

CWA State Worker Bargaining Update

September 30, 2011



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are Fighting Back!

The Christie/Sweeney/Oliver deal eliminating Collective Bargaining for Healthcare hurt us, but we are not defeated. We are fighting back – at the Bargaining Table, at the Polls this November, and at the worksite.

What follows is a Bargaining Report of where we are and where we are headed:

Language and Takeback Demands:

The Christie Administration has made many takeback demands – some of which will go away but some of which continue to pose significant problems. Problematic demands that we are dealing with at the table over the last few sessions include but are not limited to **Clothing Allowance, Shift Differential, Increments and Job Security:**

Clothing Allowance – in early 2011, the State Auditor – Boxer – issued a report criticizing clothing allowances for workers who do not wear uniforms. At the same time, the Christie Administration demanded an end to Clothing Allowance at the table, even for titles that wear uniforms or need to maintain work clothing. **We are struggling with the Administration over criteria for Clothing Allowance and this is going to be a difficult issue to resolve.**

Shift Differential – Our current contract contained a shift differential of 25 cents an hour – a very small differential. The State put a demand on the table to do away with that. **CWA has rejected that demand.**

Increments – The Administration has demanded some freeze of increments during the life of the next contract. **We have rejected that demand.**

Job Security – The Administration demanded eliminating Side Letters 13 and 35 which protect jobs from privatization and closure of facilities. **We have rejected that demand and we are working on a counter proposal that addresses privatization concerns, layoff avoidance, and hiring back laid off workers.**

There are other language issues that we are struggling with including PAR/PES, Union Leaves, Discipline, and Grievance procedure – these issues are important and deserve full and fair negotiations to achieve a good end result. Since the State placed dozens of demands on the table, we know that negotiations will take time. **Nevertheless, you should know that we have not signed off on any of those issues.**

We will have to resolve these issues before we can get an Agreement. We are working on them and we have made some progress, but until these matters are resolved, there can be no Agreement.

Healthcare:

Healthcare for workers in the State Health Benefits Plan is no longer collectively bargained under Sweeney Legislation for this current round of contract negotiations. Design of the Healthcare plans is now handled by the Joint State Health Benefits Plan Design Committee. **A report on what is happening with that committee is attached.**

Wages:

As of October 1, State Workers' pension contribution will increase by 1% (and will increase another 1% phased-in over 7 years).

Depending upon how much you earn and what coverage you have, worker healthcare contributions could triple by the end of a four year agreement. You can look up what your costs would be on the CWA website – www.cwanj.org.

We know that this is not going to be a rich Contract – but we still need a Contract that results in a net increase.

The Administration offer, does not at this time, cover the out of pocket increased costs our members will be paying.

**Neither side has reached a bottom-line on economics.
We are still bargaining.**

Analysis:

Negotiating this Contract continues to be a very challenging task. We know that our members are worried about the increases in pension and healthcare costs as well as job security. We do not know if we will be able to reach an Agreement with this Administration any time soon. There are many difficult outstanding issues. We are, however, still negotiating and we are making limited progress.

Instead of focusing on negotiations with us, Governor Christie is flirting with running for President. We must fight back and make sure that our rights and our Contract are not sacrificed to crass political ambitions.

We engaged a great deal of mobilization in the spring trying to stop the Pension-Benefits bill. We are developing plans to help to drive the Contract negotiations forward in the event that we do not make greater progress in the next few weeks. Locals will roll these plans out through shop stewards and activists. For obvious reasons, we are not including them here.

You can receive regular updates from the bargaining committee by going to www.cwanj.org and signing up and by checking your own Local websites.

In Solidarity,

**John Rose, President CWA Local 1031
Patrick Kavanagh, President CWA Local 1032
Adam Liebttag, President CWA Local 1036
Ken McNamara, President CWA Local 1037
Paul Alexander, President CWA Local 1038
Tom Palermo, President CWA Local 1039
Carolyn C. Wade, President CWA Local 1040
Chris Shelton, Vice President CWA District 1
Hetty Rosenstein, NJ Director CWA District 1
Steve Weissman, NJ General Counsel, District 1**