

Los Angeles school workers speak out on working conditions, sellout tentative agreement

Our reporters
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This week, 30,000 classified workers in Los Angeles Unified School District are voting on a tentative agreement that is being touted in the bourgeois media as a “historic” breakthrough for the most exploited sections of the district’s workforce. In reality, the Service Employees International Union Local 99 negotiated a contract that fails to raise their pay and working conditions out of the poverty-level conditions that have prevailed for decades, following a three-day strike last month which shut down the nation’s second largest school district.

The classified staff include teaching assistants, playground workers, special education assistants, bus drivers, gardeners, custodians, cafeteria workers, maintenance workers, early care and education workers, conflict resolution workers and many more. Many work part-time and make between \$17 and \$23 per hour, averaging \$25,000 a year in Los Angeles, the fourth most expensive city in the US. Neither these workers nor the teachers received strike pay from their unions.

In a self-indicting statement, SEIU Local 99 Executive Director Max Arias said to the LAist, “the low pay is one reason why SEIU members had not given up their pay to go on strike since 1969. But poor working conditions pushed members to a breaking point.”

On the second day of the strike, following the pattern from the 2019 teachers strike in Los Angeles, Democratic Mayor Karen Bass was brought into negotiations with the SEIU 99 and LAUSD. The tentative agreement was announced two days later.

The Los Angeles Educators Rank-and-File Committee called for workers to vote NO on the three-

year tentative agreement and issued a statement analyzing the contract’s details. Supporters distributed leaflets at school employees’ credit unions in LA. What became clear is that even though the union posted the complete contract on its website last weekend, it has kept the rank and file in the dark, as only one brief online meeting was held to discuss the details.

Kamar, a former yard supervisor in LAUSD, explained how the district kept her part-time with under 20 hours per week.

“I noticed that they gave me just enough hours to where I was unable to receive any benefits whatsoever and it was done on purpose.” She explained, “I used to get breaks at certain time, two breaks. I would ask for more time and it was never given to me. I know that it was done on purpose once I found out that once you work over a certain amount, I think four hours, you are able to receive benefits and whatnot. I saw the game.”

Many workers in LAUSD are currently experiencing the situation that Kamar faced as a yard supervisor. The district keeps many workers under 20 hours a week to avoid having to pay for additional expenses such as health care. The demand for full-time work and benefits has been left unaddressed in the tentative agreement workers are voting on this week.

Maricela, a cafeteria worker in the district for a year, came to the credit union with her children, Alexa and Alex. She began by describing her job. “I work in the cafeteria at an elementary school. I prep the food for the kids every day. That’s basically what I do.

“I work part-time, 20 hours a week, and I do receive medical benefits. But I didn’t know that in the new contract I would have to pay 100 percent of the premiums for my husband and children. I didn’t know

that.

“We live in a two-bedroom house, and we pay rent. If it was only my income, we wouldn’t be able to afford it. But we can make it because my husband works. He works in construction. The rent is very pricey. It’s very expensive to live here.”

Elva has been working with LAUSD for four years and has been a member of SEIU Local 99. “I’ve been working as a special ed assistant for two years. Before that I worked in an afterschool program for two years.

“I live with my daughter. My rent is \$2,200 for a two-bedroom apartment. On top of that I have to pay all the other bills. That’s why I have to work a second job 3-5 days a week, depending. And I do 30 to 40 hours a week at that job. So I barely have time to see my daughter. My mom takes care of her most of the time.

“No, I don’t get the medical benefits, and I don’t qualify for food stamps.”



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