

For a united struggle to defend public education in California and beyond!

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On Monday morning, more than 33,000 school workers in Los Angeles are set to strike the nation's second largest district. In waging a fight against school privatization and attacks on public education, teachers are joining a growing movement of workers in the US and around the world.

There is broad support throughout California and beyond for a united struggle. Just last week, hundreds of parents and students packed a school board meeting in Oakland to oppose plans to close nearly one-third of the district's schools. After being forced to work without a new contract since July 2017, about 100 teachers in Oakland carried out a wildcat sickout in December, demanding a statewide and national strike.

A decisive strike by LA teachers would be enthusiastically supported by educators nationally and by workers everywhere—from the Yellow Vest struggles in France (joined by protesting teachers this weekend) and striking workers in India, to Dutch teachers preparing their own walkout and the furloughed and unpaid federal workers in the US.

As the Monday deadline approaches, however, an urgent warning must be made. The United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA), in league with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), has no intention of waging a genuine struggle. Just the opposite: they are seeking to prevent or isolate a strike.

Teachers should be prepared to walk out, regardless of any last-minute delaying tactics by the UTLA. They should fight for the immediate strike action of all school workers and charter school teachers alongside those in the LAUSD. An appeal should be issued to teachers in Oakland and across the state.

To wage a struggle requires the formation of school and neighborhood rank-and-file committees to

formulate demands and mobilize the full support of all workers behind a statewide teachers' strike.

It is essential that teachers take stock of the record of the UTLA. The union kept teachers on the job for 19 months, dragging them through an interminable series of legalistic hoops, only to abandon last week the most critical demands opposing the expansion of charter schools, unlimited standardized tests and other privatization policies. Then the strike date was suddenly postponed—all this despite a nearly 100 percent strike vote many months ago.

AFT President Randi Weingarten (annual salary \$514,000) and UTLA President Alex Caputo-Pearl, together with the rest of the union hierarchy, are at work frantically conspiring to prevent a walkout and, in the event they cannot, to limit its scope and block it from sparking a broader struggle.

Weingarten admitted as much, tweeting this week, "This is not about a strike wave—this is a specific fight for the kids & public schools of LA." Weingarten has made a lucrative career of betraying struggles and is highly sensitive to the increasingly tenuous hold of the unions over teachers.

Teachers should recall that the strike in West Virginia only occurred because rank-and-file teachers organized through social media independently of the unions. To continue their struggles, West Virginia educators defied the unions' injunction to return to work on the basis of a rotten agreement with the billionaire governor.

The response of the unions was to redouble their efforts to impose an agreement—an operation repeated in Oklahoma, Arizona and other states. The tragedy was the fact that teachers in these states did not yet have independent organizations to take their struggle forward.

The unions are not workers organizations, but pro-

corporate syndicates. They work not to unify workers, but to isolate them. They are controlled by wealthy executives who live in a different world—and have completely different interests—from the workers they claim to represent.

The organization of independent rank-and-file committees must be combined with a new political strategy to mobilize the working class against the capitalist system and both big business parties.

The operations of the unions are bound up with their political alliance with the Democratic Party, which no less than the Republicans and the Trump administration is controlled by the rich. It is the Democrats that have spearheaded the attack on public education in California, just as it was the Obama administration that paved the way for Trump.

Under the Democrats, the once-renowned education system has been targeted by years of budget cuts that have left schools starved for resources, with the state now ranking 43 out of 50 in per-pupil spending. Newly elected Governor Gavin Newsom has, in his budget proposal, predictably added no new funding for K-12 aside from that which was already constitutionally mandated.

The UTLA's endless support for the Democrats has emboldened LAUSD Superintendent Austin Beutner, a former Wall Street investment banker. Beutner and the billionaire privatizers are working to dismantle the Los Angeles schools into "portfolio schools." The UTLA has given credence to the lies of Beutner that "there is no money," with Caputo-Pearl promoting a 2020 ballot initiative. He pleaded, "There's a movement to address state funding in California and we need Austin Beutner to be a part of it."

The 2018 strike in Arizona was shut down by the unions with similar promises to gain education funding on a ballot proposal, "Invest in Ed," which was unceremoniously removed from the November vote by big businesses in the state. Caputo-Pearl himself has gone on record advocating for higher property taxes, seeking to foist the burden further onto the working class.

There is no lack of resources. Three individuals in the US now own more wealth than half of the population. If even a fraction of the \$71 billion private fortune of Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, the richest of California's 144 billionaires, were confiscated and

used for public needs, the number of public-school teachers in California could be doubled overnight and their annual salaries raised to \$100,000.

This is capitalism, a social and economic system that sacrifices all social needs, including the right to public education, to the profit interests of the rich. Trillions are funneled into Wall Street at the drop of a hat, and hundreds of billions spent on war, with the support of the Democrats and Republicans. And the ruling class is demanding endless cuts to the living standards of workers and the social services on which millions depend.

Teachers should declare that the full funding of education is non-negotiable. Classes should be no larger than 20. Every school requires adequate full-time support staff, counselors and nurses. Teachers must have a 30 percent wage increase and fully-paid healthcare and retirement benefits.

None of this can be achieved without a frontal attack on the wealth of the corporate and financial elite and reorganization of economic life based on the principle of social need, not private profit.

The World Socialist Web Site Teacher Newsletter appeals to teachers to contact us today at teachers@wsws.org and take up this fight.



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