

# January 10 strike date set for 33,000 Los Angeles teachers

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Last week, the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) announced that it had set a strike date of January 10 for 33,000 teachers after failing to reach an agreement with the district after more than 18 months of negotiations.

The announcement came a few days after as many as 50,000 educators and their supporters marched in the nation's second largest school district to demand increased wages, a reduction in class sizes and the hiring of nurses and other critical staff. Teachers in Oakland, Fremont and other California cities are also pressing for strike action as part of the resumption of teachers' strikes, which saw statewide walkouts earlier this year in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Arizona and other states.

Ever since the previous contract expired in June 2017, the UTLA has sought to prevent a walkout in defiance of a 98 percent strike mandate by rank-and-file teachers. This included tying teachers up in worthless state mediation and fact-finding schemes.

Even in his announcement of the deadline, UTLA President Alex Caputo-Pearl made it clear that he would call off strike action if district officials gave the union some gesture to sell the members. "We will strike on January 10 unless we see an addressing of the crucial issues that shape education," the UTLA president declared.

On the question of salary, the district had initially proposed a 3 percent increase retroactive to the 2017-2018 academic year along with a 3 percent increase in the next conditional upon the district's financial health. The union has given its blessing to this insulting pay offer from the banker-turned school superintendent Austin Beutner, which is barely above the rate of inflation and will do nothing to relieve educators facing crushing housing, health care and debt

servicing costs.

According to the December 19 press release, the union is opposed to the "unacceptable strings attached" to the pay raise, not the meager amount. This includes "making it harder to qualify for healthcare in retirement and requiring more work hours for already overworked educators." There is little doubt that the UTLA is willing to crawl back from this position in order to prevent a strike.

From the beginning, the union has told teachers to place their confidence in a supposedly neutral fact-finding panel, which is headed by a former federal mediation official and includes an attorney from a pro-employer law firm and a negotiator for the UTLA's parent organization, the California Teachers Association.

At the same time, the panel said an agreement based on the proposals of either side would lead to more spending cutbacks, and its chair has recommended a sharp decrease in retiree health care benefits to pay for any salary increases. "Making some adjustment for future teachers is warranted and it may help in the future to free up more money for salaries as opposed to diverting so much money to retiree health benefits."

While the panel found only marginal differences in the bargaining positions of the two parties and recommended a quick resolution. While little separates the positions of the union, district and state officials, there is a vast gap between all of them and the aspirations of teachers and the needs of their students.

This underscores with the utmost urgency calls by the *WSWS Teacher Newsletter* for teachers to form rank-and-file committees independently of the trade unions to conduct a genuine fight.

In opposition to the UTLA's efforts to isolate teachers, rank-and-file committees should expand the

districtwide strike to all 30,000 school support staff and thousands of charter school instructors and staff.

At the same time, these committees should establish links of communication with broader sections of workers throughout Los Angeles and teachers in Oakland, Fremont and across the state to prepare a statewide strike. Rank-and-file committees should take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the UTLA and oversee all negotiations and contract votes to prevent any backroom deals.

According to its more recent strike handbook, the UTLA plans to pay teachers nothing for the first 10 days of the strike and then force teachers to apply for loans through the California Credit Union. Meanwhile the CTA is paying its president Eric Heins a \$317,000 compensation package.

The UTLA has not called a walkout in three decades—the strike fund belongs to workers, not union bureaucrats. Rank-and-file committees should demand the payment of full pay and benefits for the duration of the strike.

Maria, who has taught in the district since 2002, recently told the *World Socialist Web Site* that her students come from all around the globe, including Mexico, Guatemala, Russia and Cambodia. “If we strike,” Maria said, “Beutner will say we don’t care about the children. But he’s always involved in secret meetings with business and charter schools. And then there’s the union—they also unionize the charter schools. How can they be with us if they’re for charters?”

The UTLA and CTA are aligned with the Democratic Party, which is no less an enemy of teachers and public education than the Republicans. Democrats like Governor Brown have overseen billions in tax cuts for big corporations and the rich, while systematically starving public education of vital resources. The state of California is now 43rd in the nation in per-pupil spending even though it is home to more than 140 billionaires and would be the fifth largest economy in the world if it were a separate country.

The unions are doing everything to prevent a real struggle that would immediately come into conflict with incoming Governor Gavin Newsom, the Democratic supermajority in the state legislature and the Democrats who control the Los Angeles city government and school district. But such a struggle is

what is necessary.

The fight to defend the right to public education and to eradicate poverty and other social ills that afflict students in Los Angeles demands the political mobilization of the working class against the capitalist profit system and both corporate-controlled political parties. What is required is a fight for socialism and vast redistribution of wealth to meet human need, not private profit.



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