Sacramento, California teachers conduct one day strike

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Sacramento, California teachers walked out of school on Thursday in a one-day strike to oppose savage budget cuts being demanded by county officials. More than 1,500 teachers rallied outside the Serna Center, where the Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) offices are located. The district employs some 2,800 teachers, serving 42,000 students.

Sacramento teachers are joining a nationwide and international upsurge of teachers and the working class more broadly. Over the last 14 months, more than 450,000 teachers around the United States walked out in the largest strike wave by educators in decades. As Sacramento teachers manned the picket lines, over 300,000 Polish teachers continued their indefinite, nationwide strike launched Monday to demand improved pay and classroom conditions. In dozens of countries spanning five continents, teachers have entered into struggle to demand the social right to free, high quality public education.

Sacramento County is demanding over $70 million in budget cuts over the next two school years, demands the district has quickly moved to impose after the county's Office of Education rejected the district's proposed budget in August 2018. In 2017, the Sacramento City Teachers Association (SCTA) and SCUSD agreed to a contract that cut teachers' health care benefits, with teachers assuming the money would be used to fund additional student programs and for more positions such as nurses, counselors, and librarians.

Instead, the money is being funneled back to the local government, which claims the district ran a $10 million deficit during the 2017-2018 school year, despite a $5 million surplus in 2017. The county then denounced the 2017 contract, which included a moderate pay raise, as being responsible for the supposed growing deficit. This will undoubtedly be used as a pretext for slashing wages after the current contract expires in June.

In addition, cuts to the most vulnerable parts of the population are also being prepared. Sacramento's Democratic Mayor, Darrell Steinberg, who helped mediate the 2017 contract, recently denounced special education as a burden, saying the district needs to "really reduce the cost curve around special education. You look at the numbers and special education is driving a significant part of the deficit." Cuts to early education, students with in-home medical needs, and prenatal education are also being made, with over 150 layoffs already made this year.

While the district and county claim there is no money for teachers and students, and the union accepts this framework, the reality is that California standing alone would be the fifth largest economy in the world and is home to 144 billionaires whose wealth is generated by the working class.

Speakers at the rally from the SCTA offered nothing but empty platitudes and offered no perspective on a way forward in the struggle. The speakers list also included representatives from other unions in the area like the Service Employees International Union, as well as the Oakland Education Association and United Teachers Los Angeles, who sold out their own strikes earlier this year paving the way for budget cuts, school closings and teacher layoffs.

World Socialist Web Site reporters talked to teachers and their supporters at the rally, while distributing hundreds of copies of the *WSWS Teacher Newsletter*. The newsletter urged teachers to build rank-and-file committees independent of the unions in order to mobilize the broadest support in the working class against the bipartisan assault on education.

Teachers from multiple neighboring districts, high

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school students, and many community members came to show support and expressed a great interest in an international and socialist perspective. In many cases, teachers requested newsletters for themselves and to give to others in the crowd, while others asked for multiple copies of the newsletter to pass out at their school sites.

Alice, a substitute teacher in Sacramento described herself as a socialist while outlining the social crisis teachers face in the city. She said she had been homeless for three months, living in her car before finding affordable housing.

"Whether Democrat or Republican, they are destroying education. Trump is just an extension of the neoliberal system propped up by the Democrats and Republicans. He is not a departure, but just an extreme move in the same direction."

Pointing to the Yellow Vest movement in France, Alice said, "It would be a great idea to take lessons from the French; students, transit workers, hospital workers, working for everyone else." She added though that while the Yellow Vest movement was a good start, she hoped it would become more revolutionary in the near future.

John, a bartender from Lake Tahoe and former Sacramento resident, came to support his former teachers. He criticized the district for not paying what they promised while schools do not have enough resources. "Just because you have money doesn't mean you should be able to buy a better education. Everyone should have access to good education," he said.

"California is a Democratic state. How have things worked out the last forty years? Not just public education, but everything. There's a housing crisis and ever-growing homelessness. They say the money's not there, but it is there."

In contrast to the anger and determination of teachers and students, the union officials led impotent chants appealing to the school district like "Honor the contract! Obey the law!" The fact is, the unions are allied with the same Democratic Party politicians whose only obedience is to wealthy bondholders who hold the school debt. District and city officials have threatened a state takeover of the district if the deficit is not addressed by next November.

In his remarks to the rally, California Teachers Association (CTA) President Eric Heins (2015 union income $318,000) declared, "You are standing together with 325,000 educators all across California and we're standing in solidarity with you!" National Education Secretary (NEA) Secretary Treasurer Princess Moss (2015 union income $429,851) said, "I am here on behalf of our three million members to say that NEA supports you!"

This is a complete fraud. Ever since West Virginia, where teachers launched their statewide wildcat strike last year, the teacher unions have done everything in their power to prevent simultaneous strikes by educators so they could isolate each struggle and cut deals that were entirely acceptable to the corporate and financial elite. The great fear that haunts the union executives is that a nationwide strike could erupt that would challenge the austerity measures of the Democrats and Republicans and disrupt the capitalist system that funnels all of society's wealth to the capitalist class and affluent layers like the union executives themselves.

The SCTA, along with the CTA and NEA bureaucrats flown in to Sacramento, will resume negotiations with SCUSD today, with the aim of reaching a rotten compromise before teachers leave school for Spring Break this afternoon. Teachers must study and assimilate the lessons of the past year's strikes and organize themselves independently of the unions to prevent such a sellout from taking place.

The *WSWS Teachers Newsletter* urges Sacramento teachers to form their own rank-and-file committees to defeat this impending sellout. Instead of accepting what the political establishment and the unions say is affordable, these committees should fight for a powerful industrial and political counter-offensive of the working class to fight for a radical redistribution of society's wealth in order to fully fund public education.

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