

Having canceled Los Angeles schools strike, SEIU circulates petition to ask that layoffs stop

Marc Wells
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Having delivered 30,000 classified workers into a poverty contract only days ago, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 99 union bureaucracy has now supposedly just discovered that the Los Angeles Unified School District is proceeding with job cuts anyway.

In a May 15 statement dripping with simulated anger, SEIU demanded that the school board “rescind all layoffs” and urged members to sign an online form letter for delivery to a board meeting on June 9. Readers curious enough to scroll past the petition on the union’s website will find, prominently displayed as the top “read more” link, the original press release hailing the April 15 strike cancellation as an “historic victory.”

Like Captain Renault in *Casablanca*, SEIU is shocked—shocked!—that cuts are happening in a district it spent months helping to stabilize at the expense of workers. The same bureaucracy that blocked a unified walkout of all 77,000 LAUSD employees now presents a letter-writing campaign as a substitute for the mass action it deliberately strangled.

On May 11, SEIU announced formal ratification of the new contract. Workers should call this what it is: a betrayal, and only the opening installment of a far deeper assault still gathering force.

At 2:30 in the morning on April 15, with workers poised to launch the historic walkout, SEIU members received an email announcing a last-minute deal. Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass had personally intervened to ensure the strike never happened. She appeared the following morning alongside SEIU, UTLA and AALA executives, where LA County Federation of Labor President Yvonne Wheeler delivered the most honest summary of what had occurred: “We would rather be here today than on the picket line.” The assembled union officials applauded.

The ~~WSWS~~ published an exposing the fraud it is.

The union and the district did not parade their financial woes before workers during negotiations. There was no honest public accounting of the looming catastrophe. Instead, after canceling the strike, SEIU joined hands with Bass and the LA Democratic establishment to announce they would travel together to Sacramento to appeal for more state funding, presenting this lobbying pilgrimage as proof of their “solidarity.” The cavalry, they promised, was coming.

It is not coming. Governor Newsom’s May Revision, released on May 14, three days after ratification closed, does include a 4.31 percent “Super COLA” and a record \$10.3 billion deposit into California’s Public School Rainy Day Fund. But the bulk of those funds are either legally locked into the reserve and unavailable for district operating budgets, or are already committed to new state-mandated expenditures, including fourteen weeks of paid parental leave that districts must now fund. None of it meaningfully addresses LAUSD’s \$877 million deficit for 2026–27, nor the additional \$443 million shortfall projected for the following year.

This is a manufactured crisis. The systematic defunding of public education is the product of deliberate policy choices, from Biden’s winding down of federal pandemic relief without replacement, to Newsom’s management of state resources, and the funneling of money into the rich. Billionaires in California alone have a collective net worth of more than \$2 trillion.

By ratifying the contract before the May 14 budget release, workers were induced to surrender their right to strike at precisely the moment its use would have been most consequential. The sequence confirms every warning the WSWS raised: this contract was being

rammed through on the basis of lies, and the cuts would begin as soon as the ink dried.

SEIU's statement contains one allegation that deserves serious examination, because it illuminates the full depth of the fraud. SEIU charges that LAUSD has been laying off classified employees while simultaneously spending an estimated one billion dollars annually on private outside contractors performing the same work.

The union points to two practices: the district's expanding reliance on third-party vendors for maintenance, technology and services that should be performed by permanent union staff; and the deliberate classification of hundreds of workers on long-term "restricted status" (essentially indefinite probation) to facilitate their disposal while vendor contracts remain untouched.

Under California Education Code and established state labor law, a public school district cannot legally lay off a public employee and then hire a private contractor to perform the identical work. The practice is, in the union's own words, unlawful. The issue was reportedly central enough to the April negotiations that the tentative agreement included new anti-subcontracting language.

Yet enforcement provisions remain contested, and layoffs of gardeners, paraprofessionals and campus assistants proceed in force. The union accepted vague commitments and "joint task force" consultative roles as a substitute for enforceable job protections, and now finds itself "demanding" enforcement of a contract whose weakness it engineered. The billion-dollar contractor apparatus was not a secret during negotiations. The SEIU's answer to what it now calls an illegal violation of both contract and state law is a form letter.

The LAUSD ratification is part of a sweeping national pattern in which an explosive wave of working-class militancy is systematically strangled. This very week, 3,500 Long Island Rail Road workers went on strike in the first major rail walkout in New York in decades, only for the Democratic Party and union leadership to shut it down hours later, with Mayor Zohran Mamdani, celebrated by the pseudo-left as a "socialist," actively supporting scabbing operations. Forty thousand New York subway and bus drivers face contract expirations with the same forces arrayed against them.

At the University of California, AFSCME canceled a planned strike by 42,000 service and patient care workers in the middle of the night, provoking fury among members. In Oakland, a school board eliminated 421 positions two days after a tentative agreement was signed

on a 91 percent strike authorization. San Francisco, Chicago, Philadelphia, all Democratic-administered, all following the same script: sign the deal, bind the workers, announce the cuts.

The union bureaucracies—SEIU, TWU, AFSCME, UTLA—are not failing their members through incompetence. They are performing their function as integrated components of the Democratic Party machine.

The claim that there is no money is a lie. American billionaires' collective wealth stands at \$8.4 trillion, roughly nine times annual K-12 public education spending. Congress, with the Democrats' active facilitation, is preparing more than \$1.5 trillion for the Fiscal Year 2027 military budget, a near-50 percent increase in a single year, as workers in Los Angeles are told there is nothing left for the people who keep schools running.

The cuts already underway are only the first wave. More will follow in the fall, and again the spring, and again the school year after that.

What the experience of April and May has proven beyond all doubt is that workers cannot conduct a genuine fight through the existing union apparatus.

What is required are rank-and-file committees: democratically controlled bodies in every school, bus yard, cafeteria and classroom, independent of the bureaucracy and both capitalist parties. Such committees can link up across worksites; formulate non-negotiable demands for living wages, full-time hours, genuine job security and enforceable prohibition of subcontracting; coordinate with education and transit workers across the country; and prepare action that no midnight email can cancel. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is fighting to build exactly this internationally.



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