

Cancellation of Los Angeles schools strike latest in string of union betrayals

Tom Hall

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Under the cover of darkness early Tuesday morning, the trade union bureaucracy reached a last-minute deal to avert a strike in the Los Angeles school district that was set to begin just hours later. It would have been the first time that the entire workforce—an estimated 80,000 teachers, administrators and support staff—walked out simultaneously in the second-largest school district in the United States.

The deal is the culmination of a betrayal carried out before a strike even began. At 4:00 a.m. Sunday, United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) announced an agreement covering teachers. The Associated Administrators of Los Angeles (AALA) followed suit shortly thereafter. Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 99 announced the final deal Tuesday, following overnight talks involving Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass.

As it always does, the union bureaucracy shouted that these were “huge victories,” a miserable cover for the agreements’ actual wretchedness. Teachers and administrators will receive an average of 11.65 percent in wage increases over two years, with some teachers getting as little as 8 percent.

Workers in SEIU Local 99 will receive only 24 percent over three years, half of which consists of retroactive back pay, since workers have been kept on the job without a contract for two years. This falls well short of the nearly 30 percent SEIU initially demanded and leaves support staff in extreme poverty. Already, 99 percent of these workers cannot afford a one-bedroom apartment.

The deals pave the way for a wave of austerity measures that will dwarf whatever nominal “gains” are contained in them. These cuts are already outlined in the district’s “fiscal stabilization” plan, under which 3,200 workers have already been given layoff notices this year.

The timing is significant. In May, only a few weeks after workers vote on the contracts, the district will release a new budget proposal for the next school year laying out specific cuts. The *Wall Street Journal* summed up the ruling class’s demand that the contracts be offset with deeper austerity in an editorial headlined “Los Angeles Schools Can’t Do Math.” The same bait-and-switch was used earlier this year to shut down a teachers’ strike in San Francisco and last year in the Chicago Public Schools system.

World Socialist Web Site calls on workers to reject these deals. The struggle must be continued, now organized under rank-and-file control. We urge the formation of committees of trusted workers at all schools to prepare the strike action for which workers have already overwhelmingly voted. An appeal should be made to the broader working class, along with preparations for a national movement in defense of public education.

Workers cannot advance their struggle for social and democratic rights except through a rebellion against the union apparatus and on the basis of complete independence from both corporate-controlled parties.

The United States is on the cusp of colossal social struggles. The year began with strikes by 46,000 nurses and healthcare workers on both coasts and mass demonstrations against the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) occupation of Minneapolis, in which the call for a general strike was widely raised. Over the course of the year, opposition has deepened and become more radical, especially as the consequences of the war with Iran have mounted. The campaign of murder and threats to annihilate Iranian civilization has exposed the government and the entire ruling class as criminal.

The economic consequences of war are driving workers—already struggling with inflation and mass layoffs—to the brink. School districts are being eviscerated by deficits in the hundreds of millions, while hundreds of billions more are funneled into the military and trillions into speculative ventures on Wall Street. The crisis is being escalated by Trump’s existential attack on public education and drive to convert schools into centers of nationalist and religious indoctrination.

There is extreme sensitivity and fear within ruling circles of the potential growth of the class struggle, under conditions where the entire political establishment is discredited and hated. The Democrats refuse to fight Trump because they are a capitalist party committed to the same basic policies of war and austerity, taking issue only with Trump’s methods in carrying them out.

The union bureaucracy, bound by a thousand threads to the political establishment, primarily through the Democrats, functions as the corporate oligarchy’s industrial police force. The bureaucracy’s role in war is to discipline workers on the

“home front,” summed up in 2024 when then-President Biden called the AFL-CIO his “domestic NATO.” As the war against Iran escalates, the union officials are seeking to prevent any expression of working class struggle.

The more powerful the potential for a mass movement, the more openly and shamelessly the union bureaucracy attempts to disrupt it. Los Angeles is only the latest in a string of sellouts this year, which include:

- UNAC/UHCP shut down a strike in January and February by 31,000 Kaiser Permanente nurses and healthcare workers in California and Hawaii on the basis of a contract with inadequate wage and staffing provisions.

- The New York State Nurses Association shut down the strike in January and February by 15,000 New York City nurses in violation of its own bylaws.

- The unions refused to support broad demands for a general strike over ICE raids and murders in Minneapolis, limiting opposition instead to consumer boycotts.

- The United Auto Workers rammed through a contract covering 40,000 University of California graduate students, who have engaged in major demonstrations in recent years against the Gaza genocide and war.

- The UAW threatened to place the local union at Columbia University, the center of bipartisan repression against Gaza protests, under receivership unless graduate students rescind their political demands.

- The United Food and Commercial Workers union called off—without a deal—a historic three-week strike by impoverished immigrant meatpacking workers at JBS in Colorado. The UFCW apparatus declared on Sunday that it had reached an agreement with insulting 70-cent and 40-cent annual raises.

The Democratic Party does what it can to ensure the bureaucracy’s institutional stability. At a rally Sunday, New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), “democratic socialist” Senator Bernie Sanders, Association of Flight Attendants President Sara Nelson and American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten (a former member of the Democratic National Committee who travels the world in support of American wars) launched a new nonprofit aimed at fundraising and financing the unions’ operations. In her remarks to the rally, Weingarten went out of her way to praise the Los Angeles teachers’ contract.

The DSA and the rest of the pseudo-left play a central role in corralling the growing radicalization into safe channels. United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) is one of several major teachers unions controlled by DSA members, and the DSA has four members on the Los Angeles City Council. Mamdani, the most prominent member of the DSA, has already betrayed the aspirations of his voters by meeting with Trump and is now planning \$1.3 billion in cuts. He also helped sabotage and shut down the New York City nurses’ strike.

Substantial sections of the bureaucracy are openly aligning

with Trump. Teamsters General President Sean O’Brien, who brags that he speaks with Trump several times per month over the phone, met in person with the would-be Fuhrer on Tuesday afternoon.

But regardless of partisan allegiance, the bureaucracy as a whole plays the same class role. This recalls the words of Leon Trotsky, who, writing in 1940, said:

The labor bureaucrats do their level best in words and deeds to demonstrate to the “democratic” state how reliable and indispensable they are in peace-time and especially in time of war. By transforming the trade unions into organs of the state, fascism invents nothing new; it merely draws to their ultimate conclusion the tendencies inherent in imperialism.

Workers must draw the necessary conclusions. A rebellion is required—not to reform this apparatus but to abolish its stranglehold over the working class. It must be replaced with democratic rank-and-file committees, genuinely controlled by workers themselves, in every school and workplace. These committees must take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the bureaucrats, prepare collective action and link up across districts, industries, state lines and national borders.

This is the perspective fought for by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). The IWA-RFC exists to unite workers internationally in a common struggle against the union apparatus, the corporations and the capitalist state. We urge teachers, school workers and youth in Los Angeles to take up the fight to build rank-and-file committees as part of this broader movement.

Such a movement requires complete political independence from both the Democratic and Republican parties and a conscious struggle to mobilize the working class against war, dictatorship and the financial oligarchy. The fight for public education cannot be separated from the fight against the trillions poured into militarism and speculation, while schools, hospitals and social services are starved of resources. An independent movement of the working class, organized through rank-and-file committees and united internationally, is the basic progressive force in society.



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