

# Los Angeles unions preparing new betrayals of education workers

Rafael Azul, Dan Conway  
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More than three months have passed since the expiration of the last contract between the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) and the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the nation's second largest school district with almost 665,000 students. The 2022-2023 school year, moreover, is more than one month old.

Also negotiating with LAUSD are bus drivers, paraprofessionals and support staff, members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

Negotiations between the teachers union and the LAUSD began in May, with demands for a salary increase of 20 percent over two years, the hiring of more teachers and investment in badly deteriorated public schools.

Details of the negotiations have been provided sporadically to the more than 34,000 members with the district offering a 23 percent increase in compensation over the next three years. While this is less than the current rate of inflation on a year-by-year basis, slightly less than half of the compensation increase will actually go towards one-time bonuses without any impact on salary.

The UTLA, for its part, released a statement last month calling the district's latest offer "insulting and negligible." UTLA bargaining co-chair and Secretary Arlene Inouye stated, "No more table scraps and no more short-term solutions; we're demanding a better future for our students."

Such rhetoric is only so much hot air meant to confuse and disorient teachers. In 2019, the union bureaucracy met behind closed doors with the district and LA Democratic Mayor Eric Garcetti to reach what the UTLA called a "historic agreement," which in fact included wage increases that were even less than the miserly increases included in the district's latest offer.

More recently, the UTLA and the district reached an agreement on what the district is calling "optional instructional days." Meant to address purported "learning loss" as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the four instructional days were to have been spread out throughout the year and the scheduling of these was made reportedly without significant consultation with the UTLA.

In response, the union asked teachers to strike on the instructional days, a meaningless gesture since those days are optional. In any case, the "strike" would have been used to advance the union's "Beyond Recovery Platform," which it is currently advancing in the negotiations with the district.

The Beyond Recovery Platform is itself an indictment of the 2019 agreement, as all of the gains the unions promised teachers would make in the 2019 agreement, which it abandoned, are now included in the 2022 platform.

These include smaller class sizes that were promised prior to the 2019 agreement, which resulted in various committees to "investigate" class sizes rather than any hiring initiatives or class caps. According to many teachers, their class sizes decreased by only one or two students per year. It also purports to fight for more nursing and counseling staff, also promised during the 2019 teachers strike.

The title of the platform itself is an acknowledgement that the union officials believe the pandemic to be over. The platform advances no calls for increased remote learning or COVID-19 mitigation protocols on campuses, which the UTLA leaders agree can now be completely unmasked with no testing in place even though an autumn surge of the virus on school sites is highly likely.

Gina Gray, a high school English teacher, recently

wrote in a local web page about 2019 and now “...it’s beginning to feel like *déjà vu*.”

“LAUSD listened as educators, parents, students, and community members shared the proposals we had developed together. But to our dismay, the district ignored the requests and made only a few counter proposals, which included a rejection of any improvements to working conditions for adult education teachers. The district also shared a union-busting proposal to limit and prevent all concerted actions by UTLA, including a prohibition on sympathy strikes in support of other underpaid education workers. LAUSD allowed the contract to expire, and we’ve had no positive movement in our negotiations.”

Similarly, what is known about the negotiations between the SEIU, which covers custodial and other school support staff, and the district reveals that a rotten deal is in the making there as well.

An SEIU page presented the district’s miserable wage proposal to its members in provocative terms: “For 2020-21 – ZERO! Nothing! Nada!,” the web page stated.

This will be followed by a 5 percent raise on 2021-22, a 4 percent increase and a 3 percent one-time bonus on 2022-23, followed by a 4 percent raise and a 3 percent one-time bonus on 2023-24.

It has been nearly half a decade of unrelenting and bitter struggles by teachers: strikes and protests around the world since the wildcat strike of 2018 in West Virginia. The strategy of the Democratic Party aligned American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA) has been to systematically isolate each of these struggles and cut deals entirely within the framework of bipartisan austerity and school privatization.

The six-day strike by 34,000 teachers in Los Angeles, California in January 2019, was no exception. They were fighting for more than just higher salaries. The broader concerns they voiced—about overcrowded classrooms, schools without nurses, librarians and counselors—won massive support from students and their families, who cheered the striking teachers, and came out by the thousands in the union rallies. Many brought food to the picket lines and marched with their children alongside the teachers.

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread in 2020, teachers have been used globally to push through the herd-

immunity policies of ruling classes through criminal school reopening measures, resulting in the deaths of countless educators and students.

As the new school year began in the United States, the struggle of teachers across the world against these policies and to make up for unresolved issues of the 2018-2019 educators’ strike waves, has promised another year of struggle, drawing teachers into strikes in Columbus, Ohio; Seattle, Washington and other locations.

Teachers must not allow a repeat of the 2019 betrayal. It is time for teachers and school workers to take matters into their own hands, by forming rank-and-file committees to transfer power from the union apparatuses into the hands of educators themselves.

The Los Angeles Educators Rank-and-File Committee calls on teachers to reject the UTLA’s wage and anti-strike demands, organize a mass assembly of educators and classified staff to discuss and elaborate demands that make up for years of cuts in real wages, and that reflect the real cost of living in Los Angeles. It also proposes that Los Angeles teachers link up their struggle with those of teachers across the country and around the world, for joint strike action.



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