

Support for LA teachers' strike

Students and the fight to defend public education

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (US)
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Since the strike by 33,000 Los Angeles teachers began on January 14, large numbers of students have joined their teachers, counselors, and other educators on the picket lines and rallies throughout Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). By taking a powerful stand, teachers are speaking not only for themselves but for educators and their students across California, the US and the world.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) calls on young people to reach out to striking teachers and other sections of workers and youth and fight for the broadening of this powerful struggle. We call on teachers and young people to form rank-and-file strike committees to expand the strike across the state and call on workers across the US and world to join in a common struggle.

Students and teachers alike are fed up with the poor conditions in their schools—growing class sizes, less funding for books and special education, too few full-time teachers and nurses.

The LA teachers are fighting for living wages and to defend the right to high-quality public education as a whole. This pits teachers and young people against the entire economic and political system—capitalism—which subordinates every aspect of life, including the right to a decent education, to the profit interests of the ruling class of billionaire and multimillionaire corporate executives and bankers.

This struggle also pits those who defend public education against both corporate-controlled parties and in Los Angeles and California, in particular, the Democratic Party, which controls every lever of political power, from the school district and city to the governor and both houses of the state legislature.

For decades, Democratic governors, state legislators and big city mayors in California have systematically cut school funding while handing billions in tax cuts to giant corporations and the state's 144 billionaires. This has created subpar learning environments, which have been used to justify school closures and a proliferation of for-profit charter schools that loot public funds and funnel them into private hands. At the same time, mind-numbing standardized tests, which are used to justify the firing of teachers, the gutting of art and music

programs and the mechanization of curriculum, have become the norm in the classroom.

The fight for public education in Los Angeles follows last year's education strike wave that spread coast to coast. In West Virginia, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Arizona and Washington, tens of thousands of teachers remained on strike for days on end to seek similar demands.

Like these other struggles, the strike in Los Angeles has revealed the enormous chasm between the striving of teachers for substantial improvements in wages, school funding and classroom conditions and the actions of the unions like the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the National Education Association (NEA) and the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA).

While the unions say they are championing the interests of teachers, parents and students alike, in reality, they accept and defend the capitalist system and are politically allied with the Democratic Party, the very same party that is spearheading the attack on public education, along with Trump and the Republicans.

Rather than expanding the strike to districts across the state and country, the UTLA, the AFT and NEA are limiting the struggle to LA alone, even as teachers in Oakland launched wildcat strikes at the same time. Officials in UTLA have also dropped key demands on ending charter school expansion and standardized testing and are working with Mayor Eric Garcetti to come up with a deal to end the strike at the expense of teachers and students.

Across the world, the attack on public education is being combated by teachers and students in Kenya, Tunisia, Iran, India, China, New Zealand and Mexico. Inspired by the massive "Yellow Vest" demonstrations, tens of thousands of teachers across France are joining "Red Pens" Facebook groups to oppose funding cuts and poor working conditions in schools and are calling for a united struggle.

These struggles, which have united teachers and other workers of every race and nationality, show that the central division in America, like the rest of the world, is not race or gender. What dominates everywhere is the class struggle—the

battle between the vast majority of the population, which is made up of workers and young people, and the tiny handful of capitalist exploiters.

In every country, capitalist governments are diverting funds to enrich the ruling oligarchy and inflate military budgets at the expense of the working and youth populations. Students and youth know the consequences of these attacks all too well. Schools, rather than serving as safe places for all people to learn at a high level and develop freely, reflect the worsening social conditions of the world in which we live.

All the political representatives of the corporate and financial establishment, including Governor Gavin Newsom and Mayor Garcetti, claim there is “no money” to fund public schools. But seizing even a fraction of the \$71 billion private fortune of Facebook CEO and California billionaire Mark Zuckerberg would be enough to double the number of public-school teachers in the state and hire tens of thousands of nurses, counselors and other educational staff.

But the Democrats, just as much as Trump and the Republicans, will not touch the fortunes of these billionaires, even though it is the collective labor of working people that creates this wealth. The capitalist politicians set the boundaries of debate and the teachers’ union collaborates with them to work out a sell-out contract.

Today, when three individuals own as much as the bottom half of the US population, schools become reflections of this grotesque inequality. Rich students are offered well-funded private schools, a path toward personal fulfillment, debt-free university degrees and six-figure salaried jobs. Meanwhile most students, from poor and working-class families, are offered underfunded schools with overworked teachers, a heavy police presence, and a future of hefty student loan debt, low-wage jobs or the military.

Trillions of dollars have been allocated to fund endless wars, border security and immigration agencies, and the militarization of society as a whole. Even as more youth speak out against social and political issues, such as mass shootings and immigrant raids, the ruling class responds only with more police and surveillance on the campuses.

It does not matter if it is Trump and the Republicans in office or Obama and the Democrats. Both parties have waged a decades-long war against the working class on behalf of the ruling class. In the eyes of the super-rich, a generation of educated young people with a knowledge of history and a determination to create a better world is a deadly threat to their wealth and power. That is why they want to condemn working-class youth to ignorance and servitude.

We cannot allow this to happen.

Teachers have begun the fight, but they need a revolutionary program and new organizations of struggle to take this forward. First, this requires transforming the solidarity of teachers, youth and their families into rank-and-file school and neighborhood committees. These committees must be independent of the

unions and political parties, allowing teachers and students to link up across the United States in an unconditional defense of public education for all. Students can bring this political perspective at rallies, picket lines and across social media, inspiring committees to take form.

Second, this is a political struggle, which requires mobilizing the whole working class—factory, service, technology and other workers—in a fight against both big-business parties. The claims by Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and organizations like the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) that the Democrats can be turned into a progressive party or even a socialist party is a political fraud. The Democrats are the party of Wall Street and war, no less ruthless than the Republicans.

Finally, the LA strike poses the need for youth and students to take up the fight for socialism by joining the IYSSE and building clubs at high school and college campuses. The defense of education and all social rights comes down to the question of capitalism versus socialism: the system of private profit and national divisions of the world, or the system of democratic ownership and internationalism. We fight for socialism, by uniting the struggles of the working class, building the foundations for a mass international movement, and absorbing the history, theory and politics of genuine socialism.

The defense of public education can only succeed through the socialist transformation of society, in which the resources that are currently held in private hands are seized and placed under the democratic control of the teachers and workers themselves. This is the logic of the battle that teachers, students and workers are fighting.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) urges all those interested in defending public education, in California and all over the world, to join the IYSSE to carry forward this critical struggle.



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