

Los Angeles teachers and the fight for social equality

The WSWS Teacher Newsletter
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This statement will be distributed at a mass demonstration of teachers and their supporters in Los Angeles, California on Saturday.

As Los Angeles teachers, students and parents converge this Saturday in a mass rally in downtown Los Angeles, they are part a growing movement worldwide of teachers, students and workers against social inequality and austerity.

This week, hundreds of thousands of “yellow vest” protesters in France were joined by teachers and high school students denouncing education “reforms” and the reintroduction of the draft. Giving voice to this struggle, one student said, “I want a merging of the movement of students, railway workers, yellow vests, of the entire world to put an end to this world of inequality and injustice.” This is exactly right.

This is one fight, the world over. On one side are hundreds of millions of workers and young people. On the other side is a tiny oligarchy of billionaires who are demanding the destruction of public education, healthcare, and pensions.

In the US, Los Angeles educators take their place alongside Oakland teachers who engaged in wildcat “sickouts” this week demanding wage increases, smaller class sizes and better conditions; Fremont teachers who are pressing for strike action after receiving an insulting one percent pay raise offer; and Chicago charter school teachers who struck for similar demands. Teachers in Virginia, Indiana and South Carolina are now threatening to strike after walkouts in the state of Washington and the wave of strikes earlier this year in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Arizona, Kentucky, North Carolina, Colorado and other states.

Allied with the Democratic Party, the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) and the California Teachers Association have kept Los Angeles teachers

on the job for more than a year without a new contract, despite a 98 percent strike mandate from educators. The unions and the Democrats have kept teachers tied up in endless mediation and fact-finding schemes even though the school district continues to offer insulting pay increases and demands for more takeaways.

It does not take a rocket scientist to know what the facts are: educators need good wages and benefits in order to cope with rising housing, health care and other living expenses. They need a substantial increase in school funding to make class sizes smaller, hire more nurses, counselors and special education teachers and adequately supply their classrooms. Educators need increased social services to address chronic poverty, homelessness and other social ills that afflict their students.

The entire corporate and political establishment, headed by the Democratic governor, state legislature and mayor, insists there is no money for any of these basic necessities. If they get their way, California will remain near the bottom of all US states in per pupil spending (46th) and the student-to-teacher ratio (48th). Standardized tests and rigged evaluations will continue to be used to scapegoat teachers, close schools and divert money to for-profit charter businesses.

The WSWS Teacher Newsletter and the Socialist Equality Party urge teachers to take matters into their own hands by electing rank-and-file committees at every school and in every community. These committees should set a strike date and build up the broadest support among staff, students, parents and other sections of workers for a struggle. Committees in Los Angeles should link up with educators in Oakland and across California to prepare a statewide strike to defend public education.

The trade unions like the UTLA and its national

organization, the American Federation of Teachers—headed by Randi Weingarten, who has an annual income of more than \$500,000—do not unite workers; they divide them. This was the role of the unions in every struggle of teachers this year, which emerged outside of the unions themselves. The AFT plays the same role as the United Auto Workers, which has imposed decades of concessions contracts, and the Teamsters, which imposed a sell-out contract on 250,000 UPS workers this year despite a majority “no” vote.

The UTLA and CTA are opposed to a strike because that would quickly develop into a direct political confrontation with the state Democrats and inspire teachers around the country to follow suit. That is why the UTLA has kept teachers on the job and offered no resistance when LAUSD Superintendent Austin Beutner fired 15 percent of district staff and announced plans for further privatization of the district under the cover of “autonomy” for individual units and “greater parental engagement.”

The formation of independent organizations of working class struggle must be connected to the building of a political leadership in the working class, opposed to both the Democrats and Republicans, based on a socialist and revolutionary program.

There is plenty of money to improve teacher salaries and public education. California is the home of 143 billionaires on the Forbes Rich List. A 100 percent wealth tax on fortunes above \$10 million on just the top four—Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg (\$71 billion), Microsoft’s Larry Ellison (\$58.5 billion), Google’s Larry Page (\$48.4 billion) and Tesla’s Elon Musk (\$19.9 billion)—would resolve the school funding crisis overnight and provide the resources to guarantee living wages for teachers and a healthy learning environment for their students.

Jerry Brown, governor-elect Gavin Newsom, Mayor Eric Garcetti, US Congressional leader Nancy Pelosi and the rest of the Democrats, no less than Trump and the Republicans, serve the interests of the rich, not working people. Far from encroaching on their grotesque fortunes, they insist that teachers and other workers accept even more sacrifices in order to fund more corporate tax cuts, bailouts of banks and corporations, like PG&E, and endless wars for conquest and profit.

An improvement of conditions for working people, whose collective labor produces all of society’s wealth, is only possible through a frontal assault on the corporate and financial oligarchy, the seizure of their fortunes and a radical redistribution of wealth. Tens of millions of workers and young people are opposed to inequality, militarism, anti-immigrant attacks, police brutality and other forms of state repression, and there is a growing support for socialism in the US and around the world.

The WSWS and SEP are spearheading the fight to organize the working class, including through the formation last weekend of a steering committee of auto and other workers to oppose layoffs and concessions, independent of the unions.

Rank-and-file committees of teachers and other educators will link up their struggles with every other section of workers—auto workers, hotel, garment and health care workers, Amazon and UPS workers, oil workers and others—to fight for the social right to good-paying and secure jobs and fully funded social programs for all workers and young people. This must be combined with a political strategy to unite all workers, black, white, native born and immigrant, in the US and around the world in a fight for socialism.



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