

This walkout should be nationwide

Los Angeles teachers, students and parents speak out on first day of strike

Our reporters
15 January 2019

More than 33,000 school teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second largest, went on strike Monday. Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to many teachers at strike locations and at a mass march and rally in downtown Los Angeles attended by more than 50,000 teachers, parents, students and their supporters.

Like their counterparts who struck in West Virginia and other states last year, teachers and their supporters wanted to talk about the broader political issues behind the attack on public education, including the complicity of the Democrats who control every level of government in Los Angeles and California, and the explosive growth of social inequality in America. Many supported the call by the *WSWS Teacher Newsletter* to broaden the fight into a statewide and national strike by teachers and all workers against austerity and social inequality.

During morning picketing at Hamilton High School in West Los Angeles, Nancy, who has been teaching for five years, said, "We don't have a full-time nurse in our school or enough counselors. The ratio is one for every 500 students. Our classes are too crowded and we're working with different learning disabilities. We are fighting for more teachers in our classrooms because education is primary.

"Beutner and Eli Broad want to privatize and expand charter schools. We are so against them. We want to have public schools available for all students in Los Angeles. We should have a statewide strike because that would show that we are all together for the same cause."

Pablo, who is also a teacher at Hamilton, denounced both corporate-backed parties for their attacks on public education. "The Democrats and Republicans get their money from the same sources, so they are doing the same thing. There is \$1.9 billion in surplus budget to help community schools and to get more counselors and psychologists, so the money is there. This inequality will continue to exist in America. They want a class that is not so educated so that we won't challenge the one and two percent that controls society."

David, another veteran teacher, said, "The Democrats are joining with the Republicans. They are bought off by powerful

corporations and they don't stand with us like we thought they would. I hoped the new governor, Gavin Newsom, would stand strongly with us. I was surprised that he isn't raising funding. He's probably going to be like so many other politicians, just bought off."

Referring to the comments of Arne Duncan, President Obama's education secretary, who said the Los Angeles teachers' demands were unreasonable, David said, "I'd like to see him walk in our shoes and work in our classrooms. But they just follow the corporate line because it benefits him.

"But we're making a last stand, being the second largest school district in the country, we have to fight this fight. We got pushed into this fight. It would be great to expand this to the Oakland teachers and elsewhere because there is power in numbers.

"The money is consolidated in so few hands, it just goes to their greed glands. The same issues facing teachers are the same for all labor no matter what country we're in. Wherever people are having to work for a living and are unfortunately living from paycheck to paycheck, they are exploited and being taken advantage of.

"We are just not listened to anymore and we haven't been listened to for a long time. Maybe it's getting to that point where we do all have to join forces to fight this. I think this country is great but it's great because of the people who are working hard and trying to make a fair wage, and not those who are only trying to get rich."

A foreign language teacher added, "They treat us like they are doing us a favor to grant us pay raises. That's a joke because people are fighting for the minimum requirement and to have a respectful environment to work in. They're not doing us a favor. This is the basics, and this strike should have been done years ago.

"The walkout should be nationwide. Teachers are not only underpaid, the fact that they are treating us like this is disgraceful. We have to do whatever it takes and not go back to the classrooms until they provide the right environment for me and my students. If we keep showing up to work without this it's like saying, 'disrespect us more.'"

Calvin, a junior at Hamilton High School, said, "I'm out here to support the teachers fight for what's right for us. I really want to get politically involved with their fight. I know that a lot of my classmates want to get politically involved as well."

"Classes at our school are just too large. Not only that, but they we don't have a lot of courses anymore since many of those have been cut. I'm really interested in Physics, for example, but some of our Physics classes have been cut recently."

When asked about the need for a statewide struggle, Calvin said, "I think you're right. This is a powerful movement right now and I'm hoping it will inspire other students and teachers to join."

Aiyama, a junior at Hamilton High, said, "I am here to support the teachers because there have been so many teachers at this school that have supported me. I am in the music academy program, so whether it be academically, or for my extracurricular activities, or whenever I have needed anything, they have been there for me. I feel it is my duty as a student to support them back. Some teachers live paycheck to paycheck to help us have a career. They should not have to live like that."

As to why California, the richest state in the country cannot provide sufficient resources for education Aiyama pointed to her sign, which read, "LAUSD SPENDS 60+ MILLION DOLLARS A YEAR ON SCHOOL POLICE! IS THIS COLLEGE OR PRISON PREP?" She explained, "It is ridiculous that they spend more money insuring we have police on campus instead of nurses, librarians, and counselors."

WSWS reporters also spoke to several students at the downtown demonstration and at surrounding area schools. Lamuel and Eduardo attend Belmont High School, located north of the Los Angeles city center. They are both seniors. They were at the rally to support the teachers along with Lamuel's mother, who is a biology teacher at Belmont High School.

"One of the big issues in my school is the number of students in each class," said Lamuel. "In my AP English Lit class there are more than fifty students. Other classes have between 45 and 50 students."

"My mother is a teacher. I can see the stress that all this creates. When we moved to Los Angeles from the Philippines five years ago, we lived with other teachers for a while. I have seen them grading papers at three o'clock in the morning. With so many students, teachers can't focus on all the students."

Lamuel's friend Eduardo spoke about the conditions in Los Angeles schools. "At the beginning of the school year there were no desks for all the students in our English lit class. They had to sit on the side."

"The building itself is old. Water fountains stop working and there is a lack of open restrooms. Teachers buy supplies on their own without ever getting reimbursed. They buy rulers, crayons, pencils, even paper and notebooks, for their classes."

Conrad, a special education teacher at Hamilton, expressed

disgust over the failed efforts by the district last week to place an injunction on special education teachers, thereby preventing them from participating in the strike.

"They're talking about raising caseloads for special education teachers. That's just something that we can't cope with. We have a lot of difficulties existing with our current caseloads of students. This is not just because of the special circumstances of each student but also because in many cases these students come from impoverished situations. It makes it all the more difficult."

Asked about what he thought about the teachers' struggle in Oakland, Conrad said, "I actually grew up in that area and have two friends who are Oakland teachers. Just last night we texted, and they wished me the best of luck. They told me 'we're watching you very closely, the whole world's watching you. Good luck.' Some teachers in San Francisco said they want to come down and be with us."

"We're all very excited to be here but it is difficult being out of the classroom and not getting paid." Asked about why the UTLA is not using its strike fund to pay teachers, Conrad said, "Well, I don't know the details of the union's finances, but it would seem to me that if you have 30,000 teachers and you haven't been on strike for 30 years, there should be a lot of money in that fund."

Also, at the downtown demonstration was Aida, a teacher at Normont Elementary for 11 years. She is a special needs resource teacher and said the difficulties her students and staff faced brought her out to the strike.

"How do they expect us to care for such large class sizes? And on top of that they put students with vastly different educational needs and abilities together," Aida said. "We are not given enough staff or resources to meet their needs."

En route to the downtown march on the metro train system, Stacy, a veteran of the Los Angeles teachers' last strike three decades ago told the WSWS, "I was on the line in 1989 and have been teaching for 33 years. For us, our school has a charter school co-located on our campus. The charter school took away our art room, music room and computer lab, and now we're cramming kids into small spaces, and its completely unfair. From overcrowding and unfair wages, and not doing right by our children, something has got to change."

"The changes over the last 30 years haven't always been obvious but clearly the systemic issues haven't gone away. We're still in the same fight as we were in 1989. The claim that there is no money for schools is ridiculous."



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