

Support the National City teachers! Defend public education!

Kevin Mitchell—SEP candidate for US Congress in California
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Kevin Mitchell is the Socialist Equality Party candidate for US Congress in California's 51st district. He will appear on the ballot in the June 5 primary elections. For more information on the campaign, visit socialequality.com/2018.

As the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for Congress (51st District) in the California midterm election, I want to voice my support for teachers in National City who voted this week to authorize a strike. The teachers in National City, which is in the 51st district, are part of an emerging movement of teachers fighting to defend public education throughout the US and internationally.

On Monday, teachers in the National City Elementary Teachers Association (NCETA) voted overwhelmingly (by 88 percent) to walk off the job if the school board does not improve wages and classroom conditions. On Wednesday, teachers protested outside Rancho de la Nacion Elementary School where the National School District held its regularly scheduled meeting.

The board emerged from the executive session to declare that the only decision it made was to schedule further negotiations with a state mediator.

For the 2018-2019 school year, teachers have been offered a miserly 2 percent one-time bonus in lieu of a wage increase. Administrators also want to extend the work day by 5 percent.

The strike authorization comes after five months of protracted negotiations over salaries and school supplies. One of the biggest issues is the fact that the district spent only a third of the \$10.5 million it had budgeted for class materials last year.

According to the NCETA's surveys, almost 60 percent of teachers say they do not have what they need to teach Common Core standards three years after it was implemented. The stress that National City

teachers face is universal, with more than 78 percent saying they are overloaded at work, and 67 percent saying their job requirements are constantly taking a toll on their private lives.

In 1990, the state of California spent \$19,000 per pupil in education funding. In 2017, this was down to \$7,160 after inflation, a decline of two-thirds. Today, California ranks 41st among all states in per-pupil spending, despite the fact that it is the wealthiest state in the country and the sixth largest economy in the world. Yet teachers are told there is no money for public education!

The attacks on teachers' working conditions are ruling class policy supported by both Democrats and Republicans.

The Trump administration has provided the largest tax breaks in history for the rich and the largest military budget for the Pentagon war machine, more than \$700 billion. Betsy DeVos, Trump's secretary of education, personifies the corporatization of public education. She recently told the media that it was up to schools to call immigration police on undocumented children.

The Democratic Party is a determined enemy of teachers. It was the Obama administration that implemented the "race-to-the-top" program, forcing cash-starved schools to compete for dwindling public funds by implementing the Common Core curriculum, which is suited to the needs of big business; introduced merit pay; and turned entire school districts into for-profit charter schools.

Both parties have funneled the wealth of the working class into the hands of the financial elite, especially since the 2008 crash on Wall Street. In Democrat-run California, the state is now the fourth most unequal in the country, having the distinguished "honor" of hosting the most billionaires and the largest homeless

population. Over 20 percent of the state lives in poverty, the highest rate in the nation.

It is this reality, where both parties are conspiring against teachers and the working class, that the unions, like the California Teachers Association (CTA) and the NCETA, do their best to cover up. They promote illusions that local school boards will listen to teachers and that lengthy negotiations with administrators through the union will solve teachers' problems.

In state after state this year, the unions have worked to demobilize teacher opposition and impose agreements that meet none of the teachers' demands. The unions have repeatedly shut down strikes (in West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona) and told teachers to place their faith in Democrats by voting in November. The unions have proven time and again that they are not workers organizations, but pro-corporate syndicates.

The Socialist Equality Party unequivocally supports the fight by teachers for their interests and in defense of public education. If it is to be successful, however, this struggle cannot be left in the hands of the trade unions.

The SEP calls for the building of rank-and-file committees to take the struggle out of the hands of the CTA and its affiliates and link the fight of teachers with the fight of the entire working class. We call for a break with the two-party system and an end to capitalism. The resources exist for everyone to go to school, from kindergarten to university, for free, and for teachers to have a decent work environment with good pay and a secure retirement.

Under socialism, public education will be considered a social right, the same as the right to decent housing, nutritious food, clean water, and a world free of war and poverty. To secure these rights, the working class must put an end to the capitalist system, which is based on inequality and the exploitation of the vast majority in the interests of a tiny minority.

If you agree with this perspective, join and support my campaign for Congress in the 51st district and take up the fight for socialism!



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