

“Someone has to make a stand!”

Union announces sellout contract after three-day strike at Los Angeles schools

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On Saturday, March 25, the West Coast Educators Rank-and-file committee will hold a meeting to discuss the strike and the way forward. The meeting will be held on Saturday March 25 at 2:00 pm PT. Register here.

Late Friday afternoon, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 99 announced a tentative agreement with the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) after a three-day strike by 65,000 school workers and educators in Los Angeles.

The few “highlights,” which have so far been released, include retroactive pay back to 2021 that amounts to a 20 percent pay raise for those who were employed at the time. This falls far short of the SEIU’s own limited pay demand of a 30 percent raise.

School workers who make on average \$25,000 per year will see their wages increase to a still poverty level of \$32,000 per year by 2024. This, however, will be largely eaten up by two more years of inflation.

A major demand by striking education workers was for full-time work and an end to 10-month contracts. Many education workers in the district are part-time and piece together 3- to 6-hour days. There has been nothing to indicate that the central issues of staffing will be in any way addressed. Janitors, cafeteria workers, aides and all staff are working on skeleton crews as their duties expand.

Workers must demand the immediate and full release of the contract and at least one full week to study the contract before voting on it. They must not allow the contract to be forced through in a snap vote, which occurred with the 2019 UTLA contract, where workers were told at a midday rally that a TA was reached and to head back to their work sites to vote on it that very evening.

Workers must be wary of the “raise,” which will be

offset by the fact that not only will it not lift them out of poverty, it could push them just over the threshold to qualify for CalFresh food stamp benefits. This is precisely what happened to the 48,000 University of California grad student workers whose union accepted a contract which raised pay to \$34,000 after three years.

Today, Saturday, March 25, at 2:00 p.m. PT, the West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Committee will hold a meeting to discuss the strike, the political forces that workers face, and why they must take the fight into their own hands.

The strike, which ended Thursday, was the largest in the US since 2019. On the third and final day, morning school site pickets were followed by a massive rally of some 50,000 workers at Los Angeles State Historic Park, and many brought their families. The powerful action shook the entire city of 10 million. The rally expressed the determination of workers to fight against short staffing, high workloads, overcrowded classes and poverty wages, made worse by skyrocketing inflation.

This strike in the nation’s second largest school district is part of a global struggle against cuts to public education, austerity and the decades-long assault on working conditions. Across the globe, the ruling class is making clear it expects workers to shoulder the costs of the financial crisis and escalating war.

Meanwhile, school workers face homelessness and hunger, with annual salaries averaging \$25,000. Those on strike include bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria workers, special education assistants, IT support staff, office administration and other staff.

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) limited the job action to a three-day “unfair labor practice” (ULP) strike, which implies the strike could not raise economic demands. This was news to many

workers, who returned today without a contract, no strike pay, no raise and no information on the state of the contract.

The 30,000 SEIU members were joined on the picket lines by 35,000 teachers and members of the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA). Despite the enormous show of opposition among school workers and educators, both the SEIU and UTLA union bureaucracies worked to contain and limit the strike. SEIU members are still working under a contract that expired in 2020.

On Wednesday afternoon, the office of Los Angeles Democratic Mayor Karen Bass stated that she is being brought into discussions between the SEIU and LAUSD after skipping town for the majority of the strike.

The WCERFC intervened at the massive rally and distributed 1,000 leaflets calling for the expansion of the strike and the development of rank-and-file committees at every school site, independent of the union bureaucracies, to fight for demands that meet the needs of workers, not what the ruling class claims it can afford.

Eduardo, a bus driver for four years, said, “Inflation is going up, and the cost of living is going up. I live with my parents, who are in their mid-70s, and we help each other out because of the high cost of living. It can’t be the same excuse year in and year out that ‘there is no money.’ This is a tired excuse, and something needs to be done. Education is always getting the short end of the stick.”

He was visibly moved when he learned of the international statements of support received from education workers in the UK, Australia, Sri Lanka, and Brazil tied to the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committee (IWA-RFC) and the call for workers to unite.

“What we are going through is very relatable around the world,” he said, “and I feel if we are able to accomplish this here, it will give a boost of confidence and motivation for others to stand up. Someone has to make a stand! This is long overdue, and it will have a ripple effect throughout the world.”

Bus drivers emphasized the fact that they are on 10-month contracts and do not get paid over the summer months. Two drivers noted how their colleagues recently received notices this year saying they need to pay back the money they received for unemployment for those summer months because the district indicated that they are on “summer recess,” when answering calls from the unemployment office.

Ulises, a school bus driver in the district for 17 years, said, “Unless we are offered summer school, we don’t get

paid for those two months. We are considered part time. ... During those two months, I have to find other work to keep paying expenses. I have worked for charter buses, but I don’t like doing that because the pay is really low.

“Inflation is affecting everybody. During the 10 months you’re okay, but when the school year is over, you still have to pay rent, gas, electricity and food. So, if you are not able to save for those two months, you have to look for another job. You’re not able to collect unemployment because we are in ‘summer recess.’”

Juana has been a bus driver for seven years. She told the WWSWS, “We need a raise because the cost of everything is increasing, along with rent and property taxes. I have kids, and I’m unable to make ends meet.”

Her coworker Jasmine, also a bus driver, added that contract labor, or scabs hired by the district, is being used and paid at much higher rates. “Contractors are getting paid better than we are. They are starting at \$36 an hour, but our top pay is \$30. The contractors are working now because they work for private schools. This is not fair. They say there’s no money, but that’s not true.”

California, home to 178 billionaires, has some of the most extreme levels of wealth inequality in the country, with 20 percent of all net worth concentrated in the 30 richest zip codes, according to the Public Policy Institute.

It is the Democratic Party that has overseen vast levels of wealth inequality, hunger, homelessness, immigrant detention centers and extreme levels of poverty in the state. The California State Board of Education, also run by the Democratic Party, has been at the forefront of charterization and privatization of public schools, which has exacerbated the poor conditions facing public school teachers and workers.

Education workers are in a growing and direct confrontation with the trade union bureaucracy and capitalist state, which have imposed austerity measures on workers to protect the interests of the rich.



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