Los Angeles teachers denounce UTLA betrayal of strike

Our reporters
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The conspiracy by United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) and the Democratic Party to ram through a new contract to end the six-day strike by 33,000 educators provoked widespread anger from teachers.

Teachers were given only a few hours to read the 40-page agreement before they were forced to vote on the deal later in the evening. Prior to that, the union and the district officials had been engaged in closed-door negotiations for five days during which time no details were revealed to teachers.

The fraudulent character of the voting process was made clear in comments Tuesday morning during the press conference announcing the deal. Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti along with Los Angeles Unified School District Superintendent Austin Beutner and UTLA President Alex Caputo-Pearl all announced that the strike was over before a single vote was even cast.

Underscoring its contempt for rank-and-file teachers, Caputo-Pearl announced that "a supermajority had liked the deal" and voted for it even though mass teacher sentiment has been overwhelmingly against the deal. Referring to this opposition, the UTLA president added, "I don't begrudge anyone who had higher expectations. That's why the struggle continues."

Typical were responses like this one from a teacher posting on Facebook, "We knew something was wrong when you held the pep rally and issued a joint statement that the strike was over before we even saw the TA [Tentative Agreement]. When it was released, we just had a few hours to review before voting. You rushed this process after a weekend of secret meetings and it shows."

Another teacher wrote on Facebook, "So many teachers couldn't vote, but not even sure our votes even count. Beutner made calls at 4 welcoming everyone back."

World Socialist Web Site reporters held several voting locations at school sites in the Los Angeles area to discuss the union's efforts to steamroll teachers into voting for the deal and the content of the sellout agreement.

James, a middle school music director in Highland Park north of downtown Los Angeles, said, "They do this tactic in student council meetings too. They give you a budget for the entire year and then they give you 30 seconds to vote on it. Administrators then come to intimidate teachers."

He continued, "I have a second job, and I saved up to participate in these protests. I need a week to review the contract. I have twins at home. I don't have time to throw down a vote."

At the Hollenbeck Middle School in the Boyle Heights area, Marcos, a special education teacher, told the WSWS, "It's too quick. People haven't had time to digest it at all. We need to have a big change. This has become a political fight now."

Diane Romero, a retired teacher, also came to support voting teachers at Hollenbeck. "The one counselor for 500 teachers is ridiculous. I also thought the amount offered on salary was not good. Three percent one year and three percent the next? That's nothing.

"This new agreement reduces class sizes by one student. That is nothing and what if the school population increases. What then? Will we just go right back to where we started and forget about it?

"I was in the 1989 strike and we were out for nine days instead of six. We got some increases on health care and salary, but they removed the salary increases a little later. I have no doubt that they're going to try to claw back the little teachers have gotten in this contract too. They already have contract openers for that."

Maria, an English teacher at Hollenbeck, said, "This

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strike meant a lot to me. It meant that I was willing to sacrifice a week-and-a-half's worth of wages so we could make some improvements in our classes that were long overdue.

"I look at this contract and I don't see anything that's been improved. The salary offer was only three percent. There's some things in here about green space. I suppose that's nice but what does it have to do with conditions in my school, reducing class sizes and making things better for kids?

"There's also this question of community schools and charter colocation coordinators. A lot of this language I find very ambiguous and they didn't give us enough time to learn about it and discuss it."

David, a math teacher at Hollenbeck Middle School, said, "Seems like this vote didn't take enough time. Even when our principal calls a meeting, we get 24-hour notice.

"I'm not at all happy with the class size reduction. Only one student reduced? In classes, we simply just don't have enough room. There aren't enough desks for students already. I've had to give up collaborative instruction in my classes where groups of kids sit around and work together in favor of a more traditional style where everyone just sits in rows and looks at the board.

"There is enough wealth to fund public education. This massive concentration of wealth is just criminal."

Lucy, an elementary teacher at San Pedro Elementary School, voted Tuesday with her two coworkers, Maria and Leiei. "We need to see a full copy of the agreement. We cannot vote without knowing the details.

"The voting is taking place from 5:00 to 7:00 tonight at our sites. What are the options for people who cannot make it there during those times?"

Dora, a substitute teacher in Highland Park, said, "I have three sisters who are full-time teachers, so, of course, I didn't cross the picket line. The district was offering $500 a day to substitutes to cross the picket lines."

On the role of the teachers' unions, she said, "They have these bloated salaries. They don't need all those bonuses if they're supposed to be fighting for us. It feels like a monopoly.

"I feel like they gave us only a few hours to read a 40-page document. Plus, I'm not a lawyer. This isn't language that the everyday person can understand without a good deal of effort."

A speech therapist and special education physical education teacher in Highland Park who spoke to the WSWS also expressed skepticism towards the teacher unions. "The multimillionaires and billionaires are responsible for this attack on public education and the unions are sponsoring Democratic politicians who are supported by the multimillionaires and billionaires."

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