

# AFSCME Local 3299 rams through poverty contract on University of California workers

Joshua Rodriguez  
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On Friday, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 3299 announced the approval of a new contract with the University of California (UC) system.

They claim the contract was approved by 96.4 percent and will cover 42,000 UC service and healthcare workers, including custodians, food service workers, security personnel, groundskeepers, medical assistants, MRI technicians and respiratory therapists.

Despite ratification, issues concerning poverty wages, housing assistance, healthcare premiums, parking costs and staffing protections will remain unaddressed and will continue to worsen until the contract's expiration in 2029.

The contract is the result of a massive betrayal, demonstrating once again the basic hostility of the union apparatus to the workers.

A statewide indefinite strike, which was to take place on May 14, was called off at the last minute with the announcement of a “historic” agreement with the UC system. Workers were then only given the “highlights” of the tentative agreement and two to three days to vote on the contract during their lunch breaks. During voting, they were greeted by AFSCME bureaucrats at voting booths who fraudulently sold the agreement off as a supposed “victory.”

At no point was the entirety of the contract ever made available for the membership to read or review throughout the course of voting, making the voting process a sham. Workers were voting on a contract they had never seen.

Additionally, AFSCME Local 3299 actively censored opposition on its social media accounts—disabling comments, blocking members and deleting posts that either criticized the union leadership or called for a “no” vote.

The process was designed to produce a pre-determined outcome. Even if the vote results are legitimate, the high “yes” vote was the byproduct of outright deception on the part of the union apparatus and of sheer exhaustion on the part of workers, who had to work two years without a contract.

The AFSCME Local 3299 bureaucracy does not represent the interests of its members. It functions as an instrument for suppressing and containing the class struggle on behalf of UC management and the Democratic Party, which runs the UC system.

This betrayal is not simply the byproduct of corrupt and greedy individuals within their union leadership, although there is certainly no shortage of this.

The union apparatus as a whole is integrated into the corporate and political structures it is supposed to confront, especially among UC management and the Democratic Party.

A genuine strike by 42,000 workers in the largest public university system in the world would have posed a direct political challenge to the California Democratic establishment and would have served as a rallying point for workers across the country and internationally.

That is precisely why the bureaucracy would not allow it. It is part of a deliberate, coordinated pattern in which the union bureaucracy across all industries and trades have intervened aggressively to strangle powerful strike movements at their most decisive moment.

Earlier this year, more than 40,000 UC graduate student workers in UAW Local 4811 voted 93.3 percent in favor of a strike when their contract expired on March 1, 2026.

The UAW—much like AFSCME—ignored their strike vote and kept them on the job anyway. What followed was the announcement of a sellout agreement that

proved favorable to UC management and failed to address the issues that rank-and-file members had voted to strike over.

In the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), over 70,000 teachers and classified support staff within United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 99 were poised to strike together on April 14, 2026, in one of the largest school work stoppages to date.

Both UTLA and SEIU Local 99—much like AFSCME—called off their strike at the last minute and enforced a poverty contract onto their membership.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass intervened directly in overnight talks to ensure that a work stoppage never took place, while UTLA President Cecily Myart-Cruz thanked Bass for “stepping in.”

Los Angeles County Federation of Labor President Yvonne Wheeler provided the most damning indictment of the trade union bureaucracy as a whole, stating, “We would rather be here today than on the picket line.”

Since the contract’s approval, thousands of school teachers and support staff have been laid off.

Six thousand DHL workers across 16 states had voted 96 percent in favor of a strike when their contract expired on March 31, 2026, but the Teamsters union—much like AFSCME—cancelled their strike one day before the deadline with the announcement of a tentative agreement.

The Teamsters boasted of a “20 percent wage increase, higher health and welfare contributions, and job protections,” however, 20 percent over four years barely keeps pace with inflation. Then DHL announced the closure of its Lakeland/Kissimmee warehouse in Central Florida, laying off 203 DHL workers weeks after the passage of their contract.

The bureaucracy is an instrument of class rule whose purpose is to contain, divert and ultimately suppress working class struggle. The more powerful the objective conditions for a strike, the more workers are determined, the broader the potential for solidarity and the greater the political implications, the more shamelessly and openly the apparatus moves to strangle it.

The answer is not better union leadership or the reformation of the old union apparatus.

The answer lies in building independent rank-and-file

committees at every campus, school, warehouse and workplace where the workers themselves can take the conduct of their struggle out of the hands of the bureaucracy and unite workers across all sectors, industries and national borders in a political fight against capitalism itself.

The struggle for a living wage, affordable housing and safe staffing is possible, but workers are the ones who will have to lead that struggle.



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