

Proposed school closures, budget cuts provoke massive opposition among Los Angeles educators

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Last Tuesday, over 1,000 teachers and school workers protested at the district headquarters against the coming devastating budget cuts at the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). The teachers and school employees are members of the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) and SEIU Local 99, the two largest unions in the Los Angeles County region.

Union officials led chants calling for stopping the cuts and layoffs, what the unions describe as "Carvalho cuts" after LAUSD Superintendent Alberto Carvalho, formerly superintendent of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools before taking the Los Angeles post in 2022.

The superintendent is planning the cuts even though the district has more than \$6.3 billion in reserve. In discussing the proposed cuts, the superintendent related to The74, "We need to ask the question. Is the need still there and is this the right position?"

Cecily Myart-Cruz, head of the 35,000-member United Teachers Los Angeles, and member of the Democratic Socialists of America, bombastically stated, "A 'Carvalho cut' is when you've got billions in the bank, but you're shortchanging students. We refuse to stand by while our schools lose critical staff year after year. This district claims it's in dire financial straits. We say, 'liars!' LAUSD has a budget surplus of \$6.3 billion. When we fight, we win!"

The union's focus on Carvalho himself as the sole cause of the cuts is meant to distract attention from the role of the Democratic Party at the local, state and federal levels in imposing cuts. This agenda is becoming ever more critical as the ruling elite's reckless drive to World War III requires massive bloodletting, both literally and figuratively, to public education and other necessary social services.

The cuts are being made in anticipation of a massive funding shortfall this coming September. Los Angeles will be among hundreds of districts around the country facing the expiration of \$190 billion in federal pandemic relief funds. The funding was meant to keep schools open during the pandemic, part of the Biden administration's policy, following that of Trump, of prioritizing corporate profits over human lives, even the lives of

small children and their families.

As far back as 2021, the UTLA was instrumental in helping to reopen schools, telling teachers they had no choice but to get back into the classroom as the Omicron variant of COVID-19 at the time was rampaging throughout the Los Angeles area and throughout the world.

If the latest cuts take place, they will most likely affect hundreds of special education assistants, campus aides, school supervision aides, pupil services, attendance counselors, psychiatric social workers, school psychologists, library aides, IT and tech support staff and art and music teachers.

Hiring freeze and school closures

In the December interview with The74, Carvalho said that LAUSD was implementing a targeted hiring freeze and may have to consider consolidating or closing some of its schools as pandemic aid funds dry up and the state faces a budget deficit.

At a school board meeting last week, Carvalho remarked that about 10 percent of all school districts in the state are planning to lay off educators. "There are over 110 districts ... right now that are facing teacher layoffs. This is not a scare tactic. That is what we know."

School officials have projected general fund revenue for next year of \$9.14 billion. Spending for next year is estimated at \$10.89 billion.

Alisa, a parent of three children attending schools in the South Bay and Harbor region of LAUSD, addressed the rally in opposition to the district's plans. "These cuts will mean that the only middle school in Wilmington will lose all electives next year. ... Underfunding is an understatement.

"During COVID, one of my children was so affected by the pandemic. He was failing 9th and 10th grades, but because of the great efforts by the counselors, staff and teachers, he's now graduating from high school. We need these great educators. We need fully funded schools. We are investing in their

future."

Cheryl Zarate, an eighth grade teacher at Thomas Starr King Middle School, said her school had to find \$800,000 in cuts. The school could lose as many as six campus aides, two counselors, school climate advocates, custodians and an assistant principal. School psychologists will no longer be available every day, only on campus two days a week.

The UTLA represents 35,000 nurses, psychologists, social workers, librarians and classroom teachers. Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 99 represents 30,000 non-teaching educational workers, including bus drivers, cafeteria workers, custodians, special education aides, teacher aides and many others.

In March 2023, for the first time ever, district teachers went on strike in support of classified staff, resulting in a total of 65,000 educators striking for three days to demand a living wage, more hours and healthcare benefits. The union bureaucracy, however, limited the strike to only three days, fearing that the strike could spin out of their control and would become a direct challenge to the Democratic Party and the ruling class as a whole, especially as teachers in Oakland announced a wildcat strike in solidarity with the Los Angeles educators.

Despite claims made by the UTLA and SEIU Local 99 that the strike was a "historic" victory, the sellout character of the resultant agreement became immediately apparent. The Los Angeles Educators Rank-and-File Committee subjected the sellout agreement to a thoroughgoing exposure, noting that the average Los Angeles school worker would receive a poverty level salary of \$33,000, up from \$25,000 the year before. Furthermore, it established joint labor-management committees where union heads collaborate more directly with the district in attacking workers and would leave retirement benefits out of reach for nearly all SEIU Local 99 members.

UTLA and SEIU sellout agreements in 2023

The latest cuts being proposed by the district are in fact a direct result of the sellout agreements reached with both unions.

Implicitly admitting that the last agreement reached only a year earlier contained no real protections for workers whatsoever, SEIU Local 99 President Max Arias stated in relation to the latest cuts, "We're expecting about 8,000 hours of cuts to our staff. That's equal to 1,500 workers. And their health care will be cut. The children on our playgrounds will face more bullying without playground aides there to protect them."

A *World Socialist Web Site* reporter spoke to teachers and school workers at the rally who were all extremely upset about the proposed cuts.

One teacher, Jennifer, who has more than 23 years of experience in the district, said that the cuts were "against what our last strike was all about. We were fighting for them [classified staff] to get more hours, etc. So now, I'm like, what happened?"

"They've been cutting special ed aides for years now. Some of these students need one-on-one help to even walk from one classroom to the other. This was like 15 years ago, when I was a special ed aide. The aide after me was cut, and this student had a severe disability. He was made to walk all the way across campus by himself with a walker and his books."

Speaking about the latest cuts, another teacher stated, "That three-day strike we had last year? This is completely retaliatory. This is a way to cut the budget more."

Cindy and John, K-12 educators, held up signs calling for the defense of school counselors' jobs.

Cindy told the WSWS, "We have one counselor for 750 students. Anything below that we have to pay for them. So we're paying for an extra one, and we're losing another one. Our students need all the resources."

When asked about coming to the defense of college and even some high students who have been brutally attacked by police for opposing the genocide in Gaza, another teacher, John, stated, "I personally support a ceasefire. I support life for those who live in Gaza."

By contrast, both the UTLA and the SEIU said absolutely nothing as far-right provocateurs followed by Los Angeles police launched brutal assaults against peaceful student protesters at UCLA on April 30. More than 200 arrests have been made of students and faculty, and over 30 protesters suffered severe injuries. Classes are now being held online, and every building entrance is blocked by security guards.

Peaceful pro-Palestinian encampments have been erected at many college campuses in the Southern California region, including at USC, Pomona College, UC Irvine, UC Riverside and California State University Los Angeles. Besides at UCLA, campus administrations have brutally cracked down on protesters at USC and Pomona College.

Rank-and-file LAUSD teachers and school employees must understand that the fight to defend their jobs and public education is intimately bound up with the defense of the Palestinian people in Gaza and the students and faculty on the campuses who are being attacked for exercising their First Amendment rights.



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