

Democratic Socialists of America, in control of school board and teachers union, keeps Los Angeles teachers on the job without a contract

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The three-day strike last week by 65,000 public school workers in Los Angeles was a demonstration of the immense power of the working class and the potential that exists for a mass movement to fight for adequate funding for schools and other social needs. Teachers and school support workers are locked in a battle against the capitalist two-party system, and the California Democratic Party in particular. They are part of a world movement, involving mass strikes and protests by millions from France to Israel, fighting against austerity and attacks on democratic rights.

But school workers are being blocked by the trade union bureaucracy in Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 99 and the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA). School support staff have been kept on the job by the union for three years without a contract, while teachers have been without a deal since last summer. The bureaucracy ended the strike and sent workers back into schools last week before any of their demands were met. The following day, the SEIU announced a sellout deal that addresses none of workers' demands and leaves support workers living in poverty.

This is a universal phenomenon, which is also being played out on the West Coast docks, New York City schools, the railroads and other key industries. The union bureaucracy functions as one wing of a corporatist conspiracy against workers, involving the government, the courts and the major corporations.

A critical role in this is being played by the pseudo-left Democratic Socialists of America. Either DSA members or bureaucrats with DSA support are increasingly in the leadership of major unions around the country, including the Association of Flight Attendants, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, and, as of this past weekend, the United Auto Workers. They also control the teachers

unions in many major districts, including Los Angeles.

The DSA's role is to block and misdirect growing working class opposition to the corrupt union apparatus and the two-party system. They are not socialists at all but use dishonest populist-sounding phrases to disguise their pro-capitalist policies. Among the most infamous examples of this to date was the DSA's vote in Congress to ban strike action by railroaders last December. They also support war, oppose public health measures to contain the pandemic and are bitterly hostile to and fearful of the working class.

In Los Angeles, both the UTLA and the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) Board of Education are controlled by the DSA. Jackie Goldberg, for decades a fixture in local Democratic Party politics, has been president of the Board since this January. Rocio Rivas, another DSA member, is also on the board. The UTLA's president is Cecily Myart-Cruz, who specializes in using racial politics to divert attention from the class struggle. In addition, three DSA members are on the Los Angeles City Council.

In other words, all "bargaining sessions" between the UTLA and the school district involve members of the same organization on both sides of the table! The concessions heaped upon LA teachers and school workers may as well have been worked out by the local leadership of the DSA's Los Angeles branch. This also graphically demonstrates that what is involved are not "negotiations" between mutually antagonistic parties but a conspiracy between the district and the unions against the classified and teaching staff.

Goldberg is a trusted, leading member of the local Democratic Party. A former student protester at Berkeley in the 1960s, she long ago shed her youthful radicalism. She was earlier an LAUSD school board member from

1983 to 1991, on the LA City Council from 1993 and 2001 and a member of the California State Assembly from 2000 to 2006. In the Assembly, she was chair of the Education Committee, where she played a central role in the attacks on public education.

Her first tenure on the LAUSD board also saw the 1989 lockout by the district of 20,000 teachers. After attempting and failing to secure support among teachers for an abysmal 17 percent wage increase over three years, Goldberg acted during the lockout as a crucial go-between for the district. In the end, the lockout ended with a somewhat higher but still concessionary—by the standards of the time—wage increase of 24 percent over three years.

Thirty years later, Goldberg was again on the Board during the next major work stoppage, the 2019 teachers strike. That strike was sold out by the UTLA after secret talks with the district and then-Mayor Eric Garcetti. By then, the union was under the control of the “Union Power” faction led by Alex Caputo-Pearl, a member of the International Socialist Organization (ISO). Myart-Cruz was also a leading member of the faction and became Caputo-Pearl’s successor as president the following year.

The DSA played a crucial role in the reopening of the Los Angeles schools—and in many other districts around the country—in early 2021, which led directly to a huge surge in infections and deaths. In February of that year, Goldberg held a virtual town hall with former LAUSD Superintendent Austin Beutner, a former investment banker, to falsely tell parents and students that opening schools was safe.

The DSA nationwide supported, and still supports, “herd immunity” policies to justify the reopening of schools. *Jacobin* magazine, the main publication associated with the DSA, published favorable coverage of the pseudo-scientific Great Barrington Declaration, which argued for the end of all lockdowns.

The magazine published a friendly interview with the Declaration’s co-author, Martin Kulldorf, and *Jacobin* Editor Bhaskar Sunkara approvingly retweeted Kulldorf’s claim that “The [Covid] lockdown is the worst assault on the working class in half a century.”

This was part and parcel of the drive by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten, acting on behalf of both parties, to reopen the nation’s schools against the opposition of teachers and to promote junk science from far-right circles.

Myart-Cruz, who is black and Latina and a leading member of Black Lives Matter in Los Angeles (which has

been rocked by a series of recent financial scandals where leading members used funds to purchase property), presented the push for reopening as a purely racial issue of “white privilege.” She said at the time: “We have to call out the privilege behind the largely white, wealthy parents driving the push for a rushed return. Their experience of this pandemic is not our students’ families’ experiences.”

This was a smokescreen for the fact that the UTLA itself, as with the AFT and local teachers unions around the country, was pushing for reopening. The UTLA eventually struck a deal with the district, which it falsely said provided for “safe reopening.” In a sham vote, it presented teachers with a Catch-22: Either accept the deal, or have schools reopen with no “collectively bargained” framework at all. The union was bitterly opposed to calls by teachers for strike action to maintain virtual learning.

The UTLA’s reopening efforts were applauded by *Jacobin*, which wrote an article entitled “LA Teachers Won a Safe Schools Reopening by Organizing.” It called the reopening “a result of our social justice-focused union leadership and school site organizing.”

To open up a new way forward, teachers must reject this entire rotten framework. They cannot fight for their interests within a system that is set up, whether in an overtly right-wing or pseudo-left guise, against them and in defense of the profit system.

Their real allies are not left-talking appendages of the Democratic Party but the teachers and workers all over the world who are fighting against inequality. This requires the formation of an independent rank-and-file committee to take the initiative out of the hands of the bureaucracy and into the hands of teachers and school workers themselves.



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