

Union oversees ratification of concessionary deal for 35,000 Los Angeles teachers

Dan Conway
7 May 2023

On Friday evening, the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) announced that the concessionary agreement the union negotiated with Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) was ratified by 94 percent of those voting on the deal. The UTLA said 27,171 ballots were cast out of approximately 35,000 educators who were eligible to vote.

UTLA officials presented the vote as a powerful mandate for the union leadership and their deal, which will last through 2025. Even if the figure is true—and there is widespread suspicion among educators about its accuracy—it was due not to the confidence in the UTLA leadership but an understanding among rank-and-file educators that the union bureaucracy would not fight for anything better even if they rejected the deal.

The ratification came eleven months after the expiration of the last agreement between the UTLA and the nation's second largest school district. It was only possible after the UTLA bureaucracy, working in conjunction with city and state Democrats, blocked strike action and systematically wore down the resistance of educators to yet another contract dictated by the corporate and political establishment.

This culminated in the rushed vote the UTLA organized between May 2 and May 4, only six days after teachers had a chance to review the terms of the 159-page agreement even as they were forced to continue teaching and doing other tasks.

The vote follows a similar agreement last month covering 30,000 LAUSD support staff represented by SEIU Local 99. That vote followed the shutdown of a powerful three-day walkout by the SEIU, which teachers joined in hopes of waging a common struggle against the austerity measures of the school board and the Democratic Party. The UTLA also pushed through its deal before 3,000 teachers in Oakland launched strike action, which is continuing today.

Announcing the vote totals, LAUSD superintendent Alberto Carvalho called the agreement, “a necessary step not only to make Los Angeles Unified the district of choice for families but also the district of choice for teachers and

employees.” UTLA President Cecily Myart-Cruz, for her part, stated, “This contract will set the national standard for all other educators to achieve livable wages and solidify an equitable future where students are supported in a healthy learning environment.” The statements by both should in fact be taken as a warning.

The deal in fact is a sellout that provides no real improvements to teachers' wages and benefits nor school benefits generally. Wage increases amount to 3 and then 4 percent increases every six months, which does not make up for the losses in real income over the last year when inflation hit 9 percent and the persistently high housing, food and fuel costs in one of the most expensive metropolitan areas in the country.

Chronically overcrowded classrooms will be reduced by only one student each year for the first two years, although even this minimal amount has no real enforcement mechanisms. A “class size task force” is to be created based on the terms of the agreement with no powers of enforcement but which will “identify patterns deserving further attention and analysis.”

Additionally, even if the new nursing- and counselor-to-student ratios outlined in the agreement are violated, there is no recourse outside of a grievance procedure, which can be continually delayed while excess ratios remain indefinitely.

Myart-Cruz's claim that the new contract offers a “healthy learning environment” is also a complete fraud. The contract make absolutely no mention of COVID-19 and does not contain any measures to contain or mitigate the disease, which continues to spread throughout the Los Angeles area causing sickness, death and disability.

Further details on the agreement can be found in the following analysis recently published on the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The UTLA apparatus conducted a campaign of social media censorship in advance of the vote, with LA teachers reporting that “hundreds upon hundreds” of critical statements had been deleted on UTLA social media sites.

The ratification was largely a vote of no confidence in the

UTLA leadership. After the last contract expired in June 2022, it forced members to work without a contract more than an entire school year and did not even call a strike authorization vote. In 2021, the union pushed through a sham agreement to reopen schools in the midst of the pandemic, claiming that teachers either had the choice of bringing children and staff into unsafe classrooms under the union's terms or the district's terms.

In 2019, the UTLA betrayed a powerful six-day strike by teachers against overcrowded classes, the diversion of public funds for the expansion of privately run charter schools and other attacks. In that case, the UTLA leadership rammed through a vote after giving educators only two hours to view the terms of the deal.

With this record of treachery, teachers had no faith that the union would bring back anything else but a concessionary deal. Writing on Twitter, one LAUSD teacher noted, "It's sad that we had to settle. Not willing to strike for UTLA anymore so I guess I take table scraps. You better not try to raise dues after this lackluster performance."

The UTLA and its parent union, the American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association, have been instrumental in imposing the dictates of the Democratic Party. Throughout the pandemic, both unions have imposed first Trump's and then Biden's policy of forcing teachers and children back into infected classrooms in order to keep parents at work producing profits for big business. Now, the unions are imposing the austerity policies demanded by Biden and both corporate-controlled parties to finance yet another bailout of the big banks and the massive cost of the US proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and growing military conflict with China.

Facing growing opposition from the working class, both the Democrats and the union bureaucracy have turned to the Democratic Socialists of America and other pseudo-left organizations to give them a political cover for their attacks on educators and other sections of the working class. This includes Biden's outlawing of a strike by 120,000 railroad workers last year, which was backed by DSA members in Congress including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

In Los Angeles, the DSA is in the leadership of both the UTLA, including its president Myart-Cruz, and the Board of Education in the persons of president Jackie Goldberg, board member Rocio Rivas, three members of the Los Angeles City Council.

As the WSWs explained, "In other words, all 'bargaining sessions' between the UTLA and the school district involve members of the same organization on both sides of the table! The concessions heaped upon LA teachers and school workers may as well have been worked out by the local leadership of the DSA's Los Angeles branch. This also

graphically demonstrates that what is involved are not 'negotiations' between mutually antagonistic parties but a conspiracy between the district and the unions against the classified and teaching staff."

Teachers should draw the lessons from this latest betrayal by the UTLA leadership. Teachers and school staff enjoy widespread public support for a struggle to defend public education and the future of the children they teach, but this can only be mobilized if they build new centers of rank-and-file decision-making and power, which are completely independent of the union apparatus and the Democratic Party.

This means organizing rank-and-file committees to link up the struggle of educators throughout the US and the world, and broader sections of the working class. This includes 11,500 screenwriters currently in the midst of a strike against the multibillion-dollar film, television and streaming conglomerates and the ongoing teachers strike in Oakland, California. Furthermore, it would intersect with the struggles of 22,000 West Coast dockworkers, many of whom work at the critical ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, who themselves have been working without a contract since last July, kept on the job by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union.

There is more than enough to provide high-quality public education and good wages and classroom conditions for educators. California is home to 186 billionaires and giant conglomerates in Hollywood, Silicon Valley and the aerospace and defense industries. But Governor Gavin Newsom, School Superintendent Tony Thurmond and both Democratic-controlled houses of the state legislature are determined to defend the status quo and prevent any challenge by the working class to capitalism and the massive social inequality that it produces, including the expansion of the worst forms of exploitation, including child labor.

Nothing has been settled by this rotten contract. The escalating assault on public education will thrust LA teachers back into struggle, sooner rather than later. To prepare for these struggle, we urge teachers to join and build the Los Angeles Educators Rank-and-File committee. For more information, fill out the form below.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)