

“All teachers have to get together from all the states”

Los Angeles teachers discuss need to expand strike as UTLA resumes talks to end walkout

Our reporters
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The United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) announced Wednesday night that it would resume talks with the school district, under the mediation of city’s Democratic mayor Eric Garcetti, in an effort to end the powerful walkout by 33,000 educators in the nation’s second largest school district. The mayor said he hopes talks would begin Thursday.

In a press conference yesterday morning, UTLA President Alex Caputo-Pearl told teachers they should be encouraged by the intervention of Garcetti and Governor Gavin Newsom although it is the state Democratic Party, which has been spearheading the attack on public education and teachers. Under Newsom’s predecessor, Jerry Brown, California took the lead in the number of charter schools in the nation, with Los Angeles leading in the state.

On the first day of the strike, Garcetti said the two sides were close to an agreement but only had a “some policy issues to confront on things like charters, on things like how is LAUSD [Los Angeles Unified School District] going to be reorganized under the new superintendent and what role will teachers play in that reorganization.” It is clear, the UTLA has fully accepted Superintendent Austin Beutner’s plans to break up the vast school district in order to facilitate closing more schools and expanding for-profit charters, and is only concerned with preserving the institutional and financial interests of the union apparatus, including access to union dues from miserably exploited charter school teachers.

Last week, Caputo-Pearl announced that the union was dropping six of its demands, including those related to the growth of charter schools and onerous standardized testing requirements. The UTLA president has only opposed a “growth of charters,” saying, “We don’t need the grow-as-fast-as-you-can business model that’s promoted by charter school billionaires.”

In 2012, the Chicago Teacher Union (CTU) shut down a nine-day strike against Democratic Mayor Rahm Emanuel, paving the way for the closing of 50 public schools. In return, the CTU was given the franchise to unionize hundreds of charter school teachers.

In a Wednesday press conference, Beutner, encouraged by the capitulation of the union, once again claimed there was no money to provide teachers decent wages and conditions. “If they can find a nickel, we’ll give them a nickel. If they can find a dime, we’ll

give them a dime,” the former investment banker arrogantly proclaimed.

While the UTLA was maneuvering behind the backs of teachers, tens of thousands marched on picket lines and joined six regional rallies on Wednesday despite a third day of unusually cold, rainy weather in Southern California. Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* discussed the plans by teachers in Oakland to organize sickouts Friday and the need for teachers to form rank-and-file committees, independent of the UTLA, to spread the strike across California and the US.

Melissa is a parent of both a first and fourth grader in the West Los Angeles area. Both she and her children attended a regional rally there.

“What inspired me to come join the picket today was how amazing our teachers are and how hard they work. I feel like now is the time to make education a priority in LA, in the state and across the country. I’m really hoping that this strike can spark something nationwide. It’s about time we change how we think about education and how we prioritize education, and I’m hoping this will spark a movement.”

When she heard about the potential for Oakland to go on strike, she said, “That’s great!”

“I think that we should partner up with the charter school teachers and put the pressure on education as a whole. I feel like there’s a lot of in-fighting between charter schools and public schools, and we really need to unite.”

Naz Somech and her son Eli also attended the rally. “I definitely support a statewide strike and a nationwide strike. All the teachers have to get together from all the states. This is bigger than just LA. There’s Oakland and other states that are facing the same issues.”

“A lot of the 2020 Democratic nominees are using this strike in LA to boost their campaigns, which is just wrong. In California, we’re being tricked by the Democrats, it’s like a mind game.”

A nurse with more than 10 years’ experience added, “In LAUSD just for diabetic students we have 1,000 encounters a day that nurses have to deal with. We don’t even have 500 nurses in the district so just scheduling that volume of support for that one section of students is difficult. You frequently have nurses leaving their campuses to help students at a different school.

“If students have severe allergies and need epi-pens, they have to get a doctor’s note to keep the medicine at school. There was a

student at a campus without a nurse who started having a reaction, so I sent over a box of epi-pens ASAP but had to send them with a non-medical employee. Out of the whole box they accidentally administered the training pen that didn't have any medicine.

