

As secret negotiations resume between unions and school district

New Haven teachers strike enters fourth day

Toby Reese, Evan Blake
23 May 2019

Over 600 teachers in the New Haven Unified School District, which covers Union City and South Hayward, California, continued their strike for the third day Wednesday. On the same day, union representatives from the New Haven Teachers Association (NHTA) and its parent organization, the California Teachers Association (CTA), resumed backroom negotiations with school district officials, the first meeting since the strike began on Monday.

The strike is the first in the 54-year history of the school district, which serves roughly 11,000 students. While teachers face an immense crisis in public education, which has been systematically defunded at the state level by Democrats for decades, the NHTA is limiting its demands to a 10 percent salary increase to cover the two school years from 2018-20, and raising no demands to deal with the district's unmanageable class sizes or poor staffing ratios.

The school district has taken the measure of the teachers' unions, which quickly dropped their initial demands for a 20 percent pay raise over two years, a \$1,500 retention stipend, and several other items. In response to this capitulation, the district's current offer is a pitiful one-time three percent bonus, a one percent pay raise for the 2019-20 school year, and an extra 0.5 percent for each additional \$1 million received in state funding, capped at one percent. Teachers must reject this offer with the contempt it deserves.

The New Haven teachers strike is the fourth in California since the beginning of the year, following a weeklong strike by Los Angeles teachers in January, a seven-day strike by teachers in Oakland in February, and a one-day strike by Sacramento teachers last month. Each local strike has been deliberately isolated by the CTA, which syphons off roughly half of teachers' union dues to pay executive salaries to union bureaucrats while leaving teachers starved of funds on the picket lines with no strike pay.

New Haven teachers must draw the lessons of the previous strikes waged by teachers in California and across the US. The history of the past fifteen months of teacher strikes clearly reveals that the NHTA and CTA are working behind the scenes to negotiate a sellout contract. To prevent the strike from being isolated and shut down, teachers need to take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands by building independent, rank-and-file strike committees at every school, to raise their own demands and fight to unify with teachers across the state and country for a broader struggle in defense of public education.

In the nearby school district of Fremont, a strike was recently averted by the union after a contract was approved that would increase teachers' pay by less than the cost of living. Similar to educators in Union City, teachers in Fremont are touted as being "highly paid," yet they too do not have health insurance and spend \$800 to \$2000 or more on premiums per month depending on their family needs.

After pushing through the current contract with the assistance of the leadership of the local Fremont Unified District Teachers Association (FUDTA), the school board is now proposing \$13 million in cuts, which are slated to include increased class sizes and the "surplusing" of teachers. FUDTA urged teachers to ratify the contract, negotiated behind closed doors between the district and union leadership, while warning them that teachers could not strike if they voted no because the bargaining process would need to start all over again.

In nearby Oakland, the Oakland Education Association (OEA) ended the strike by colluding with the school board to ensure that the miserable contract they negotiated, which included an 11 percent raise effectively spread out over five years, was predicated on over \$22 million in budget cuts that primarily impacted student services. New Haven teachers recognize the threat of a similar process unfolding in their district and must fight to

oppose it.

As with their fellow teachers who have gone on strike across California, the US and internationally, New Haven teachers have shown great determination to struggle, and have the overwhelming support of their community behind them.

Figures for the percentage of students attending school across the district declined from 20 percent on Monday to only 15 percent on Tuesday, with many students joining their teachers on the picket lines. At James Logan High School, with an enrollment of roughly 3,600 students, merely 125 students attended school Tuesday, 400 fewer than on Monday. On Wednesday evening, roughly 400 teachers, parents and community members marched through Union City to protest the local school board meeting.

Reporters with the *World Socialist Web Site* went to the picket line outside of James Logan High School in Union City on Wednesday morning, where dozens of teachers were at their pickets on each corner of the school long before the school day started. We spoke to teachers about their struggle and the lessons from recent teachers strikes, as car after car drove by honking in support of the teachers and students arrived to join their teachers on the pickets.

Mike, a science teacher with 21 years' experience, spoke about how the New Haven District is touted as the highest-paying district in Alameda County. Mike noted that New Haven teachers "have to pay for health care coverage out of pocket and we have taken many furlough days and other cuts over the years."

In discussing the cuts that came from the Oakland Unified School District following the strike, Mike stated, "That's one of my biggest fears. I'm worried about funding being reallocated, but there is money and I don't think there should be any cuts for teachers or students. I think teachers from across the state need to come together in this struggle, to demand more funding for education."

Rita, who moved from the Philippines and has taken on a second career in teaching a foreign language, said, "as a single parent you have to skimp on something just to afford the basics. Before Medicare, I had to pay over \$800 per month just for my own health insurance. I also have to put extra money in a 403b plan and make contributions to the pension."

Commenting on the difficult classroom conditions in the district, Rita noted, "Our classes a few years ago were 40-45 students per class and the numbers have only gone down slightly. With many of our students, I am often

teaching them a second language, but they have a difficult time knowing a first language! I need to teach them two languages and the grammar rules."

In response to the media's claim that teachers are "hurting students" by going on strike, Rita responded, "Are the students not hurting in the classroom if they are not given a proper education? Younger teachers have a very difficult time with food and housing and are forced to get a second job, which takes away from their energy and time for teaching."

Brenda, a calculus teacher for 14 years, explained that her annual healthcare bill is over \$17,000 and many teachers are constantly looking for a decent apartment for under \$2,500 per month that will fit their family.

"Costs add up," she explained. "Utilities here are ridiculous and the rates keep going up. About half of my gross income is gone after union dues, taxes, and pension payments, and there is very little left. I look on Zillow for a better place to live every other day and I don't think this is an uncommon situation."

"Meanwhile, I teach 38-42 students per class who oftentimes come from families that are challenged economically. We have kids coming to school hungry and oftentimes give them bus money to get home."

Two freshmen students, Milani and Yaritza, stood with their teachers on the picket line offering support. Yaritza stated, "It's not fair they have to go through this. What they do is very hard and underrated and there wouldn't be a future for anybody without our teachers."

Milani commented, "Our teachers work on weekends, not just from 8am-3pm, I have teachers that stay at school until 9pm and come in on the weekend. And it's not just instruction, our teachers support us in so many other ways too."

When asked what they would do if money weren't an issue, the students responded, "We would leave it up to the teachers; they are the ones who do the work and best know what is needed."



To contact the WSWP and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact