

With strike deadline approaching, Los Angeles officials and unions move to block walkout of 80,000 school workers

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With hours to go before a potential strike by 80,000 Los Angeles school workers, negotiations between SEIU Local 99 and the Los Angeles Unified School District are continuing under intense pressure from city and political officials. As of this writing, this includes Mayor Karen Bass, who has been directly involved in talks Monday night.

The last-minute negotiations follow the announcement Sunday of tentative agreements by United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) and the Associated Administrators of Los Angeles (AALA), moves that have already served to divide workers and weaken the prospect of unified strike action.

Taken together, these developments constitute a coordinated effort to prevent a joint walkout and impose a settlement before rank-and-file workers can act. This would also isolate a separate potential strike by 200 teachers in the Little Lake City School District, in Southeast Los Angeles County, which is set to begin Thursday.

School workers must act now to oppose these efforts. Educators and staff should organize rank-and-file committees among their coworkers at each school to fight the sabotage of union officials and impose the democratic will of the rank and file to proceed with a walkout. The strike must go ahead, but under rank-and-file control, not unaccountable bureaucrats. These committees will form the basis for making the broadest possible appeal for support among workers in Los Angeles, the United States and around the world.

On Monday, a rally was held in downtown Los Angeles, bringing together educators and supporters amid growing tensions over the contracts and the threat of a strike. The mood among workers was one of anger and determination, sharply contrasting with the attitude of

union officials.

What is taking place are not “negotiations” in the sense of two adversarial parties. It is a conspiracy of the Democratic Party, through the city government, LAUSD and the union bureaucracy, to sabotage the class struggle, which terrifies them above all. The union bureaucracy, joined at the hip with management and the capitalist parties, is a full partner in this effort because a genuine struggle by workers would undermine these corrupt relations.

Similar betrayals have already taken place this year across America, including among nurses in New York City and at Kaiser Permanente, San Francisco teachers, the United Auto Workers’ blocking of a strike at Nexteer, and the shutdown of a strike at Bath Iron Works, a major defense contractor.

The intervention of Mayor Karen Bass recalls the role of San Francisco Mayor Daniel Lurie and former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in shutting down a four-day strike by educators earlier this year. Also involved in that intervention was American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, who is also a top Democratic Party operative and former member of the Democratic National Committee. Soon afterward, the San Francisco school district announced layoffs as part of its “fiscal recovery program.”

At a separate event Sunday in New York City featuring Bernie Sanders, Zohran Mamdani and Randi Weingarten, the role of the union apparatus was made explicit. At the rally, Weingarten hailed the LA teachers’ contract, declaring: “And just this morning at 4:00, UTLA got a contract that our members and the kids in LA deserve.”

The frantic attempts to block a strike are taking place as war preparations intensify against Iran, with talks breaking down and threats to annihilate Iranian

civilization. This war, driven by the struggle for control over oil and strategic interests, is deeply unpopular, and its disastrous consequences will trigger massive opposition. The ruling class is acting to suppress this opposition.

At the same time, a massive funding crisis confronts school districts across the country, as resources are siphoned away to Wall Street and war. In Los Angeles, a city marked by extreme wealth and poverty, the district faces a projected deficit of \$877 million for the 2026–27 school year, with another \$443 million in red ink anticipated the following year, despite holding multibillion-dollar reserves. In February, the school board approved a plan expected to eliminate 657 central and regional office staff positions as part of a county-approved “fiscal stabilization” regime.

No matter what union officials say about their tentative agreements, this means that huge cuts face educators once they ratify the deals, or even before, as long as this deficit remains. Educators must raise the demand that it be filled, not through cuts, but through the wealth of the rich and the major corporations, which is more than enough to provide high quality education for all.

The UTLA and AALA agreements provide for an 11.65 percent wage increase over two years, with some teachers receiving as little as 8 percent. They include toothless fines for violations of special education class size ratios and vague, unspecified “commitments in support of immigrant students and families.”

The AALA “highlights” are even more vague, while promoting the same wage framework. They include a defined eight-hour day and 40-hour workweek, along with longevity bonuses and stipend pay for some high seniority principals.

The agreements are being used to undermine a unified strike and pressure SEIU 99 workers who are among the lowest paid in the district, with average annual earnings of roughly \$35,000, a poverty wage in one of the most expensive cities in the country.

In talks, the SEIU initially put forward a demand for a 30 percent raise over three years, which is modest given the cost of living. In response, LAUSD has offered a 13 percent increase along with off-schedule bonuses instead of genuine retroactive pay. Given that workers have been without a contract for 22 months, this offer would amount to little more than backpay.

Opposition among workers is widespread and growing, particularly online. Remarking on the fact that SEIU 99 remains at the table while UTLA and AALA have already

accepted tentative agreements, one commenter said, “They should absolutely hold out for a better deal. Just because other unions caved, doesn’t mean the others should. Why did UTLA ‘begrudgingly’ accept the crappy 8% raise for so many of their long time members? This is literally the ideal situation for the unions to have negotiated a MUCH better deal across the board since EVERYONE was striking and all contracts were being negotiated at the same time. ...”

One worker spoke out against the claim that “there is no money for schools,” saying, “The money is there and has been there. LAUSD has 5 billion in reserves and they are on average near 900% off on their 3 year budget projections since about 2014. Imagine someone telling you they cant pay you for the work you did and agreed to because they’re \$100 in debt and you find out they have \$800 in the bank for safe keeping.”

Another worker raised the crushing cost of living in Los Angeles, driven above all by housing. “Everything really just comes back to the insane cost of living in this city due to expensive housing,” one person wrote. “I had a neighbor who taught at LAUSD but couldn’t afford to live in LA anymore.”

Workers must draw the necessary conclusions and act immediately. If a tentative agreement is announced overnight, it should not be accepted as binding. Full details must be made available immediately, and any attempt to cancel strike action must be opposed.

The struggle must be taken out of the hands of the union bureaucracy, which has sold out one struggle after another across the country.

Across all unions, workers should form independent rank-and-file committees to break the isolation, share information, organize from below and assert their democratic will. These committees can provide the means to overturn sellouts and ensure that decisions are made by workers themselves.

Educators and school workers must appeal to the broader working class, linking their struggle to a wider fight against inequality and in defense of the rights of immigrants and all workers. This requires the independent mobilization of the working class against the oligarchy.



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