"Luckily I was able to follow close behind and was able to fix it and call 911. But if I had been delayed, the student could have died. I had to tell the student's mom that she should keep her kid out of school until she had the order to keep an epi-pen on site."

Rosalyn is a science teacher at Emerson Middle School, a district-run charter school who attended the West Los Angeles rally with a coworker. "Our classes are huge, we get a nurse once a day, there aren't enough counselors and some math classes are up to 50 students," she said.

A coworker explained, "The charters drive out all the students with major difficulties and then they try to tell us that these separate school systems are equal. They're turning education into a cottage industry so that they could make a profit. It's just like the prison system."

"California is run by Democrats and we have the second biggest number of prisoners. Now they want to turn a profit off our students. Liberals serve business same as Republicans, just a slightly different way."

Her coworker agreed, "Red flag, blue flag, it doesn't matter, for the politicians it's all about the money."

At Eagle Rock High School near downtown Los Angeles, teachers and students on the picket line experienced a groundswell of public support. Cars passing by regularly honked their horns in support of teachers during the early morning, while numerous homes had signs in windows and on front lawns supporting teachers.

Dave, a counselor at Eagle Rock since 1995, said, "We have such great parent support. It's very heartening also to see many of our students on the picket line here with us. They're learning a lot. They keep telling me, 'we're part of history, we're part of history.'"

"The students aren't simply out here because they like us, but because they're experiencing many of the same issues themselves. The class sizes are just too big. I know one of our science teachers has 54 kids in one classroom, 56 kids in another. The fact is we want better conditions because it's best for the kids. They want to learn, and they can't do that in an overcrowded classroom."

On the idea of expanding the strike, he said, "That would be awesome. I've read so many statements of support from teachers across the country. They wish us well and wish they could be out here with us. But yes, the more cities and districts are out, the more this struggle will grow. It will be a domino effect and real change will happen."

Sofia, Priscilla and Cecilia are all seniors at Eagle Rock High School. **Priscilla** said, "Our classrooms are definitely overcrowded. Sometimes there are so many kids that the noise in the classroom prevents us from learning."

"Our teachers come to school every day with a smile on their faces. They definitely deserve a pay raise. I totally support teachers from across the state and across the country standing up for what they believe in too. Teachers and students are all dealing with the same situations. Not just Los Angeles."

World Socialist Web Site also received a statement of support from Michael Holmes, an English teacher at Fremont High School in Oakland, California. "I stand in solidarity with the teachers in LA and their refusal to accept the narrative that California, a state that hosts over a hundred billionaire-residents, cannot depart from its pro-market, pro-capitalist stance long enough to fund an equitable public education for ALL its kids, and a living wage for ALL the people who work at the schools."

"The issue exposes the fact that even a state with a Democratic Party supermajority in its legislature is far from compassionate, or just, in terms of supporting its youth and working class. CA ranks as one of the states that spends the least per student. LA teachers are standing up not just for a better deal in their district, but as a symbol of the need for a statewide and nationwide strike. No more passive acceptance of morally bankrupt state and national governance."

Steven Perez has taught at Emerson Middle School in West Los Angeles for 25 years. He said, "Beutner denies that he's superintendent because he supports charterization, but everyone knows that's why he's there. His plan to create 32 'networks' and 'portfolios' is designed to break up the school district and lay the basis to create more charter schools."

"The billionaires want the charters because they know there's billions to be made for the tech companies, for the consultants, they're getting tons of money out of that. But it's not helping the schools or the students."

"We absolutely support Oakland teachers. It's not just about this state, it's across the country. We've had some fairly successful strikes across the country recently, but people have to stand up and unite. The public is mostly on the teachers' side, on the side of public education, because they realize what has happened in the last 15 years."

"They say this is the 'new normal' to have one counselor for hundreds of students, a nurse one day per week, etc., but I don't accept this. That would have been unheard of a couple decades ago, and we're saying now that we don't accept it."



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