

SEIU Local 99 calls snap vote of Los Angeles education workers to push through concessionary contract

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27 March 2023

After a powerful three-day strike of more than 65,000 Los Angeles educators ended last Thursday, the largest single strike in the US since 2019, SEIU Local 99 announced a tentative agreement with the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) on Friday. On Monday evening, it held an online membership meeting to try to sell the terms of the contract to the membership.

The few “highlights” make clear the contract will leave tens of thousands of school support workers in poverty.

LAUSD workers are severely underpaid, making an average of only \$25,000 per year. Many also are only allowed to work part-time, depriving them of benefits. The last concessionary contract in 2018 required workers to have worked 30 consecutive years for the district, with the sum of their age and years of service equaling 87 to obtain full health benefits upon retirement, making it impossible to obtain.

The latest agreement only provides for wage increases of 30 percent over the life of the contract plus \$2 per hour across the board. This means that the average SEIU worker will only have a salary of \$32,000 per year, still an extreme poverty wage in the expensive Los Angeles metropolitan area. Small one-time bonuses being offered in the new contract will do nothing to offset such poverty wages. The modest salary increase, without lifting workers out of poverty, will also put them at risk of no longer qualifying for federal and state social assistance programs, such as SNAP and Cal Fresh.

The SEIU hopes that by pushing a snap vote, workers will not have enough time to review the contract details, reject it and demand a better deal which is their

right. This concern was evident in Monday night’s online union meeting, which only lasted 45 minutes, designed to limit many workers from speaking and asking questions.

The WSWs spoke with Alex, a school bus driver who attended the meeting. He said, “It was a very short meeting, only 45 minutes long, not even an hour. I don’t even know how many people attended because it was on Zoom.

“The local president gave his slide presentation about what to expect if it goes through. This contract covers 2020-2023, and then we’re going to have to renegotiate in February 2024. So right now we would be getting retroactive pay all the way back to 2020. It was presented like this is just for the meantime; we’re going to get a new contract next school year.

“We really didn’t get to interact. It was the slide show and just a quick Q&A. Somebody asked about the three days of lost pay. That was a concern. And the union said, ‘well, the district didn’t pay us,’ like there was nothing that could have been done.

“We also didn’t get any strike pay. Most of us pay between \$60-80 a month in union dues. That’s our money. Shouldn’t we have gotten strike pay?”

“We were told to check the union website for details. But the voting will take place next Monday through Wednesday, April 3-5.”

The rank and file in SEIU Local 99 must take the initiative away from the corrupt union bureaucrats and fight for what they actually need, not what the district and city and state governments say they can afford.

The West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Committee is calling for a NO vote and is raising these demands:

- **100 percent pay raises** to begin elevating LAUSD

workers out of poverty and to fight rising inflation.

- **Restore full staffing levels in all departments:** custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, special ed assistants, school climate workers, parent reps and all others.

- **Bring back full COVID-19 protections and mitigations,** including the instituting of a COVID dashboard to report all cases of coronavirus, norovirus, and other viruses. COVID is still rampaging throughout the country despite false claims by the Biden administration that it is over. Free testing, quarantining, vaccinations, etc. If a school site has an outbreak, the workers must shut down the school. Provide full income and free services, including medical care, to all employees and students and their families to sustain themselves.

- **All part-time employees must be converted to full-time, including full benefits.**

- **The counting of the contract ballots must be conducted by rank-and-file SEIU members.**

- **All negotiations between the union and the school district must be live-streamed to prevent secret concessions being worked out behind closed doors.**

- **All members must receive the entire contract, not just the “highlights.”**

- **All members must receive a week’s pay in strike pay for going on strike.**

Workers must conclude their struggle on their terms and only when their demands have been met. This can only take place, however, if workers break free from the corrupt trade union apparatus, which is nothing more than an arm of the prowar, pro-austerity Democratic Party and form their own rank-and-file committees.

SEIU Local 99 is also concerned that should a contract not be reached soon, school workers will unite with 35,000 Los Angeles teachers, who are also working on an expired contract, and those with expired contracts at numerous other districts, including Long Beach, San Francisco, Oakland, Fresno and San Diego. Such a broad movement of the working class threatens to blow apart the methods of bureaucratic control.

All LAUSD workers and their sympathizers are encouraged to join and build the rank-and-file committee of Los Angeles educators today. Details can be found by clicking on the link here .



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