

Teachers protest in Los Angeles as more budget cuts loom

A WSWWS reporting team
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On Friday, May 15, two days after a Los Angeles Superior Court judge ruled against a one-day work stoppage planned by the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA), several hundred teachers, students and supporters held a protest rally outside the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) office near downtown Los Angeles.

UTLA president A.J. Duffy, along with the rest of the union bureaucrats, had previously touted the canceled work stoppage as a bold and dramatic show of union power, only to back down on even this limited tactic in the face of the ruling.

Earlier in the day, some union members and supporters staged a sit-in on the street in front of the district's downtown office building. Forty-five protesters, including Duffy, were arrested for blocking traffic. They were booked and released shortly afterwards.

The judge's ban notwithstanding, the number of teachers calling in sick exceeded the usual Friday amount by about 700. Teachers at some schools came early to pass out fliers protesting the board's planned cuts. Around 1,000 students held sit-ins and walkouts at various high schools around the school district as well.

The protesters held signs proclaiming "LAUSD, shame on you!" and chanted slogans against job and budget cuts and the raising of class sizes.

Some of those who had been arrested earlier in the day in the union's civil disobedience stunt spoke to the crowd. They all prefaced their remarks with expressions of gratitude to the LAPD officers for their politeness as they arrested and booked them. They then led the crowd in pro-UTLA chants.

The rally took place the day after Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger announced that the defeat of budgetary ballot measures in the Special Election on May 19 would result in an ongoing shortfall of \$21.3 billion. Up to 5,000

state workers will be laid off, and education and social services like hospitals and healthcare will suffer further cuts, including an additional \$5 billion to be taken from public education alone. This would be on top of the more than \$11.5 billion just gutted from the budget for public schools for 2008-2010.

The day after the May 15 protest outside of the LAUSD offices, a *Los Angeles Times* article revealed that district Superintendent Ramon C. Cortines said after the protests that Duffy and a top aide had met with him before to suggest a compromise: The district would spend more of its federal stimulus money than planned in the coming year, forestalling the need for any teacher layoffs, and the union would agree to concessions, such as a wage freeze or unpaid furloughs.

"Cortines said he was open to such a deal, and that he might be able to offer jobs as long-term substitutes to laid-off teachers." The article further added, "Duffy had no comment on the negotiations."

Duffy's silence should not be treated lightly by workers. There is every reason to believe that the UTLA will enter into a rotten deal with the LAUSD in which they will not only agree to attacks on teachers' living standards, but play a leading role in designing them.

A team of *World Socialist Web Site* reporters talked to some of the attendees of the May 15 protest. One of the students that came to the rally was an undocumented high school junior from Guatemala.

"I've been attending this school for about three years and I don't like what's going on, how the district is doing things," he said. "Not only that, it's very unfair. The classes that I go to are very packed already—we're talking about 40 kids in one classroom. And they want to cut more teachers, teachers that just came to my school recently and they're brand new, and they have already received pink slips."

He was critical of the one-day strike: "I believe if they

really wanted to send a message to LAUSD, it should be at least a week nonstop, because then they would show them the impact that teachers have in the schools. Because without the teachers, the district is nothing. Without the students the teachers are nothing. Basically we need each other, but the LAUSD doesn't see that.

“The teachers have the power to get everything they want and more. They should connect with other working class people.”

The interviewer explained the necessity to break with the Democrats, to which he replied, “I totally agree with that. The Democrats, I call them the Republicrats.” As for Barack Obama, “Even a lot of people who consider themselves radical who are black, like some of my professors, were believing the Obama trend.” He added, “The way I see it, it's manufactured, it's not from the bottom, it's not from the people. He's not representative, I think, at all of the historical things that have happened to black people.

“We need a well-thought-out network of how we affect each other and our lack of coordinated action affects each other.”

Rafael Johnson teaches 11th and 12th graders at Roosevelt High School in LA. He spoke about the response of students to the budget cuts.

“It's clearly evident how repressive the school board is. I had a long conversation with my students in my last class, and the students are very much aware that the administration is not engaged with the students collectively or interpersonally. They realize that they're being moved around, the teachers are being cut that they love.

“You can see it from the demonstration here that there's a great concern, a great anguish that's being felt in the community. But the school board is very much opposed to student organizing in correlation with the teachers.”



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