

# 30,000 LA school support workers overwhelmingly vote to strike

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An overwhelming 94 percent of 30,000 classified school workers in Los Angeles have voted to authorize a strike against the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the second-largest school district in the United States. The vote, conducted by SEIU Local 99, signals a sharp escalation of class struggle in a district serving more than 400,000 students across over 1,000 schools.

This follows the 94 percent vote three weeks ago by members of United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) to authorize a strike by 35,000 teachers. Taken together, 65,000 teachers and support staff are now preparing to strike.

The classified workers are the backbone of the public school system. They include instructional and special education aides, custodians and maintenance workers, bus drivers, food service employees, campus safety officers and logistics staff. Schools cannot function without them. Yet they are paid poverty wages and treated as expendable.

This struggle is not isolated. Across California and the United States, class tensions are intensifying. In addition to LA teachers, 40,000 graduate student workers in the University of California system have voted to strike with their contract expiring on March 31.

More than 35,000 Kaiser Permanente healthcare workers just waged a month-long strike before it was abruptly shut down by the United Nurses Associations of California/Union of Health Care Professionals without even reaching a tentative agreement. Skilled trades workers in the California State University system and San Francisco teachers conducted four-day strikes earlier this month, and nurses at USC Keck Medical Center are also engaged in contract battles.

The SEIU vote reflects a workforce pushed to the brink by relentless cost-of-living increases in one of the most expensive metropolitan regions in the country. The average salary for classified school workers is \$35,501,

classified as “extremely low income” in Los Angeles. Many workers are employed only part-time, working the 10-month school year and earning closer to \$30,000 or less. A significant number fall below the federal poverty line.

Nearly 90 percent of these workers are Latino or African American, and a substantial proportion are immigrants or the children of immigrants. Many are themselves parents of LAUSD students. They confront not only economic hardship but also the broader climate of repression directed at immigrant communities, including the escalation of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids under the Trump administration.

The daily conditions reported by workers expose a profound social crisis. According to internal union surveys, a large portion of classified staff are housing insecure. Many live in overcrowded, multi-family dwellings or commute long distances because they cannot afford to reside in the communities where they work. Part-time scheduling deprives them of full health coverage, forcing thousands to juggle multiple jobs. Meanwhile, the district continues to push subcontracting schemes and proposes layoffs, deepening fears about job security and the future of public education.

Workers also report surveillance, intimidation and even threats of arrest for discussing contract issues. Such measures underscore the hostile environment in which these essential employees are compelled to fight for basic rights.

The objective conditions exist for a unified movement of hundreds of thousands of workers. Yet the union apparatus has worked systematically to isolate each struggle.

The current strike authorization itself exposes the political limits imposed by the union leadership. Workers were not guided toward an open-ended economic strike aimed at securing serious gains. Instead, they were called

to vote on an Unfair Practice Charge (UPC) strike framed as a protest against alleged harassment and intimidation by the district.

Negotiations for a successor contract began in April 2024, following the expiration of the previous agreement. For nearly two years, SEIU Local 99 has kept workers on the job without a contract. The union declared an impasse only in December 2025. Mediation sessions in early February quickly stalled. LAUSD's latest offer, an 8 percent raise spread over three years, amounts to an insult and a real wage cut with inflation.

The 2023 contract was hailed by SEIU and California's Democratic Party political establishment as "historic." Three years later, workers are poorer in real terms, while the Democrats have not protected them from ICE raids. Rising rents, food prices and utility costs have surpassed the modest increases. The lesson is clear: one-day protests and limited UPC strikes do not alter the structural conditions that produce inequality.

SEIU Local 99 and UTLA have the combined power to shut down the entire district indefinitely. Instead, the bureaucracies work against it. Nor have they sought to unite with graduate students, nurses or other sections of the working class although there are increasing popular demands for a general strike. Instead, both unions have called for a March 18 rally, a controlled demonstration designed to vent anger and parade Democratic politicians while negotiations continue behind closed doors.

This isolation flows from SEIU's political alignment with the Democratic Party. California's Democratic establishment presents itself as a defender of workers and immigrants even as classified school employees endure poverty wages in one of the world's richest regions. The "sanctuary state" narrative serves to mask the hyper exploitation of an impoverished layer of the working class, keeping immigrant workers subordinated to the demands of the state, in this case the school district administration.

The LAUSD Board of Education exemplifies this. The seven-member board includes figures aligned with the Democratic Socialists of America as well as establishment Democrats: Vice President Dr. Rocio Rivas and Karla Griego are DSA-endorsed; President Scott M. Schmerelson and members Sherlett Hendy Newbill, Nick Melvoin, Tanya Ortiz Franklin and Kelly Gonez are Democrats. Most were elected with financial and organizational support from UTLA and SEIU.

This same board majority voted on February 17, 2026 to issue at least 657 layoff notices to teachers. The claim that

a "Labor Majority" controls the district collapses under the weight of such decisions. The board functions as an instrument of the capitalist state, enforcing austerity while preserving bond ratings and budgetary priorities.

Union leaders have criticized Superintendent Alberto Carvalho personally but have largely avoided a direct political confrontation with the board and the Democratic establishment that controls it. The reason is evident: the unions are tied by a thousand threads to the same political apparatus responsible for imposing austerity.

Historical experience demonstrates both the militancy of classified workers and the constraints imposed by the union bureaucracy. From union recognition struggles in 1968 to solidarity actions with teachers in 2019 and the brief 2023 UPC strike, workers have repeatedly mobilized. Each time, their demands have been narrowed and contained by the union apparatus within the framework acceptable to the district and its political overseers.

The March 18 rally, like the previous protest last December, epitomizes this contradiction. Presented as an escalation, it is in fact a mechanism to prevent an uncontrolled, district-wide shutdown. It signals to the authorities that the union leadership retains control. But the overwhelming 94 percent strike authorization reveals that workers' anger runs far deeper than the limited tactics being advanced.

The central task is the development of independent rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by workers themselves and independent of the union apparatus and capitalist political parties. Such committees could link up across workplaces and industries, formulate clear demands for living wages, full-time hours, secure jobs and genuine protection for immigrant communities, and prepare coordinated action.

The fight of LAUSD classified workers is part of a broader resurgence of class struggle. Its outcome will depend not only on the courage and determination already demonstrated by workers, but on breaking free from the grip of the SEIU and other labor bureaucracies.



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