



California's real pension crisis



By Yvonne R. Walker
 President, SEIU Local 1000

Private sector retirement security time bomb

California is facing a retirement security crisis.

Despite the headlines, the crisis is *not* the cost of public employee pensions. Public employees across California, including the members of SEIU Local 1000, have shown a willingness to make adjustments at the bargaining table and in the legislature to ensure that CalPERS is adequately funded.

The *real* pension crisis in California is among private sector employees. Half of all Californians will spend their retirement years in poverty, according to a recent UC Berkeley study, with most of these workers relying almost entirely on Social Security.

This is wrong on several levels. It is morally wrong for our senior citizens to be forced to live in poverty after spending a lifetime working—or work until they die.

No 401(k) bailout

A big part of the problem is that private-defined contribution 401(k) plans were decimated—even more than CalPERS—when the stock market crashed in 2008 because of Wall Street greed. The banks and Wall Street investment firms that caused this crisis got a bailout from the government, but individual taxpayers who lost their retirement savings were left out in the cold after a lifetime of hard work. 401(k)

plans were designed to supplement defined benefit plans. Instead, they have become a poor substitute.

The retirement problem is even worse for those workers who do not have a 401(k) or defined benefit plan. According to the same UC Berkeley report, only 52 percent of Californians work for companies that offer a retirement plan, compared to 58 percent for the United States as a whole. The risk is particularly bad for private-sector workers in early and mid-career.

“A strikingly large proportion of workers age 25–44 (54.9 percent) are at risk for serious economic hardship in retirement,” the report states.

Social Security not enough

This is the problem that our society must address: How can we facilitate the ability of working people to retire in dignity with some modest income? This is the goal we must work towards.

Right now we are in a race towards the bottom, where employers continually cut benefits or eliminate them altogether. Instead, we need to ensure a modest level of retirement security for all workers, public and private.

This could mean expanding CalPERS to private employees or setting up a CalPERS-like system for private employers to buy into. We don't have all the answers, but we are determined to be part of the process to find a solution, because this is the right thing to do for all Californians.

History Remembered

100 years of women's right to vote

California 1911 suffrage election campaign set stage for national victory



Almost a century ago, women gained the right to vote in California after a tough electoral campaign and set the stage for the passage of the 19th amendment eight years later.

The victory of "Senate Amendment 8" in California on Oct. 10, 1911, carried huge symbolic ramifications across the nation. Although five legislatures in western states had already granted women the right to vote, it was the first time that thousands of male voters cast direct ballots to enfranchise their sisters, mothers and daughters.

Ironically, women's suffrage was a tough sell in otherwise progressive San Francisco, which was then California's largest city. Just 15 years earlier, women's suffrage was rejected by California voters because of a well-organized negative campaign by the San Francisco-based Liquor Dealers League, which stoked fears that empowered women would shut down the bars.

New organizing: phones & cars

Realizing they would probably lose in the Bay Area, women's suffrage supporters countered with a successful strategy that focused on harvesting votes from rural California and fast-growing Los Angeles. By winning big in rural counties and in Los Angeles, suffrage support overcame huge opposition from San Francisco voters to win statewide 125,037 to 121,450.

Their campaign utilized relatively "new" technologies by using cars to stage organizing caravans in small towns and using telephones to coordinate statewide events in support of suffrage.



National implications

California was by far the largest state to approve suffrage at the time, and the victory made headlines throughout the nation, boosting the Golden State's reputation as a leader in adopting progressive ideas.

Victory in California came at a time when the national movement for suffrage on the East Coast and Midwest was gaining momentum as more working women joined the ranks of suffragists.

Labor fights for suffrage

Some suffrage leaders, such as San Francisco native Maud Younger, recognized that organizing women workers in unions was crucial to winning the right to vote. Women's suffrage had become a core organizing principle among unions representing garment workers and teachers.

"I appeal to you as a mother, a grandmother, as a garment worker, a school teacher, a trained nurse, a woman who used to vote in another state, a physician or a settlement worker, as the case might be," said Margaret Haley, the first female president of the Chicago Federation of Teachers and a national leader in the suffrage campaign.

Haley successfully lobbied President Woodrow Wilson to push for suffrage during World War I. After two unsuccessful tries, the amendment was approved by both houses of Congress in June 1919. On Aug. 26, 1920, women's right to vote became law as Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify the 19th amendment.

Resource Center

Monday-Friday
7 a.m. to 7 p.m.
866.471.SEIU (7348)

Website

seiu1000.org

Connect with Local 1000

Facebook

facebook.com/seiu1000

YouTube

youtube.com/seiu1000

Twitter

twitter.com/seiu1000

