

# Union bureaucrats, Democrats cancel strike of 77,000 Los Angeles educators

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At 2:30 a.m. Tuesday morning, only hours before tens of thousands of workers were set to strike, members of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 99 received an email announcing a last-minute deal with the Los Angeles Unified School District. The move abruptly shut down the strike before it could begin.

The strike would have involved the entire workforce of 77,000 classified workers, teachers and administrators for the first time in the district's history. Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass intervened directly in the talks late Monday night, showing the Democratic Party was determined to prevent it.

The shutdown followed the Sunday betrayals by United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) and the Associated Administrators of Los Angeles (AALA). Workers were deliberately split apart in order to prevent a district-wide confrontation with LAUSD and the Democratic Party establishment.

Workers responded angrily to the sellout. An LAUSD school bus driver told a WSWs reporter that as of Tuesday morning he had not seen the contract details. But, he said, "With everything that's going on—the war, price of gas, ICE raids, cost of living—there's so much affecting all of us right now. And the classified workers are the lowest paid in LAUSD. We can't afford to live like this. I think if we had gone on strike, it would have inspired everybody else facing the same things."

A teacher said, "I think this is an unprecedented opportunity for UTLA and they are capitulating too soon. All three unions should be capitalizing on our solidarity and force the district to give us what we all deserve. These circumstances aren't going to arise again anytime soon. Let's not forget the over 5 billion dollar reserve, a superintendent in legal jeopardy and a 22 million dollar embezzlement scheme. I'm hearing the same sense of disappointment from other teachers at my school site as well."

What took place was not a genuine negotiation. It was a joint operation involving LAUSD, City Hall and the union

apparatus to stop a strike that threatened to escape bureaucratic control and draw broad support from workers across Los Angeles and the country.

In a press conference Tuesday morning, Mayor Bass appeared alongside union presidents from all three unions and Los Angeles County Federation of Labor President Yvonne Wheeler. UTLA President Cecily Myart-Cruz thanked Bass for "stepping in," and "showing leadership in the struggle," while Bass herself made clear her central concern was preventing a shutdown that would disrupt the district and the city.

Wheeler gave the clearest expression of the union bureaucracy's integration with the administration when he said he wanted to "thank Mayor Bass for being the closer to the max. We would rather be here today than on the picket line." The remark drew loud applause from the assembled officials and union executives.

The SEIU, UTLA and AALA betrayals in Los Angeles follow a national pattern. Throughout the past year, union bureaucracies have blocked or shut down struggles by New York City nurses, Kaiser Permanente nurses, San Francisco educators, Michigan autoworkers and defense contractors in Maine, each time promoting limited agreements while demobilizing workers.

SEIU 99 workers are among the lowest-paid employees in the district, with average annual earnings of around \$35,000 in one of the most expensive urban areas in the country. The union had initially advanced a demand for a 30 percent raise over three years, itself a limited demand under present inflation and housing costs.

The tentative agreement falls below even that. The reported terms provide a 24 percent increase over three years, including 12 percent retroactive after workers had already gone 22 months without a contract, while LAUSD's prior offer had been only 13 percent plus off-schedule bonuses in place of real retroactive compensation.

In Los Angeles, where rent, food, gas and childcare have all risen sharply, the deal locks workers into continued economic insecurity while the union presents it as a

breakthrough.

Workers immediately recognized this. One wrote on SEIU 99's Instagram, "24% over 3 years? You do know cost of living goes up roughly 8% every year? That means we are in the same place in three years."

But the worst aspect of the deal is that it paves the way for continued austerity, which will reach the next stage as soon as the deals are ratified. The district is currently under a "fiscal stabilization plan" and already cut 657 central and regional administration jobs in February. Superintendent Alberto Carvalho warned in February that layoffs were unavoidable, stating, "At some point, we reached a breaking point."

The SEIU deal rescinds 200 IT job cuts, but leaves untouched hundreds of other threatened positions.

Workers responding online highlighted the limited nature of the so-called gains. One wrote: "So we are still having layoffs for the rest of the workers? This is not right. All workers are needed." Another added: "What about maintenance and operations? This is still a loss for those losing jobs."

The union bureaucracy has done everything to conceal the reality that, whatever modest gains may be in the contracts, they will be more than offset with cuts in the next school year. The district has a projected deficit of \$877 million for 2026–27 and an additional \$443 million the following year, which are being used to justify layoffs, teacher attrition and school "consolidations," i.e., closures.

The timing of the contract itself is significant. Ratification will likely take place in late April and early May. Later that month, the district will release its proposed budget for the next school year, which must be finalized by late June. By the time final budget decisions are made, the workforce will already be bound by a new contract, while management regains full freedom to implement layoffs, workload increases and program cuts.

The same pattern has been carried out in districts across the country. Earlier this year, after a four-day strike was called off in San Francisco, layoff notices followed rapidly under a multi-year "fiscal recovery" plan.

In Tuesday's press conference, when asked how LAUSD would pay for the new contracts, acting superintendent Andrés Chait replied that the district would "limit subcontracting" and "appeal to Sacramento [the state capital]" for more money, while Mayor Karen Bass insisted that "we have the most powerful delegation... the solidarity you see today is going to Sacramento."

Bass' reference to "solidarity" expresses the complete unity of the union bureaucracy with the pro-corporate Democratic Party.

The "appeal to Sacramento" amounts to the Democrats

claiming they will "pressure" themselves to increase state funding for the district. But the state government is also dealing with a \$21 billion budget deficit for the next fiscal year. In a few weeks, after Democratic governor Gavin Newsom refuses to release more funding, they will claim that "unfortunately" nothing could be done.

The claim that "there is no money" for schools is a fraud. The resources exist in the obscene fortunes of the corporate and financial oligarchy and in the trillions spent on war. But workers can only gain access to this wealth, created by their own labor, through a mass struggle fighting for a radical redistribution of wealth and its redirection to public education, healthcare and other social needs.

By cancelling the strike, union officials are helping deliberately to enforce the policies of the ruling class and sabotage all resistance.

Opposition is already emerging among workers. One SEIU member wrote, "Unions did a terrible job bargaining. We had power but didn't use it. I hope members vote no." Another commented, "There is no immediate relief. The cost of living rises daily and we are constantly playing catch-up."

The late-night shut down of the strike before it began proves the union bureaucracy functions as an instrument of control over the workers.

To oppose this, educators and staff must form rank-and-file committees in every school, bus yard and workplace. These committees must take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the bureaucracy and place it under the democratic control of workers themselves.

Workers must take power out of the hands of the union bureaucracies, which at every turn strangle serious opposition, vote down the agreement, expand coordination across districts and sectors, and prepare a unified struggle of the working class against social inequality, austerity and the use of public resources for militarism.

This also requires a break with the Democratic Party and with the entire framework of austerity and war that it defends.

The struggle in Los Angeles is part of a broader confrontation between workers and the political establishment. Its outcome will be determined by whether workers are able to organize to give themselves real control and take the initiative out of the hands of the apparatus.



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