

Los Angeles teachers: No to the UTLA sell-out! Demand the immediate release of the full contract and adequate time to study it!

The Los Angeles Educators Rank-and-File Committee
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The following is a statement by the Los Angeles Educators Rank-and-File Committee, a group of educators fighting against the betrayals of the UTLA and SEIU union bureaucracies in the Los Angeles school district. To contact them, text (619) 431-0643 or email: wcedrankandfile@gmail.com. Alternatively, fill out the form at the bottom of this statement and your information will be forwarded to them.

Brothers and sisters,

Nearly an entire week has passed since the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) and the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) suddenly announced a new tentative agreement. But neither the union nor the district has yet to release any details.

When it comes to the 35,000 teachers who will actually be affected by the contract terms, there has been no transparency whatsoever. Whenever teachers have intervened on social media, demanding or even politely requesting that the UTLA provide them with details, we've either been met with silence or outright censorship.

The UTLA leadership has no right to conduct such dirty maneuvers behind our backs, and we must not allow it! The longer the union delays releasing the tentative agreement, the less time teachers will have to review it. Given the UTLA's track record, we have every reason to expect a razor-thin window between the public release of the TA and the start of actual voting.

The few "highlights" released so far show that the deal is a sellout. The UTLA had initially pledged raises of 20 percent in the first two years of the contract, which was still insufficient and barely kept pace with inflation. But the current tentative agreement contains only 7 percent increases each year. Adding insult to injury, the annual 7 percent increases are broken into a 3 percent and then 4 percent increase six months later. This means we will get the full 7 percent for only half of the year.

The unusual twice-annual pay increases will reduce

pensions for retirees, because California State Teachers Retirement System (CalSTRS) determines your retirement based on wages made in the last two years of employment.

As one of our colleagues explained: "What's really bad about it is that it absolutely screws over retirees, near-term retirees, because it's two-tiered. We get 4 percent for the first semester, and 3 more percent for the second semester. You're not getting a full 7 percent for any one year. And so in the eyes of CalSTRS, the ones who determine your financial retirement, you won't have gotten the 7 percent for that year. This is the first time I've ever seen a two-tiered schedule from LA Unified. But it also allows them to get away with this moving forward. So it's not just this year's retirees and the next two years' retirees. They're going to want to keep doing this from now on."

In addition, the more frequent salary increases may also provide the district with more opportunities to renege on them. The 1989 contract, for example, allowed the district to forgo salary increases in the last two years only if the district could not "afford" it. Given recent statements about the district's financial health, it's possible that a similar provision might also be in the current contract.

In Los Angeles, classrooms have 10 more students than the national average. This issue is all the more critical given the spread of COVID in our overcrowded classrooms. The LA County health department has already uncovered the first local cases of the new "Arcturus" COVID variant. But on the issue of staffing and class sizes, the "highlights" boast a reduction of only two students per class! There does not appear to be any mechanisms in place to even enforce these reductions, except that we will be able to "file a grievance on violations," which will go nowhere as they always do.

That they are trying to push this deal past us is all the more outrageous because we just shut down the school district in a powerful three-day strike with our brothers and sisters in school support positions! We showed that we have the power to win our demands. But the union bureaucracy,

which has kept us on the job for nearly a year without a contract, and which kept school support staff on the job for *three years* without a deal, is working hand in glove with the district to try to make sure that doesn't happen.

After the strike, SEIU Local 99 announced a deal which increased starting salaries of \$25,000 to a measly \$32,000 per year. \$32,000 in Los Angeles? Raising eyebrows among school workers, they claimed that this poverty contract passed by 99 percent! Even if this is true, it is only because they made it as hard as possible to vote. Balloting was held during spring break and in-person voting was only available in three locations for one day each. There were only two days allowed for online voting. As soon as the SEIU deal went through, the UTLA then announced its deal, in a clear sign they are trying to divide us.

This is a repeat of the sellout of our strike in 2019, when the UTLA kept teachers entirely in the dark while they conducted closed-door meetings with the district and the mayor. Once an agreement was reached, the UTLA immediately called the strike off and gave teachers little more than two hours to review the full contract before voting started.

It is also a little less than two years ago that the UTLA forced us and our students back into unsafe classrooms during the height of the pandemic. The “vote” the union bureaucracy used to legitimize it gave us the Catch-22 of choosing between going back to in-person with the inadequate measures “negotiated” by the union or going back with no measures at all. This only shows that the UTLA does not care what we think and treats our basic democratic rights with contempt.

The Los Angeles Educators Rank-and-File Committee (LAERFC) calls on our coworkers to organize against the conspiracy to once again nullify our democratic will and to bureaucratically “ratify” the contract.

Therefore, the committee demands:

? The immediate release of the full contract, including any and all “letter agreements” and appendices!

? We must have a full two weeks to study the entire agreement carefully before any vote, which must be conducted in such a way as to ensure everyone is able to cast a ballot.

Based on what is known so far, however, and given the way in which all information is being kept from us, **we urge our co-workers to vote no on the contract**, both because it falls far short of what we need and as a matter of principle.

We are not simply calling for a “no” vote so that the UTLA can go back to the district to “get it right,” because the UTLA bureaucracy will only come back with a nearly identical deal. Instead, a “no” vote must be the starting point of a campaign by rank-and-file teachers to take matters into

our own hands and fight for what we need, not what the districts, city and state governments say they can afford. This includes:

? Pay increases well above the rates of inflation—an immediate 20% raise and another 20% for 2024-2025 —not only for teachers, but for nurses, counselors, substitutes and all support staff;

? Immediate class size reductions of at least 10 students per class and the hiring of teachers and staff to accommodate that reduction;

? Massive investments in school infrastructure and the imposition of adequate public health measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases on campus.

The biggest lie of all is that we have no choice but to accept whatever the bureaucracy gives us. We, the 35,000 teachers, backed by students, parents and workers throughout the region and the country, are more powerful than the 65 bureaucrats who negotiated this betrayal.

We have the power in our hands. The only issue is that we must know how to use it. Now is the time for educators to stand up against decades of cuts and isolation imposed on us district by district. All teachers and staff—from Hawaii to Florida—must have decent salaries, working conditions, retirement benefits, including medical benefits throughout our retirement.

We call on teachers and school workers from throughout the Los Angeles area to join the Los Angeles Educators Rank-and-File Committee, to begin campaigning among our coworkers and organize actions against both the district and the corrupt UTLA and SEIU bureaucracy.



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