

The International Socialist Organization, Jacobin hail betrayal of Los Angeles teachers' strike

Adam Mclean
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Bhaskar Sunkara, the editor of *Jacobin* and former vice chair of the Democratic Socialists of America, made a revealing comment on Twitter January 17, as the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) was preparing to shut down and sell-out the Los Angeles teachers strike.

“The DSA and the ISO [International Socialist Organization] sending tacos to striking teachers is pretty good. But the SEP [Socialist Equality Party] is sending them the correct program, and let's not forget that's the most important thing.”

Dripping with his characteristic cynicism, Sunkara meant his comment as a snide attack on the SEP and the *World Socialist Web Site*. How could anyone, after all, consider the most important thing in developing the strike of teachers to be a program and perspective? Clearly, the DSA/ISO's “Tacos for Teachers” initiative was far more important.

Behind the sarcasm was also a worry—that the program advanced by the SEP was winning broad support, and that the UTLA and its allies in the DSA and ISO were losing control of the situation. The ISO and the DSA in fact had and have a political agenda, which is aimed at reinforcing the political domination of the Democratic Party via the trade unions and thereby ensuring that the strike was isolated and defeated.

This fact was confirmed five days later, when the UTLA shut down the strike in the most blatantly undemocratic manner possible, giving teachers only a few hours to review and vote on a deal announced by the UTLA and the school district that repudiated all the major demands of the teachers. The conditions surrounding the end of the strike have not gone unnoticed by teachers and the thousands of parents who supported them, and many have voiced their anger at the union on social media.

The ISO and the DSA, however, have responded with a

campaign of misinformation aimed at presenting the maneuvers of the union to shut down the struggle as a great victory.

The ISO, which has a significant presence in the “Union Power” faction led by UTLA President Alex Caputo-Pearl, published a glowing article on their website, “We Won a Historic Victory for LA Schools,” by Gillian Russom, an ISO leader and the East Area representative in the UTLA. “The agreement is complex and there's a lot there,” Russom writes, “I think it's a victory on many levels.”

Russom acknowledges in a backhanded way the widespread opposition to the contract. “[P]eople were ready to rule the world—it's natural that there's a lot of questioning: was this the best we could get? What if we stayed out a few more days?” She goes on to defend the contract against anger from teachers.

In defending the eventual lowering of class size caps to 39—which will not happen for years, if it happens at all—the ISO writes: “One of the frustrations at my school that I'm hearing from a lot of folks is, ‘Yeah you're reducing by seven kids but you're reducing from 46 kids to 39, which is still bull****.’ That's totally understandable but one figure to keep in mind is that if you were to reduce one student in every classroom in LAUSD, that's the equivalent cost of a 5 percent raise. So you're talking about a very expensive item in terms of hiring new people.”

In other words, lowering class sizes below 39 is “very expensive.” This is the sort of excuse that could have just as easily come from LAUSD Superintendent Beutner.

Russom goes on to hail the promise to get the Board of Education to agree to a vote on a resolution calling for the state to establish a cap on charter schools. “We got something on that and they didn't have to bargain on that

at all.” In fact, this provision amounts to nothing at all. The school board has a pro-charter majority, and the Democratic legislature has been responsible for making California the leading state in charter schools in the country.

Jacobin magazine, for its part, published an interview with Arlene Inouye, a leader of the UTLA, after the strike was shut down.

Jacobin comments that “strikers were able to wrest major concessions” from the district. This is echoing the assertions that the contract represents a great victory for teachers. A decrease of class sizes by a single student is hailed as “the elimination of Section 1.5 of the contract [that allows the district to ignore class size caps].” The convocation of a Board of Education vote on a resolution capping charter schools--which is by no means guaranteed to pass--is praised as “political support for a statewide moratorium on charters.” A six percent raise, virtually the same as what the district was previously offering, and which fails to keep up with inflation, is also praised as a great achievement.

While acknowledging that “Tuesday’s voting process was unfortunately rushed into a few short hours,” *Jacobin* claims that “a vast majority of LA educators nevertheless feel that this is a historic victory for public education in LA and across the country.” This is merely a repetition of the claims of the UTLA and is belied by the enormous anger of teachers over the agreement and the way it was “ratified.”

As for the interview, it consists of empty questions that allow Inouye to make declarations about how wonderful the agreement was, without any actual examination of the character of the deal or how it was passed.

The social interests represented by ISO, *Jacobin* and the DSA are the interests of privileged layers of the upper middle class. Their aim is to demonstrate to the ruling class that they can be tasked with containing and smothering opposition by taking up highly paid positions within the union apparatus. Caputo-Pearl, with whom the ISO and DSA are aligned, made \$143,340 in 2017, and the UTLA’s seven top officers averaged \$141,552 a year. ISO leader Jesse Sharkey, the president of the Chicago Teachers Union, makes at least \$180,000 in salary and other payments from the union.

Moreover, groups like the ISO and the DSA are allied with the Democratic Party, which has overseen the attacks on public education in California and is predominantly responsible for the state of affairs in the classroom.

While workers are becoming more militant, more

radical, and have in some cases even broken free from the stranglehold of the unions, the pseudo-left has acted to politically chain the radicalizing workers to these anti-working-class organizations. Far from providing teachers and workers with a program to fight, they seek to manipulate the aspirations of teachers to advance the selfish strivings of current or aspiring union executives and Democratic Party politicians. In doing so, Sunkara, the ISO, the DSA and co. were all complicit in the betrayal of the Los Angeles teachers and the consequences that will flow from it.

As the struggles of teachers continue in Denver, Virginia and other areas of the country, educators must base themselves on the lessons of the LA teachers strike. A real struggle requires the formation of rank-and-file committees, independent of the anti-working class unions, to organize a national strike to defend public education. Teachers, moreover, have to unite with federal workers, autoworkers, Amazon and UPS workers and others to develop a powerful counter-offensive against austerity and social inequality, including preparation for a general strike.

The *WSWS Teacher Newsletter* insists that teachers are in a direct political conflict with the Democratic Party, which controls every lever of political power in California and has spearheaded the drive to privatize public education. Mayor Eric Garcetti and Governor Gavin Newsom in California, and so-called progressive Democrats like Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, will no more encroach upon the private fortunes of the super-rich than Trump and the Republicans.

Seizing the wealth of the billionaires and carrying out a radical redistribution of wealth, as part of the socialist reorganization of the US and world economy, is the only way that the resources necessary to defend and vastly improve public education can be secured. That is why the Socialist Equality Party and the *WSWS* fight to arm teachers with the political program that consciously articulates their strivings for social equality, and why the coming struggles of teachers and other sections of workers must be guided by the perspective of genuine international socialism.



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