

One-day strike by Sacramento, California teachers

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Nearly 3,000 teachers and support staff are conducting a one-day strike today in Sacramento, California. The Sacramento City Teachers Association (SCTA) called the limited walkout after 92 percent of its members voted last month to authorize strike action in the state capital.

A last-ditch mediation session Monday between district and SCTA officials ended without an agreement. The Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) employs 2,800 educators who teach 42,000 students.

While teachers are determined to join the growing fight of educators throughout the state, the US and internationally, the SCTA and its parent organization, the California Teachers Association (CTA), want teachers to blow off steam while they maneuver with state Democrats who have spearheaded the assault on public education.

The strike has been officially called because of the district's non-compliance with the terms of the last contract signed by the SCTA in 2017, which included an across-the-board pay increase for teachers, with most receiving a 3.5 percent raise. The contract also contained cuts to teacher health care benefits, which the union and school officials claimed would give the district more resources to hire support personnel and reduce class sizes. Predictably, these promises have never materialized.

Citing a \$35 million budget deficit, the district is calling for additional cuts and demanding that the cost savings from the health care cuts be used to address the budget shortfall. District and city officials have threatened a state takeover if the deficit is not addressed by next November. "Sacrifices will have to be made," Democratic mayor and former state senate president Darrell Steinberg has insisted.

Among the sacrifices will likely be teacher layoffs. In closed door sessions in February and March, the school board passed resolutions mandating the more than 150 layoffs. The SCTA sued the school district, not over the proposed layoffs, but for having "unlawfully engaged in discussions regarding general budgetary matters in closed sessions," i.e., without the collaboration of the union.

This is the third teacher walkout in California this year, and follows a six-day strike by 33,000 Los Angeles educators in January and the seven-day strike by 3,300 Oakland teachers that ended early last month. Both strikes were betrayed by the unions, which are now collaborating in the imposition of budget cuts, school closings, the expansion of charters, and in Oakland, the layoff of at least 257 educators.

Sacramento teachers voted overwhelmingly in 2017 to walk out before an agreement between the union and the district was reached. But the union blocked the strike and is limiting the current action. The last time Sacramento teachers actually went on strike was 30 years ago, in 1989.

The four other school employee unions have openly denounced teachers for daring to strike. After the authorization vote in March, Richard Owen, executive director of the United Professional Employees (UPE) Local 1, said, "We have 100 percent votes saying that's the silliest, most selfish thing you could do to a district that's in these dire circumstances," he said. SEIU Local 1021 executive Ian Arnold said a strike "would be devastating to our students, devastating to our staff, and would really hurt the region. No company would want to relocate to a region where the schools are failing."

Despite the district's claims of financial distress, it confirmed on Monday that it would pay replacement

teachers \$500 each for crossing picket lines on Thursday.

Even though Sacramento is a relatively small school district, the political implications of a protracted struggle are enormous. It would immediately set teachers on a collision course with the California Democratic Party, which has presided over decades of funding cuts to public education, making the state among the last in the country in per-pupil spending. Teacher salaries in Sacramento are among the worst in the state and rank fourth from the bottom when compared to comparable districts.

Teachers must draw the lessons of the struggles of the last 14 months, beginning with the wildcat strikes by West Virginia teachers in February 2018, and build new organizations of struggle, controlled by the rank-and-file and independent of the unions. These committees must rally the broadest support among workers and youth to oppose all budget cuts and school closures and to mobilize the working class to fight to break the grip of the corporate and financial aristocracy, which has enriched itself by looting public education and other public assets.

The fight to defend public education must be combined with the fight to defend all the social and democratic rights of the working class. Only last month, Sacramento police arrested 84 people protesting the murder of 22-year-old Stephon Clark, who was shot 20 times by Sacramento police officers. The district attorney ultimately decided not to bring charges against the two police officers involved, leading to demonstrations in the city involving thousands after Clark's death in March of last year.

While teachers go on strike in Sacramento, more than 80 percent of Poland's 400,000 teachers have launched an indefinite nationwide walkout. The Polish strike is part of an international struggle. This year alone, teachers have struck in Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Iran and numerous other countries across the globe.



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