“The spineless UTLA is in the pockets of the Democratic Party”

Opposition mounts among Los Angeles teachers to union’s school reopening agreement

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The West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees are organizing the enormous opposition among educators, parents and students to the homicidal reopening of schools throughout the region. Register today and invite your coworkers and friends to attend our next meeting at 2 p.m. PST today*!*

On Tuesday, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) teachers union announced a tentative agreement (TA) to reopen schools for in-person learning. The announcement has been met with widespread opposition and anger from educators, many of whom have already begun declaring on social media that they will be voting against the agreement.

The deal reached by UTLA and LAUSD will allow elementary school students to return classrooms on April 19, while secondary students will return in late April when the district predicts all educators should have access to both doses of the coronavirus vaccine. The LAUSD school board also voted in favor of the agreement Friday morning, sending it to Los Angeles teachers for a vote.

Fully in-person instruction will be offered for preschool students, while elementary students will be divided into two cohorts, with the first attending school in the morning and the second in the afternoon.

The return to classrooms will inevitably result in heightened transmission of the disease in the second most populous metropolitan area in the United States.

Only a few weeks ago, Los Angeles was the global epicenter of the pandemic, with more than 22,000 Angelenos now having died from the disease. The majority of LAUSD students are considered impoverished, with many living in multi-generational, overcrowded housing conditions which will only contribute to mass community spread after those students return home from overcrowded classrooms.

In reviewing distributed schedules, educators have also come to the realization that the work day has been extended by nearly an hour. An elementary school educator told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “The day used to end at 2:19 and now the schedules show 3:00 p.m. Additionally, we have been asked to come in 20 minutes, it is unclear if we are working in part during our lunch, and now we are told we are expected to stay at least another 10 minutes after work.”

A teacher with 25 years of experience in LAUSD who wished to remain anonymous told the WSWS, “I just found out the TA includes increasing teachers’ work day by one hour. UTLA SELLOUT!! The UTLA said if we don't agree to it, the district can just unilaterally impose it on us, whatever they want, without even the threat of going on strike. What a bunch of weasels. The spineless UTLA is in the pockets of the Democratic Party and doing the bidding of the district like the scoundrels that they are.”

He emphasized that teachers are being blackmailed into voting yes on the deal. “The union is telling us that if we vote ‘No’ we have to accept the district’s reopening plan, but we are already doing that. What kind of union rolls over and doesn’t even threaten a strike under these conditions?”

Tuesday’s announced agreement is the result of a sham vote held by the UTLA last week. Many teachers believed they were voting in favor of safety measures that prioritize students and educators, which the UTLA limited to vaccinations and the stipulation that LA County move from California’s most dangerous “purple tier” to the still deadly “red tier” based on the numbers of infections, along with the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) and sanitary supplies.

Many educators are voicing concern for special education students and the staff and teachers who care for them, noting that it is impossible to socially distance as many require toileting and feeding supports. Teachers are rightfully demanding the plans for how a supposedly safe environment

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will be provided for the special needs students.

Educators are reporting being blindsided with the TA and numerous teachers are coming forward on social media declaring they are uncertain on what it was they voted on last week in the UTLA survey. Many believed they were committing to proclamations by the UTLA that they would lead a fight to keep schools closed until the spread of the virus is contained. It is becoming clearer to thousands of educators that the UTLA forced them into a sham vote, knowing full well the county and state were headed into the red tier.

Opposition to the TA has grown to such a degree by both educators and parents, that the UTLA has been working overtime to corral and shut down the growing chorus of denunciations, encouraging members to "talk shop" in the UTLA's private Facebook page and not air their concerns on large social media groups that include tens of thousands of parents and workers.

Los Angeles County officials announced Friday that on Monday the county will move into the red tier. This is not the result of significantly lowered case numbers, but due to a rewriting of the metrics after two million vaccines have been distributed across the state to the populations that reside within lowest income populations, what the state has deemed the "Vaccine Equity Quartile."

Los Angeles County also used the opportunity of the announcement to allow the resumption of partial in-person dining along with the reopenings of indoor gyms and movie theaters. Those businesses will be allowed to reopen up to 25 percent capacity as of 12:01 a.m. Monday morning.

The California Blueprint for a Safer Economy now stipulates that once the two million vaccine threshold is reached, the "Purple (Widespread) tier will shift from a 7 day average of greater than 7 cases per 100,000 to greater than 10 cases per 100,000; and the "Red (Substantial) tier will be widened to 4-10 cases per 100,000."

This is part of a concerted effort by California's Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom, the Democrat-controlled state legislature, and a bipartisan policy to reopen businesses and the economy. Schools are the linchpin for a broader reopening and all measures are being taken to facilitate this, even artificially rewriting the metrics.

The forcing open of schools in LA comes nearly one month after Chicago city officials conspired with the Chicago Teacher's Union (CTU) to pry open K-12 schools despite widespread opposition to reopening. Teachers in Los Angeles and beyond must learn from the betrayals of the CTU and begin organizing independently.

The West Coast of the US has become the primary front in the ruling class campaign to open schools everywhere, with districts and teachers unions from Seattle to San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, and all other major cities throughout the region moving forward in lockstep to force educators to accept reopening.

A fighting program is needed to prevent these deadly actions. Already in Michigan, where schools opened in early March, K-12 schools have become the primary source of outbreaks. In the first week of March, 47 school outbreaks were recorded and over 220 staff, teachers and students tested positive for COVID-19, while there were 71 youth-related outbreaks that included sports.

John, a LAUSD middle school teacher told the WSWS, "I will vote no. I've come to see the UTLA as stupid and spineless. The proposed setup for middle school and high schools is idiotic. I'll be in the room with the same 12 kids all day. But I won't be teaching them. I'll teach only via zoom (having to wear at least a mask), and they will be zooming their classes while they sit in my room. Simply idiotic!"

He added, "The union leadership does not understand or does not care to use the power of organized labor. The position should have been that we are not returning this spring. The LAUSD has 33,000 teachers. They can't open schools without us."

The individual anger and opposition by teachers and families must find organized political expression. It is not enough for educators to overwhelmingly vote 'NO' on this sellout agreement hatched between UTLA and LAUSD, they must begin formulating their own way forward.

At 2pm PST this Saturday, March 13, the West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees are meeting to discuss how educators and other sections of the working class—including healthcare, food production, logistics and other workers—will carry this fight forward.

All decisions regarding school openings and closures must be overseen by rank-and-file committees formed by workers and parents, in consultation with trusted scientists of their choosing. These committees will determine what is safe, not what the ruling class and its media mouthpieces claim they can afford. The interests of human life must take precedent.

We urge all educators, parents and students in Los Angeles, throughout California and across the West Coast to make plans to attend Saturday's meeting and invite your coworkers and friends.

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