

UTLA bureaucrats holding Los Angeles educators back from struggle

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Negotiations officially broke down last month between the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the second largest district in the country, and the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA).

After 10 bargaining sessions, the UTLA announced on August 20 the complete failure of talks, revealing that LAUSD rejected virtually all of the union's already toothless demands. The district's 21 counterproposals represented, according to the UTLA, a "minor movement, missed opportunities, or unacceptable proposals like cutting programs."

LAUSD has flatly rejected meaningful wage increases, smaller class sizes, or guarantees of adequate resources. At the same time, the district is pushing sweeping cuts to healthcare by freezing contributions and shifting employees onto high-deductible plans—effectively cutting hundreds of dollars from already meager monthly incomes.

Both teachers and school workers (members of Service Employees International Union Local 99) remain on expired contracts, facing some of the most severe attacks in decades: layoffs, budget cuts, loss of healthcare and unprecedented assaults on democratic rights for staff, students and their families. Officials are openly discussing school closures, benefit cuts and the elimination of essential student programs.

The stonewalling of LAUSD shows that it is both necessary and urgent for educators across California cities who are also working on expired contracts to prepare for strike action to win their demands. Schools across the country are being bled white, and federal funding for education dismantled, in order to redirect money into Wall Street and the military.

Such a struggle must inevitably bring educators into conflict with both the Democrats who control California and the Trump administration, which is preparing to flood American cities with soldiers as part of his bid for dictatorship.

A statewide strike would be a powerful signal to workers around the country who are looking to fight back against not only the impossible cost of living but Trump's dictatorship. Immigration agents have already seized students and parents near school properties in California this year, a sign of what is being planned for the entire working class.

The Democrats, terrified of a movement from below, have largely avoided even commenting on Trump's unprecedented violations of the Constitution. In California, they are practically working in tandem with Trump. Newsom's administration has

poured billions into corporate tax cuts, policing and surveillance, while deploying the California Highway Patrol (CHP) to enforce "law and order" in working class communities and orchestrating homeless encampment sweeps.

Fraud of "We Can't Wait"

Despite this, the UTLA and SEIU 99 are refusing to call for an immediate strike, pursuing a deliberate policy of delay and diversion, while workers are told to wait for some future, hypothetical "action."

The urgent issue educators confront is to organize themselves to break out of the union's stalling tactics to enforce their democratic decision to strike.

More than 80,000 teachers from virtually every major school district in the state of California are currently working under expired contracts. The California Teachers Association, of which the UTLA is a part, has spent the summer and the start of the semester attempting to fool educators by pretending to organize some sort of job action in the future.

The name of this campaign, ironically, is "We Can't Wait," even while the CTA makes teachers wait for permission to strike that it refuses to give.

The UTLA's so-called "escalation plan" in Los Angeles is designed to wear workers down and prevent a confrontation:

- **August 26:** "Big Red T-shirt Day"—a publicity stunt encouraging members to wear union-branded shirts
- **Week of September 8:** Parent leafleting events
- **September 16:** "School-site picketing"—not a strike but symbolic protests with no disruption to district operations

LAUSD is preparing deep cuts, layoffs and privatization schemes—yet UTLA calls on workers to hand out flyers and wear matching T-shirts rather than mobilizing for a real fight. These stunts are meant to let off steam and prepare the ground for the next sellout agreement.

Philadelphia is a warning for California teachers. There, the teachers union organized a similar bogus "strike ready" campaign over the summer, only to announce a contract meeting none of teachers' demands which they rammed through days before an August 31 strike deadline.

In Chicago, teachers recently experienced their own major betrayal by the union bureaucracy—a warning with urgent lessons for educators everywhere. Under the Democratic Socialists of America-controlled CTU leadership and Democratic Mayor Brandon Johnson, Chicago teachers were sold a contract touted as “Trump-proof,” with “common good” language presented as a bold defense.

Shortly afterward, the city announced that the school district was in deep financial crisis and is now threatening to rip up the CTU contract. Today, under conditions where the CTU and the Democrats conspired to impose “labor peace,” Trump has now sent the National Guard and ICE into the city, declaring that the Chicago was “about to find out why it’s called the Department of WAR.”

In Los Angeles, the bitter lessons of the March 2023 SEIU Local 99 strike are instructive for educators and staff. A massive 65,000 LAUSD support staff and UTLA members walked out, but the strike was deliberately limited to three tightly controlled days.

None of SEIU members’ core demands were met. Meanwhile, the UTLA used the “solidarity strike” to deflate anger and funnel workers back behind the Democrats.

Bureaucrats try to hold back workers

A real struggle is exactly what the union bureaucrats want to avoid, because it would cut across their alliance with the Democrats (and, in some cases such as the Teamsters and UAW, with Trump) and threaten their intimate ties with corporate management.

At the Labor Day 2025 event in Los Angeles, UTLA President Cecily Myart-Cruz and SEIU Local 99 President Max Arias gave carefully calibrated speeches meant to sound militant while avoiding any genuine mobilization of workers.

Arias declared, “They’re billionaires because of our labor. Maybe it’s time we taught them what happens when they don’t have that labor, and they can no longer be billionaires.”

Myart-Cruz, for her part, said, “Yes, we need a general strike, maybe in 2028, maybe in 2026. But we have to build up to that,” adding, “Nobody is going to come save us. We have to do it ourselves,” even using the word “revolution.”

None of this rhetoric has been followed by any call to action. On the contrary, the statements by Myart-Cruz and Arias are a calculated attempt to capture the massive opposition in LAUSD, keeping it firmly within channels the union bureaucracy can control.

Myart-Cruz’s remarks were immediately scrubbed from mainstream media coverage. It was one of the only outliers where a union official even paid lip service to the broader political situation during Labor Day events, the exception that proves the rule.

Forward to rank-and-file committees

Myart-Cruz, Arias and the broader union bureaucracy are dressing up symbolic stunts and long-term “build-up” rhetoric as substitutes for the immediate, mass strike action needed to defeat LAUSD’s austerity agenda.

Educators and school workers cannot allow another betrayal. The urgent task is to break decisively from the UTLA, SEIU, CTA and the AFT bureaucracies, and organize independently of both corporate-controlled parties. This means building rank-and-file committees—democratic organizations controlled directly by educators, school workers, parents and students—to take the initiative out of the hands of the union apparatus and into the hands of workers themselves.

These committees must fight for:

- **Immediate strike action** uniting teachers and school workers to defend jobs, wages, healthcare and democratic rights
- **Full transparency** in all negotiations and budgets
- **An end to school closures, layoffs and privatization schemes**
- **The defense of immigrant students and families** against ICE raids and repression
- **The mobilization of workers across Los Angeles and nationwide** to oppose austerity, war and the suppression of democratic rights

The breakdown of negotiations on August 20 marks a deliberate escalation by LAUSD and the political establishment against educators, students and the working class. Both corporate parties are dismantling public education, diverting trillions into war, and imposing austerity while suppressing basic rights. The UTLA, SEIU and the entire union bureaucracy are active collaborators, tasked with diffusing opposition and chaining workers to the pro-capitalist Democrats.

To defend jobs, healthcare and quality public education, educators and school workers must take the struggle into their own hands. Under the explosive conditions now unfolding, only mass, united strike action organized by independent rank-and-file committees can mobilize the strength of the working class against austerity, authoritarianism and war, and fight for a socialist program to secure fully funded public education for all.



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