of that resolve will be critical to our survival as an organization as well as to your quality of life, both within and outside of the workplace.

This is a fight we cannot afford to lose. And it's a fight that every member will need to engage on one level or another. So far, all of you have been absolutely stalwart through this prolonged and difficult process, and I wish I could tell you that we were at the end. But we've got a bit to go yet before we get to where we need to be.

We are currently scheduling meetings throughout the County with our members to discuss these things in person. Feel free to be proactive and contact us to schedule a meeting in your area if we haven't contacted you already. We will also be available nights and weekends for these informational meetings. We will, as well, be putting out more information about the broader threats we will be facing over the coming year.

This is a very tough time for every public sector employee and public sector union in the Country. But I believe that the men and women of our organization are as tough as any union members anywhere. I have

great faith in our members' ability to rise up to a challenge, and expect that we will meet these challenges with courage, conviction, and grit. My money, as always, is on us.

Please feel free to contact me or any LIUNA rep with any questions, suggestions, or general thoughts.

In Solidarity,

[Stephen Switzer, Business Manager](#)