

Los Angeles teachers prepare to vote on strike authorization as union bureaucracy pushes healthcare concessions

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25 January 2026

Over 35,000 teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), members of United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA), will vote January 27–29, 2026, on strike authorization. At the same time, the union bureaucracy is forcing through a separate vote on a concessionary healthcare bargaining tentative agreement (TA) reached with the district last December that shifts costs to teachers through various measures, including higher co-pays and deductibles.

The scheduling of a strike authorization vote expresses a profound buildup of anger, not only among teachers but across the working class in California and nationally. Forty thousand academic workers across the University of California system are preparing to strike. Thirty thousand school support workers in LAUSD, members of SEIU Local 99, are moving toward their own strike vote.

Across California, districts are reaching an impasse and preparing job actions. San Francisco educators are concluding a second strike authorization vote; five Sacramento-area districts, including Natomas Unified and Twin Rivers Unified, are described by unions as “strike ready” for spring 2026; and San Diego educators are planning a one-day strike in late February. Many others, from Oakland and Berkeley to Madera and Apple Valley, are at impasse.

Educators have repeatedly been at the forefront of mass struggles. In 2019, teachers’ strikes helped inaugurate a new period of working-class resistance in the United States after decades of suppression. Los Angeles was a central battleground, as tens of thousands walked out and won widespread public support.

Today, these struggles are intersecting with broader social and political upheavals. Nurses are striking in New York and preparing job actions at Kaiser facilities in California and Hawaii. In Minneapolis, a general strike

was conducted January 23 in response to Immigration and Customs Enforcement terror following the killing of Renée Nicole Good. This was followed the next day with the brutal ICE killing of nurse Alex Pretti.

Los Angeles teachers face especially brutal conditions. The city is among the most expensive in the world, yet starting pay for LAUSD educators is only about \$65,000 a year, with average salaries ranging from roughly \$45,000 to \$71,000 depending on experience. About 21 percent of full-time teachers qualify as low income for affordable housing programs, and 28 percent rely on second jobs to survive.

A single adult with one child needs around \$96,000 annually to cover basic living costs in the region. Median rents for a one-bedroom apartment exceed \$2,500 per month, consuming more than half of a new teacher’s gross income. These figures expose the lie that educators’ demands are unreasonable. They are fighting simply to live.

Yet teachers have been kept working without a contract since June 30, 2025—not by accident, but by design. UTLA has deliberately delayed decisive action while attempting to dissipate anger through controlled gestures. Now, the union is combining a necessary and overdue strike authorization vote, which must be a resounding **YES**, with a healthcare TA that represents a major sellout and must be voted down.

Despite UTLA’s claims of a “big win” and “fully funded” healthcare, the 2026–27 Health Benefits Agreement between LAUSD and the unions explicitly embeds mechanisms to shift costs and risk onto workers. The agreement’s stated “purpose” commits the Health Benefits Committee (HBC) to “contain costs within the annual ‘budget’ ... through plan design” and to take “whatever measures are necessary to ‘live within’ the

healthcare budget.” This language is a blank check for cost-cutting, including higher copays, increased deductibles, and direct contributions from educators.

Most concretely, Section III.2.b commits the HBC to “exploring the introduction of a High-Deductible Health Plan (HDHP) paired with a Health Savings Account (HSA).” High-deductible plans are universally understood as a means of shifting thousands of dollars in upfront medical costs onto workers, undermining real access to care and deterring treatment. The agreement further authorizes the HBC to modify plan elements “including but not limited to co-pays, deductibles, premium contributions, [and] assessments,” so long as costs remain within the district’s fixed contribution. In other words, it locks in austerity.

Eligibility is also restricted. The HBC “shall not recommend any changes that would expand eligibility,” blocking pathways to coverage for precarious and part-time workers. Any surplus funds above \$125 million are returned to the district’s general fund rather than used to guarantee improved benefits. In practice, healthcare security is subordinated to budget ceilings and accounting targets, not workers’ needs.

By tying the strike authorization to this reactionary healthcare vote, UTLA is employing a mechanism of self-defeat. If teachers accept the healthcare TA in order to “support” the strike vote, they effectively indemnify the union leadership for its own betrayals and undermine their fight before any real struggle begins.

This tactic has a long history. In 2019, UTLA rammed through a sellout deal worked out in advance behind closed doors with the district and Democratic politicians, urging a “no time to study” vote and forcing ratification before educators could review the 40-page contract. UTLA dropped core demands—charter caps, meaningful funding, and class-size reductions—before and during negotiations and blocked democratic debate, using rushed, dispersed voting to minimize opposition and isolate rank-and-file dissent.

In 2022, UTLA went further, systematically demobilizing educators and forcing through concessionary outcomes. After 11 months without a contract and no genuine strike authorization, the union rushed a complex agreement through a tightly controlled ratification process in 2023. Social media censorship, delayed bargaining, and manipulated procedures transformed widespread opposition into grudging acceptance. Broken promises from 2019 and betrayals during the pandemic reopening were compounded.

UTLA’s parent organization, the California Teachers Association, later replicated this framework statewide through its so-called “We Can’t Wait” campaign. Prolonged delays and carefully isolated actions were cynically repackaged as “coordination,” while a genuine statewide strike was deliberately ruled out. By fragmenting the struggle district by district, the CTA ensured negotiations remained tightly confined within the political and financial parameters set by Democratic Party officials and local school boards.

The same pattern is unfolding today. Amid a growing movement toward a general strike in response to the Trump administration’s drive toward war, dictatorship, and austerity, UTLA and other unions are consciously working to keep each fight isolated and contained.

By blocking a unified movement that could challenge the state and corporate agenda, these organizations no longer function as instruments of workers’ struggle, but as mechanisms for enforcing austerity, suppressing resistance, and imposing labor discipline.

The class struggle cannot be waged through these institutional channels. The defense of public education, healthcare and democratic rights requires the formation of independent rank-and-file committees, controlled by workers themselves, linking educators across districts and states and uniting with other sections of the working class.

This is not simply a question of one contract, however important. The political issues bound up with this fight—amid the Trump administration’s assault on public education, democratic rights, and the militarization of society—make clear that the struggle must advance toward a broader confrontation over political power itself.

Teachers must vote **YES** for strike authorization and **NO** on the healthcare sellout. But to win their fight, they must take the struggle out of the hands of a bureaucracy determined to contain and betray them. The objective necessity is to expand the fight, prepare for a general strike, and transform the struggle into a conscious political movement of the working class, fighting for its independent interests against capitalism and its political representatives.



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