

Voting underway on contract for 35,000 Los Angeles teachers, amid continuing censorship by UTLA

Evelyn Rios, Dan Conway
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The WSWs wants to know: How are you voting on this contract and why? Fill out the form below to tell us. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Voting began Tuesday on a tentative agreement for 35,000 educators in the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) union. The voting took place after teachers had only a few days to study the deal, after waiting nearly a week for the union to release the full language outside of self-serving “highlights.”

The UTLA bureaucracy calls the agreement, reached after keeping teachers on the job without a contract since last summer, a “historic victory.” But it falls far short of what teachers are demanding, particularly on teacher pay and staffing ratios. UTLA President and Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) member Cecily Myart-Cruz said of the agreement, “Smaller class sizes will give our kids the attention and care they require, and competitive salaries will ensure our schools can successfully hire, retain and develop successful teachers and educators to mold our young leaders of tomorrow.”

The tentative agreement in fact will reduce class sizes by only a single student, and even this is virtually unenforceable under the language of the deal. The Los Angeles Rank-and-File Educators Committee, formed by teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District, issued a statement urging teachers to vote “No” on the contract.

Particularly upsetting is the disingenuous way the agreement’s 7 percent annual raise is broken up into twice-annual increments rather than one large increase for the whole year, allowing huge cost savings for the district. Meanwhile, inflation and the overall cost of living is at an all-time high, particularly in Los

Angeles, one of the most expensive cities in the world.

One educator told the WSWs, “They keep on saying it’s a 21 percent raise. But it doesn’t feel that way when it’s broken down every six months at 3 percent and then 4 percent. The problem with the union is that they said they wouldn’t take anything less than 20 percent over two years, and then they come back and say, ‘well, the district will not budge.’ I’ve been hearing that for the last 30 years. Stop playing with numbers as the union. You say the raise is over 20 months, but it’s actually over 30 months [retroactive to the last July]. You just can’t throw away this fiscal year that started in July of 2022 and then start counting the timeline from May. It doesn’t work that way.”

The UTLA bureaucracy has been working overtime to refurbish its image after the 2019 contract betrayal, when it shut down a strike and gave educators only a few hours to review and vote on a contract. They repeated their role in 2021, when they forced educators back into COVID-infested classrooms by forcing teachers to “choose” between returning under an inadequate safety plan bargained for by the UTLA or returning with no safety measures at all.

In March, faced with growing anger among the rank and file, the UTLA joined a three-day strike of school support staff in SEIU Local 99. The UTLA, however, did not raise its own demands during the sympathy strike even though it was then in negotiations with the district and, like the SEIU, did not provide its members with any strike pay while on the picket line. The SEIU reached a separate agreement, which also fell short of workers’ demands, and scheduled a vote during spring break when many would have been unable to vote.

Teachers have taken to social media en masse to

express their opposition, only to encounter intimidation and outright censorship by the UTLA.

On social media sites run by or in affiliation with the UTLA, teachers have reported “hundreds” of postings being removed. One teacher wrote, “Did anyone else get kicked out of UTLA Facebook today? I don’t think UTLA is welcoming dissenting opinions on the new TA. I saw all the comments had been taken down from the few posts allowed up about the TA—literally hundreds of comments gone!”

Another wrote, “I am profoundly disturbed by UTLA leadership’s methods. The bargaining team comes on these pages and tells us it was the best they could do. They will call dues-paying former board members ‘naysayers’; they will call others who ask questions or who wish to even mention [tentative agreement] cons as ‘anti-union’.”

Regardless of what the UTLA bureaucracy has to say about its opponents and even of the union membership, no amount of censorship and name calling will change the facts.

An email sent out to members on Saturday highlighted a rally held Tuesday to promote the union’s “community school” initiative to supposedly fight charter co-location initiatives. The email highlighted the story of one parent whose son’s classroom was moved to the auditorium and her daughter’s was moved to an off-campus location to make room for a private charter school operating on the public school’s campus.

What the email does not mention is that under the terms of the tentative agreement, UTLA officers can be appointed as charter co-location administrators, who will have a direct hand in this process. Moreover, the UTLA already runs charters of its own through the district’s autonomous school plan.

Other teachers expressed their opposition to the deal on social media. One school counselor wrote, “I feel my needs/wants as a staff member got pushed to the side. I feel unappreciated as well as my colleagues who do so much for our students. Just feeling slighted and underrepresented and feel frustrated.”

Another teacher wrote, “UTLA does not defend members. ... \$100 a month [in union dues] is not a good deal.”

The tentative agreement also includes an additional \$2,500 per year for special education teachers, along

with additional per semester bonuses if classes exceed mandated class size caps. During a recent membership meeting, however, teachers found that even these modest provisions were not enforceable. One special education teacher wrote. “I’m sitting in the meeting, and they told us staffing in the contract is not enforceable due to a teacher shortage!”

A “No” vote is necessary, but it is only the beginning. No faith whatsoever can be given to the UTLA even to give an accurate accounting of the vote. Teachers must ask, if the UTLA is willing to shut down opposition to the deal on social media, what else are they prepared to do negate the will of the membership?

Teachers can only win their demands by fighting for rank-and-file control against the pro-corporate bureaucrats in the UTLA. This is why teachers have formed the Los Angeles Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, a group democratically controlled by teachers themselves. They will find powerful allies not only among SEIU Local 99 workers in the district but among students, parents and school workers throughout the country, especially teachers in Oakland who are set to go on strike Thursday and among New YorkCity teachers, who are being told they need to accept a rotten deal by the UFT bureaucracy.

For information on joining a rank-and-file committee and taking this struggle forward, teachers are encouraged to sign up using the form below.



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