

Vote ‘No’ on the SEIU Los Angeles contract! Education workers must build their own rank-and-file committees to take the struggle into their own hands!

Los Angeles Educators Rank-and-File Committee
3 April 2023

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The Los Angeles Educators Rank-and-File Committee urges school support staff to vote NO on the three-year tentative agreement in voting this week. That this deal has even been brought to a vote is a betrayal of the strike by 65,000 school staff workers and teachers which shut down the Los Angeles Unified School District for three days.

We were not only striking for ourselves but for workers everywhere. Our strike was part of a world movement, including massive strikes and protests in France, Israel, Germany, Britain, Sri Lanka and other countries. All over the globe, workers are coming into conflict with their employers as we are told there is no money for our lives, but the cost-of-living skyrockets.

The 30,000 public school support workers at the center of the strike make an average of just \$25,000 a year, a pittance in Los Angeles, the fourth most expensive city in the world. Bus drivers, cafeteria workers, assistant teachers and other school support staff were joined by another 35,000 LAUSD teachers.

Our strike showed the enormous power that we hold, as well as the broad support we have from the working class.

But throughout our struggle we have increasingly found ourselves in conflict not only with the school district but with the functionaries of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 99.

For three years, SEIU kept us on the job without a contract—while the United Teachers Los Angeles has kept teachers on the job since last summer on an expired contract. Years of pent-up anger forced the SEIU to finally call a strike. But it limited the strike to a three-day Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) action in order to try to prevent us from

raising economic demands.

Now, the SEIU claims we have won a “historic victory” and that the new LAUSD contract will somehow end our poverty-level existence. But none of the our demands have been met.

Now, the SEIU has clearly timed the vote to coincide with spring break. With many of our coworkers on vacation for the week, the union is hoping our anger will dissipate, resulting in a low voter turnout and a marginal “yes” vote.

We, the Los Angeles Rank-and-File Educators Committee call on all SEIU Local 99 workers to vote no on this contract. We believe we deserve to have a living wage, not the 20 percent plus \$2 bonus the SEIU and the district have agreed to.

Why workers should vote “No”

1. When adjusted for inflation, the “gains” of this contract amount to little. In 2024, we will be making an average of just \$33,000—an impossible salary in a city where the average apartment costs well over \$2,000 a month.

Altogether we are getting a 20 percent pay increase (for those who have worked during the entire time) plus \$2 come 2024. The district has agreed to give us 6 percent one year and 7 percent the next two years, starting retroactively in 2021.

But during this time inflation went as high as 9 percent! When the actual increases in the cost of living between 2020 and 2023 are considered, this contract does nothing to bring us out of poverty. It is also substantially lower than the 30 percent pay increase we were promised.

The federal government considers people “rent-burdened”

if they spend 30 percent or more of their income on rent. In Los Angeles, the average rent is \$2,374 a month for a one-bedroom apartment. This means that under the new contract we will still have to spend basically all of our paychecks just to keep a roof over our heads.

2. The contract does nothing to alleviate the rampant understaffing at our schools. Some of us must frantically drive around to multiple campuses, filling in gaps created by the district's refusal to adequately staff schools.

3. The SEIU champions the joint labor-management committees agreed to in this contract, but these are just opportunities for the union bureaucrats and management to meet and rub shoulders. They do nothing to actually place rank-and-file workers in charge.

This joint labor-management deal contains a \$3 million trust that will be used to “educate” and “professionally develop” SEIU members. In reality, these types of schemes have been used for decades at Kaiser Permanente and in the auto industry to funnel corporate money into the pockets of union functionaries. “Joint training centers” in Detroit were at the center of a corruption scandal, which engulfed the United Auto Workers in 2016. It is a form of legal bribery.

4. The district is also throwing a paltry \$1,000 at us in exchange for being exposed to a deadly virus at work for two years. We were doing online instruction during one of the three years of the pandemic. This amount demonstrates just how much our lives are worth in the eyes of the LAUSD.

5. The deal contains no changes to the concessions that we gave up on retirement. In 2018, the SEIU agreed that full health benefits would only be available to those working after 30 consecutive years and whose retirement age is the difference between 87 and their total years of service. These terms leave full benefits out of reach to everyone except those who spend their entire adult lives working for the district.

The new terms also include health care provisions requiring employees to cover 100 percent of premium costs for any enrolled dependents, such as spouses or children.

Build the Los Angeles Educators Rank-and-File Committee

The experience of the last few weeks—in fact, the last three years—shows that we are in a fight not only against the district but against the union bureaucracy.

On the one hand, school support staff and teachers shut down the second largest school district in the country. We

have fought to increase staffing, ensure adequate pay, and generally improve our working conditions. We are aware that we speak for a growing, powerful movement of all sections of the working class who struggle to afford rent on poverty wages.

On the other hand, the union bureaucracy has obstructed our struggle. They kept us without a contract for three years, staged a limited, three-day strike, coinciding with the beginning of Spring Break, and brought us a contract that does nothing to fundamentally change our position. They even took us off the strike before we could even see or agree to a contract.

We can and must oppose this. Voting “No” is an important first step.

However, going forward, it is clear that we cannot continue as we have previously. Even with a “No” vote, the SEIU would keep us at work for months, even years longer with no contract.

It is time we took this struggle into our own hands. To do this, we need new structures that give us the means to block the sellout attempts by the apparatus, democratically decide for ourselves what our strategy will be and organize the tremendous strength of all 65,000 unionized district workers, as well as nonunion workers and educators and workers in other industries throughout the country.

In addition to voting down this contract, we urge our co-workers to take up the following demands:

- 100 percent pay increase effective immediately, followed by automatic increases to our pay tied to the cost of living.

- Full staffing in all departments, and an end to a situation where staff have to stretch themselves to work at multiple schools.

- Full-time employment and benefits for all workers, including the transfer of all 10-month employees to year-long contracts that do not dry up during the summer.

- Full retirement benefits for all workers who have worked longer than 10 years and are over the age of 65.

If you agree with this perspective, we urge you to contact us and join the Los Angeles Educators Rank-and-File Committee. The sabotage and duplicity of the union apparatus can be overcome if we take control of this movement and unite with other sections of the working class in a joint struggle.



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