

# Why Los Angeles teachers must vote “no” on the UTLA-LAUSD contract

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The *World Socialist Web Site* urges educators to reject the tentative agreements reached last week with Los Angeles Unified School District. They impose stagnant wages, leave layoffs and austerity fully on the agenda and codify a divide-and-conquer policy that pits teachers against each other.

Voting is currently ongoing for United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) and the Associated Administrators of Los Angeles (AALA)/ Teamsters 2010 members; Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 99 has not yet announced its ratification vote.

The deals were used to cancel what would have been the first simultaneous walkout of all 77,000 district employees, which was called off hours before it was set to begin on April 14. They are also the product of the Democratic Party, acting through both the district and city government and the trade union functionaries, to prevent all resistance from below, which they fear much more than they do Trump.

The specific aim of the contracts is to block all resistance to massive austerity which will begin, in all likelihood, soon after the agreements are ratified. The district is currently operating under a “fiscal stabilization plan” with a projected \$877 million deficit and already announced layoffs in February.

A new budget proposal is expected in mid-May, only a few weeks from now, which will likely contain sweeping new cuts.

Despite propaganda calling the deals “wins,” opposition among educators has been immediate and substantial. An analysis by the WSWS found that 68 percent of comments on the UTLA’s social media accounts were opposed to the deal. For SEIU 99’s pages, 58 percent of comments were against it.

What is needed is a fight not just against district administrators but the union bureaucracy, which has proven it cannot be trusted to organize a struggle. The WSWS urges workers in the school district to take the initiative into their own hands by forming a network of rank-and-file committees unifying schools across the city, to prepare independent action to enforce the overwhelming democratic mandate for a strike.

A new bargaining team, consisting solely of working educators must be formed to fight for what the district’s employees and students urgently need, not what the corporate elite who control the district claim they can afford.

## What is in the UTLA contract

A review of the full language of the UTLA contract confirms it is a miserable sellout.

For teachers, the headline wage figure of 11.65 percent over two years is

being touted as a major gain. In reality this is largely eaten up by inflation in Los Angeles, currently at 3.4 percent. Moreover, only 4 percent of this figure is retroactive to the expiration of the last contract in July 2025.

In the area, transportation costs are up 9.1 percent year over year, food up 3.2 percent and energy up 11.2 percent. Gas costs \$5.99 per gallon this week, up nearly 23 percent over the past year, driven by the US attack on Iran. The median rent for a one-bedroom apartment is \$2,532 per month.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development defines “low income” in Los Angeles County for a single person as \$84,850. A family of four earning over \$121,000 still qualifies as low income. By comparison, the new starting wage for a teacher will still be only \$77,000.

## UTLA rejects “equality”

But the worst part of the wage proposal is that it pits workers against each other by seniority. Some teachers will get pay increases of 35 percent while others will get only 8 percent.

Under the new pay scale, most teachers will receive 3.25 percent for each year of service up to 10 years. After that, the increase falls to 2.5 percent for years 11 through 19, and then to only 1.5 percent for 20 years and above.

This is justified on the basis that higher pay increases for newer teachers are needed to improve retention. But rather than financing this by laying hands on the immense wealth of the corporate and financial elite, the increase comes at the direct expense of older teachers, deliberately pitting one section of the workforce against another.

The UTLA summed up its strategy in this infamous phrase: “The foundational principle behind the new fair wage scale is equity. It is not *mere equality*, but equity [emphasis added].” In other words, the UTLA is not only supporting lower pay raises for experienced teachers. It is explicitly rejecting the principle of equality itself as a governing principle among its own members.

What they derisively refer to as “mere equality” is in reality the most revolutionary principle in history. It has toppled monarchs and dictators all over the world and animated the struggles of countless millions to build a better world. Among them include those generations who fought and gave their lives to build the trade unions against the concentrated governmental and economic power of the ruling elite.

The open hostility to the idea of equality shows just how far removed and hostile the union bureaucracy is to the workers they claim to represent.

The attack on equality in favor of “equity” has become widespread in identity politics circles, where it is used to justify affirmative action programs and other forms of preferential treatment based on race or gender. Again, the logic is deeply reactionary because it pits workers

against each other on the basis of personal identity in a struggle over control of their declining share of national income, rather than uniting them in a common struggle against their exploiters.

