

# US workers speak out in support of last week's Los Angeles schools strike, urge rejection of tentative agreement

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26 March 2023

Last week, 65,000 education workers and support staff went on strike for three days at the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the second largest school district in the nation.

After keeping workers on the job without a contract for three years, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 99 was compelled to call the limited job action. Workers are fighting against poverty wages, with school support staff making annual salaries of \$25,000 per year in one of the most expensive cities in the country.

Workers showed their determination and militancy during the strike, but the union bureaucracy sent them back to work Friday morning without any of their demands having been met. That afternoon, the SEIU announced a tentative agreement which falls short even of the union's own official demand of 30 percent wage increases plus an additional \$2 per hour across the board. After the last year of the contract, the starting wage will still be only \$32,000 per year, far below what workers need to afford rent and other basic needs. The SEIU has said it will hold a contract rollout meeting Monday evening over the internet, with a vote likely to follow soon after.

The strike received widespread support from workers all over the world. Teachers from Brazil, Sri Lanka, Canada, Britain and Australia sent in statements of support to the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The WSWs also spoke with a number of workers throughout the US about the strike.

Jake is a graduate student and teachers assistant at the University of California Riverside (UCR). He compared the LA walkouts to the recent strike by 48,000 UC graduate students. "We recently went

through a strike to get basic living needs met. Now our fellow educators are doing the same in Los Angeles. Educators throughout history have been the backbone of society, and we seem to have forgotten that. Without educators we cannot move forward towards the future where all our needs are met. Ironically, educators cannot do their jobs without basic needs being met. LAUSD and California have viewed educators as expendable and replaceable. We need to stand with teachers and workers to ensure they get what they deserve, a decent standard of living.

"When it comes to funding oppressive services in schools like police on campus the coffers overflow, but ensuring that educators can pay rent and buy food, all of a sudden we all need to make sacrifices. This is not a two way street. This is non-negotiable. Educators need their needs met."

Jake warned educators: "Don't let the union tell you what you want or what's good enough. Stand up for what you want and need. In the UC strike, the bargaining team was in lockstep with the United Auto Workers (UAW) against the demands of the rank and file. In December, the UAW 2865 put out a letter simply declaring that UC was planning to reduce enrollment by 33 percent. Why wasn't this opposed?"

"I was expecting to work with the union. But once it got going and I saw how the union was acting against us, I was disheartened. This is an important lesson: that the union bureaucracy does not represent our interests. Then what flows from that: we need to build independent rank-and-file committees to express and stand up for what the rank-and-file grad students want."

He then exhorted education workers to "Keep fighting. It's not easy. Rejecting the TA would be an

amazing step, something we weren't able to do at UC."

Manuel, a UPS worker who formerly worked for the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) for 10 years as a custodian, declared his solidarity with LAUSD workers: "I support the education workers' demands for everything they need and more. From experience, I can say teachers spend money out of their own pocket to get the classroom equipped with learning posters, teaching materials, even tissue paper. Meanwhile district administrators and the school board members soak in the 'budget,' while teachers and front line education workers are left out to dry."

Manuel is one of 350,000 UPS workers nationwide whose contract expires on July 31. Workers are determined to win back years of concessions, but the UPS officialdom has kept them in the dark. "In Anaheim, it is the same political game [with the union bureaucracy] as well. The funny thing is the Teamsters union and UPS run the same malpractice on their members as the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) and SEIU."

Manuel appealed for unity between school workers and UPS workers against the corrupt bureaucrats in both unions. "Together, without the bureaucracies holding us back, the working class could exercise their strength instead of being kneecapped. Power to the rank and file!"

Alicia, a teacher in Michigan, said, "When I started teaching 25 years ago, I remember our pay for starting teachers was about \$25,000. So when I read in the article that LA school workers are getting paid \$25,000 a year, and knowing how much that city costs to live in, I was floored. It has to be well below poverty based on the cost of living there. They have to hold the feet to the fire to get what they need just to live!"

"I can't even imagine what they are doing just to survive, especially anybody with a family. When would you even have time to spend with your family if they have to work two or three jobs? They can barely make enough money to put food on the table."

"It's sickening to see how much money we can find to spend on war but not things we need to take care of people here at home. I have one answer. How about you pull out of the war?"

Turning to the pandemic, she said, "We now know the schools and the factories were the two main vectors that were responsible for community spread of COVID."

They don't even have a test for long COVID. They won't even admit it exists. So they can't even begin to comprehend the amount of damage that has been done to multiple generations.

"Biden and the state leadership here were obviously working hand-in-hand in terms of getting everybody back to face-to-face school in March 2021. That was when things were horrible, just horrible as far as the pandemic goes."

Alicia also appealed for unity with educators and other workers across the country. "The important thing is unifying all the different groups of working people and not isolating them, like the unions tend to do. They tend to isolate them on purpose. They do that to break them down and force them to settle for less than they deserve and that they need."

"All we have is our social disobedience," she continued. "By that I mean social disobedience to try to stop it. It has to be social disobedience on a massive scale, like a general strike."

She concluded, "The [Educators Rank-and-File Safety] Committee is the one group where educators can truly have a voice and can bring about the kind of changes that are needed to improve their lives and working conditions."



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