

“This is gaslighting. A deception”: Los Angeles school workers denounce union-backed sellout contracts

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22 April 2026

Build a movement against the sellouts! Fill out the form below for help in building a rank-and-file committee at your school.

Educators, classified staff and parents across the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) are speaking out against the tentative agreements between the district and three unions. These deals were used to call off what would have been the first unified strike of 77,000 LAUSD employees and are being imposed in direct opposition to the will of rank-and-file workers.

Voting is ongoing for members of United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) and the Associated Administrators of Los Angeles (AALA); Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 99 has yet to schedule its vote.

The WSWS is urging workers to reject all three contracts, which impose stagnant wages and pave the way for huge budget cuts. In an analysis published Wednesday, it urged educators “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,” the WSWS concluded.

“Pay teachers a living wage”

A WSWS analysis of comments on union social media found roughly two-thirds of UTLA comments and a majority of SEIU 99 comments were against the contracts.

Many spoke out against the inadequate wage increases. For teachers, this is only 11.65 percent over three years, but some will get even less. One educator wrote: “Low income in Los Angeles is 84,850 dollars. PAY TEACHERS A LIVING WAGE.” The new starting salary for a teacher under the UTLA contract remains around \$77,000. Another explained, “Mortgages are 6% and few teachers can afford a house in Los Angeles. Groceries go up by 3% every month.”

A third put it directly: “Our salary purchasing power has been

diminished by 3–4% every month. Wake up—gas prices and food, insurance have gone up 30–35% just this year.” A parent of a special education student added, “11.65% [in wage increases over 3 years] is not enough. These educators are literally shielding and protecting our kids in today’s environment—that deserves far more than the bare minimum.”

One SEIU 99 worker spoke out against the 24 percent increase in their contract, “I personally work 7 and a half hours every day and then go work a home case. And I still make 40k. If I’m working at least 35 hours a week every single week, I deserve to be able to afford to live.”

A food service worker explained, “I need a wage that allows me to work 1 [full-time] job. Currently, I work 2 FT jobs, because LAUSD doesn’t believe their Food Services Division deserves a living wage.” Another cut through the deception: “24% over three years? Cost of living goes up roughly 8% every year. That means we will be in the same place we are now in 3 years.”

“Someone always has to be thrown under the bus”

A veteran middle school teacher in LAUSD, John, with 35 years in the district, told the WSWS: “I thought the contract was garbage. I don’t like how they [are] pitting new young teachers against us with many years [by giving bigger pay raise for newer teachers]. I am a little biased because I’m at the top of the salary scale, and I understand that they want to make it attractive to new teachers.

“But they certainly don’t reward people who’ve been through years and years of service. It’s ridiculous! And in some of the chat groups, people are saying in about nine months, they’re going to open negotiations again. Well, that’s the kind of garbage I’ve heard for multiple contracts.

“One time I heard someone from the UTLA say, ‘Well, you know, somebody always has to be thrown under the bus.’ Okay, this time it was veteran teachers, right? They pit the young against the older teachers. But that is not okay. Why did you let it go so long like this? It’s not right to penalize veteran teachers. What about those people who have been in the job for 30 or 35 years?”

Educators on social media have also denounced the uneven pay raises. One wrote, “This is gaslighting. A deception. When it comes to pay, everyone should benefit equally. This contract is a SLAP to the face to those teachers who reached 98 salary points.” Another noted correctly, “Veteran teachers are getting LESS than what LAUSD offered!” A 29-year teacher commented, “I paid for 98 units, used my sick days for two pregnancies and now getting screwed again.”

For SEIU 99 workers, entire classifications have been excluded altogether from the increase to seven-hour minimums, the threshold for healthcare benefits. One worker wrote, “Instructional Aide Braille positions were not included in the recent 7-hour increase. There are less than 20 of us in the whole district!”

Health Care Assistants (HCAs) were also left out: “So No additional hours for HCAs!!! Wow, horrible.” Workers in Unit F, covering School Supervision Aides, Community Representatives, and Out-of-School Program Workers, are also out. “Nothing includes Unit F,” one worker said.

“How will this be paid for?”

One worker asked the question on the minds of thousands: “How will this be paid for? Enrollment is down, which means less money.”

The district is already under a “fiscal stabilization plan” and is projecting an \$870 million deficit for next year. The WSWs has warned that the district will announce huge cuts as soon as the ink is dry on the contracts, as has happened in other school districts.

The contracts leave the fiscal stabilization plan fully intact. While 200 layoff notices for IT workers were rescinded, which union officials trumpeted as a victory, 457 layoffs affecting gardeners, drivers, maintenance and operations personnel and others are still moving forward. “What about the class B drivers?” one worker asked. “They never get mentioned. This is not a win for many of us.”

John outlined, “I’ve heard that from the financial aspect of it, the district may not even be able to sustain it. They’re deficit spending as it is. Then there’s also declining enrollment. At my middle school I’ve been told that it may go under 1,000 students next year. That means they’ll have to get rid of teachers. When I started several years ago, it was about 1,500 students. The whole LAUSD school board and administration are bloated. All these people sitting down at Beaudry [District Headquarters], what do they do? They don’t go in the classrooms, and they take it as an insult if they are given a choice of resignation or go back into a classroom. It’s too much work.”

“The union gave in...”

Many spoke out against the last-minute deals to avert a strike.

The last remaining contract, for the SEIU, was reached only hours before the deadline in the middle of the night, after a direct intervention by Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass.

“The union gave in,” said one worker on SEIU’s social media. “They should have walked out at 11:59 pm if their demands weren’t met.” Another popular comment declared, “You unions did a TERRIBLE JOB in bargaining. Between not walking out by midnight and settling for so much less when we had so much power—I hope members stand up and vote no.”

The behavior of the unions flows from their material interests. The bureaucracy functions as a labor-management police force, tied to the district, the Democratic Party and the financial interests behind austerity

John, the veteran teacher, was surprised when the WSWs told him that the heads of the UTLA and SEIU Local 99 both make over \$200,000 a year. “Really? We’re told that the head of UTLA, Cecily Myart-Cruz, gets a teacher’s salary. ... Once Myart-Cruz is done, she’s going to go higher in the CTA (California Teachers Association) or NEA (National Education Association) or the Democratic Party. These union leaders are actually very isolated. They’re not in the schools. They don’t deal with the stuff we face. They talk like, ‘we’ve got to do it for the kids, we got to do it for the teachers.’ They don’t give a damn about that stuff. None of them ever go back into the classroom.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges all educators and school workers to vote “no” on these agreements and to take the initiative into their own hands by forming rank-and-file committees at every school—independent of the union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party.

These committees must link up with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to prepare a genuine, unified strike action that 77,000 workers voted for and to mount a broader political struggle to secure fully funded public education and a living wage for all school workers.



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