### **Empty promises, labor-management “cooperation”**

The rest of the contract is characterized by demands that were either dropped entirely or reduced to unenforceable gestures. Use of phrases like “make every effort to” or “collaboratively advocate for” abound, committing the district to nothing. Other issues are referred to joint labor-management task forces—the “Climate Literacy Task Force,” a professional growth task force, and “Community Housing Task Force”—that will do nothing except give union officials more opportunities to rub elbows with district administrators.

The last of these is particularly noteworthy because it will oversee the opening up of school-owned land to real estate developers, under the guise of creating “affordable housing.” It will organize “industry forums” which “*may include* Non-Profit Developers and Community Land Trusts [emphasis added].” To be blunt, this type of arrangement is highly favorable for bribery.

The contract does not include a provision to hire additional elementary school physical education teachers, as members demanded. Special education also remains critically understaffed. The agreement introduces a still-inadequate 20:1 caseload cap for Resource Specialist Teachers, but only at schools where 80 percent of special education students are in general education settings for 80 percent of the school day.

This condition excludes the majority of LAUSD schools and leaves teachers in moderate-to-severe, intellectual disabilities, and early childhood special education classrooms without meaningful protection. If the district violates this ratio, the contract imposes wrist-slap penalties of \$500 to \$1,000 per period.

Mental health counseling services are addressed through vague commitments to increase staffing, with no binding guarantees, no dedicated funding, and no implementation timeline.

Substitute teachers receive nothing. Adult Education counselors remain on a lower pay schedule than K-12 colleagues despite identical credentials. Coordinator stipends are eliminated. AI language creates a procedural obligation but no prohibition on displacement.

Highly touted language on immigrant students and families amounts to nothing. It essentially only confirms the existing language from LAUSD’s policy bulletin from last year. That bulletin prohibits teachers from interfering with ICE raids on schools, only allowing them the right—but not the duty—not to actively assist. The contract merely “commits” the district to “increasing and enhancing partnerships” with immigrant non-profit groups. Yet another joint “District Immigrant Support Committee” will meet on a quarterly basis. It also promises to “seek opportunities to secure additional funding” to expand existing immigration resource centers.

Finally, the agreement says nothing about the fiscal stabilization plan or any meaningful protections against layoffs. The supposed prohibitions on reductions in force contain exceptions big enough to drive a school bus through. Layoffs are still permitted due to “actual or anticipated declines in enrollment”—the district has pointed to a 46 percent decline in enrollment as a primary justification for cuts—or due to reductions in program offerings, or changes in class size tables.

In other words, layoffs are “restricted” except in any conceivable situation where the district would actually choose to lay people off.

### **For a rank-and-file movement against inequality!**

The contract must be rejected. But rejection is only the start. What is required is a new strategy, a new political perspective, and new organizational channels through which workers can conduct a real fight.

This contract expresses the total integration of the bureaucracy which controls the unions with corporate America through the Democratic Party. In almost every major city in the country, overwhelmingly controlled by Democrats, massive cuts are being imposed to close municipal, school and transit deficits. The administration of California Governor Gavin Newsom is itself preparing cuts tied to a \$21 billion state deficit.

After calling off the strike last week, union bureaucrats said they would join hands with Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass and district officials to make an “appeal to Sacramento” for the state government to give LA schools more funding. This is a cynical fraud. They know very well that this money will not be given up. It is designed only to provide themselves with political cover once the cutting in LA schools begins.

This framework has played out again and again. Cuts followed the four-day strike in San Francisco and are taking place in Oakland following ratification of new deals there earlier this year. Massive cuts also followed the ratification of the new Chicago school contract last year.

Everyone knows the money exists. The problem is that trillions are tied up in the hands of the corporate oligarchy and diverted into the military.

American society is being picked clean to pay for wars aimed at controlling global supply chains and strategic resources—while schools suffer, Trump is requesting a 50 percent increase in military spending next year and \$200 billion for the war on Iran. Meanwhile, the biggest Wall Street run-up in history has produced a surge in billionaire wealth to \$8.4 trillion—around nine times what the country spends on K-12 public education each year.

The working class has to take hold of this wealth, created through its own labor, and redirect it to high-quality schools, healthcare and every other social need. That means building a mass movement independent of the entire political establishment. It also means building new organs of workers’ power—rank-and-file committees—which can override the sellouts of the union bureaucracy and unite workers in a common struggle.

This is what the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is fighting to build all over the world, as struggles by workers continue to break out internationally against austerity, inequality and war.



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