

Southern California public education unions agree to attacks on membership

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The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) reached a tentative agreement last Friday with the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA), the union representing teachers in the district. The agreement, if ratified, by both membership and the school board this week, would implement 10 additional unpaid furlough days during the upcoming school year. The ten furlough days would be comprised of five actual instructional days lost along with loss of pay for four holidays and one training day. Together, these represent a five percent salary cut.

According to LAUSD superintendent John Deasy, the measures were necessary due to the “continued pathetic level of funding” received from the state.

Most tellingly, the current agreement is nearly identical to that passed on May 25 by SEIU local 99 which represents school janitors, cafeteria workers and other school support staff. According to the local’s web site, the vote “demonstrates the selfless commitment of SEIU local 99 members to stand united for each other and for the students we serve every day.” Like the UTLA agreement, the SEIU’s bargaining efforts resulted in the loss of 10 furlough days from members.

This essentially means that UTLA membership is being presented with a sham vote on Wednesday as the SEIU's agreement essentially means that ten school days are already lost regardless of how the vote proceeds.

Local 99 is simply following the playbook of the much larger local 1000 which represents state and municipal employees. The governor's office reached agreement with them on a plan to reduce hours and pay for membership. The current plan being negotiated includes a four day workweek and the elimination of the eight hour day, with a decrease in overall hours and pay.

The position of the SEIU was spelled out most clearly on a video posted on the union's website. In it, John Kern, head of bargaining unit 3, said the following, “To say no always includes a cost. And the cost of saying no now is that we’ll take ourselves out of the action, but we will definitely be acted upon instead. That is not our choice. That's not a responsible choice.” See video.

As the June 15 deadline approaches for passage of California Governor Jerry Brown's latest budget agreement, school districts and other state and local institutions are preparing for the aftermath. The state’s budgetary shortfall for the upcoming year has ballooned from \$9.2 to over \$16 billion.

The LAUSD faces a \$390 million shortfall of its own. The district is the second largest in the country serving 664,000 students, and has thus become a focal point for nationwide attacks on public education.

Despite the disastrous economic situation faced by the district, the UTLA is seeking to promote illusions among its members, claiming that teachers will have lost wages reimbursed should the district end the year with a budget surplus. The steady stream of budgetary woes for the district since the onset of the economic crisis, gives the lie to such pap. In 2008, the district was \$427 million in the red, in 2009, \$838 million, in 2010, \$620 million, and in 2011, \$408 million. The district is projected to have a \$390 million shortfall during the upcoming fiscal year.

According to both the district and the teachers’ union, the ultimate outcome of the latest proposal depends upon the passage of November ballot initiatives proposed by Governor Brown to raise sales and income taxes. Both the district and the union have asserted that non-passage of these initiatives will result in the loss of an additional 15 school days while the newly-agreed upon furlough days will be rescinded if

the initiatives do pass.

If everything does indeed hinge on the November election, then why is such a matter being voted on at all right now?

Indeed, the UTLA's response to the latest agreement has been to launch an internal propaganda offensive, the cynicism of which is only matched by its crudity. The union's web site claims that the latest agreement "Means that most RIF'd (Reduction in Force, meaning teachers who received notices of possible termination last March) employees will return next year." This year, 9,150 RIF notifications were sent out, while the current agreement spares 4,149 of those or slightly more than half.

Of the 9,150 RIFs sent out, 3,606 were received by adult education instructors. The current agreement restores only 653 of those positions, a devastating loss for Adult Education programs in Los Angeles County. The district is now determining which of the 24 adult education campuses in the city will be shut down as a result.

The rosy picture painted by the union contrasts with Governor Brown's statement after the latest budget proposal was announced, "We are going to have to go farther and make cuts far greater than I asked for at the beginning of the year."

Regardless of the outcome of these agreements, they represent only a small fraction of the cuts which have been made to the public sector since the onset of the economic crisis.

Public education has been extremely hard hit in the state of California, with many more cuts in the offing.

LAUSD, for its part, has also recently announced that it would apply for prize money under President Obama's reactionary Race to the Top Program. The program, which was once only available to states, has now been modified to allow individual school districts to apply for funds. The state is eligible for prize money only to the extent that it's able to show permanent structural reductions in workforce and programs, which themselves lay the groundwork for further layoffs and school privatizations. Such "reforms" will inevitably remain in place even if the district does not obtain the prize money.

California government is also seeking options for the review and removal of credentials for those teachers who have ever been accused of professional

misconduct regardless of type. An initial investigation had covered 604 cases over the past four years. The investigation has now been expanded to allegations made over the past 40 years. For all intents and purposes, every teacher now teaching who has been suspected of misconduct will be investigated and possibly terminated.

Democratic Senator Alex Padilla has also authored legislation which was recently passed in the state senate, and which expedites the firing process for those teachers accused of offenses involving sex, violence, drugs or "unprofessional" conduct. The process does not pay heed to the ultimate guilt or innocence of the teacher so accused.

Said Padilla, "Because a school board is ultimately responsible for ensuring a safe learning environment, the school board should be empowered to dismiss employees they determine to be a serious threat to the health and safety of students." The "health and safety of students" could well be predicated on non-exposure to socialist ideas or for that matter to works of art and literature with even the most modest anti-establishment aspirations. The measure will soon be put to a vote in the state assembly.

Since the 2008 economic crisis, over 30,000 public school teachers have been laid off in the state of California.



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