

# As Los Angeles educators prepare strike, administrators and union officials meet for emergency talks

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On April 14, nearly 70,000 Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) workers are poised to strike, driven by years of deteriorating conditions, poverty wages and the intolerable reality that many cannot afford to live in the very communities they serve.

The strike, if it proceeds, would be a historic confrontation involving teachers, classified staff and administrators in the nation's second-largest school district. It reflects a deepening insurgency of workers confronting a bipartisan assault on public education, living standards and democratic rights.

The mandate for the strike is overwhelming. In separate strike votes, 94 percent of teachers and 97 percent of service workers voted in favor. These votes expressed mounting anger against the attacks on public education.

Yet on Wednesday, officials from United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA), Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 99 and the Associated Administrators of Los Angeles (AALA/Teamsters) met with LAUSD representatives behind closed doors, signaling a last-ditch effort to block a strike.

This meeting was convened under intense pressure from the Los Angeles City Council, which recently passed a unanimous resolution urging both sides to reach a fair deal to avoid a district-wide shutdown. The Council includes four members of the Democratic Socialists of America.

Workers must be warned that a sellout is in the offing. To prevent a last-minute deal and enforce their democratic decision for a strike, educators have to take matters into their own hands. They must organize themselves from below in a network of rank-and-file committees at schools across the district to impose their

decision for a strike and organize a fight to win their demands.

No talks under these circumstances will result in a deal favorable for workers. The district's wage proposal underscores its contempt for workers. LAUSD offers an 8 percent ongoing salary increase and a one-time 3 percent bonus spread over two years, with a "reopener" clause that effectively postpones any further gains indefinitely.

UTLA's demand for roughly 17 percent over two years, including raising starting teacher pay to about \$80,000, given the staggering cost of living in Los Angeles, is a modest demand which would still leave many educators struggling to cover living expenses.

For classified workers, including custodians, cafeteria staff, bus drivers and aides, average annual earnings are only \$35,501, with many falling into the category of "extremely low income." Many of these are immigrants, faced with the ever present threat of ICE terror. SEIU is demanding only a 13 percent increase over three years.

Conditions have existed for a powerful statewide and national movement in defense of public education. Contracts were up for virtually every major school district in California over the past year, and almost every major school district in America has been fighting massive cuts since the pandemic supplemental federal funding was allowed to expire by the Biden White House in its last year. This has gone further under Trump, who is seeking to abolish the Department of Education and divert hundreds of billions to the military.

LAUSD officials insist that the district faces a "fiscal crisis," citing declining enrollment and uncertain

funding. This narrative has become a mantra used to justify cuts across public education. In reality, it is sitting on a \$5 billion reserve, the largest in its history.

Yet the bureaucrats in the California Teachers Association have worked consistently to block unified action and isolate school districts from each other. A four-day strike was shut down earlier this year in San Francisco with abysmal 4 percent annual wage increases in one of the world's most expensive cities.

The UTLA and AALA contracts expired 10 months ago, and the union has kept teachers on the job for most of the school year. SEIU Local 99 has kept workers on the job nearly two full years without a contract.

The decades long decline in American public education can be reversed only through a fight by the working class for a massive redistribution of wealth out of the hands of the oligarchy and the military in favor of social needs. This means a broad national and even global movement pitting the working class against the entire capitalist political establishment.

The union bureaucracy is working to prevent this at all costs to avoid upsetting its relationship with the Democratic Party and corporate America. Already this year, one struggle after another has been sold out, including by nurses at Kaiser Permanente and in New York City, mostly immigrant meatpacking workers in Greeley, Colorado, graduate students and academic workers at the University of California and New York University and hundreds of military contractors at the Bath Iron Works shipyard.

The lessons of the last UTLA strikes are critical. In 2019, LA teachers struck for six days and won support among parents and the working class. Yet the union rushed through a sellout, giving members only hours to review a lengthy agreement. Fundamental issues such as class size, staffing levels and the expansion of charter schools remained unresolved. The settlement preserved the district's budget priorities and managerial control.

The 2023 walkout followed the same pattern. The bureaucracy imposed tight deadlines, restricted debate and presented concessions as victories. At no point did it seek to unite educators with other sections of workers, either within the school system or across the broader economy. Instead, it isolated struggles and ensured they remained within limits acceptable to the political establishment.

The central question is not whether workers are prepared to fight. The strike authorization votes and growing militancy provide a clear answer. The question is how this opposition can break through the obstacle of the pro-corporate trade union apparatus. A general rule has emerged: The more militant the workers and the more powerful their position the more openly and ruthlessly the bureaucrats attempt to sabotage them.

To advance their interests, educators and school workers must take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands. This requires the formation of rank-and-file committees, independent of the unions, that can organize democratic discussion, advance demands based on actual needs and link up with other sections of the working class. Such committees provide the means to immediately stop the backroom deals and maneuvers of the bureaucracy as well as reverse all layoffs initiated so far.

The struggle must expand beyond LAUSD, uniting with healthcare workers, logistics workers and other workers facing similar conditions across the country and worldwide. It must challenge the diversion of resources to the military and the wealthy, insisting that society's immense wealth be redirected to meet human needs.



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