

Democrat Tony Thurmond fails to shut down New Haven teachers strike in California

Evan Blake
1 June 2019

On Friday evening, the New Haven Teachers Association (NHTA) announced that after the third straight day of bargaining sessions with New Haven Unified School District (NHUSD) managers, the two sides had once again failed to reach a tentative agreement. Democrat Tony Thurmond, California's State Superintendent of Public Instruction, who helped shut down the 2019 teachers strikes in Los Angeles and Oakland, took a seat at the bargaining table with the express intention of ending the strike.

There have now been six formal and two informal bargaining sessions between the two sides. District managers are ruthlessly seeking to make an example of New Haven teachers, while the union has continually climbed down its demands from a 20 percent salary increase over two years, in addition to other demands, to its current ask for a mere cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) salary increase. The strike involves nearly 600 teachers, counselors and nurses that serve roughly 12,000 students in Union City and South Hayward, California.

Early Friday morning, the NHTA announced that Thurmond would join that day's bargaining session between the union and district managers. In their daily "Strike Bulletin" distributed to teachers on the picket lines, the union gushed praise for Thurmond, presenting him as a supposed ally of the teachers in their struggle.

The NHTA approvingly stated: "Thurmond played a role in ending the Oakland teachers strike. This is great because it means our good, hard work is working. More and more local, state and national policy-makers are listening to us and applying pressure to the school board. Will they - and NHUSD managers - listen?"

In a separate press release, Thurmond stated, "I am happy to do what I can to help with this strike, but I want it known that my priority is to end it, and I will do

what I can to encourage all parties to stay at the table until a resolution is reached, preferably as soon as possible."

Thurmond is now a veteran at shutting down strikes, preventing the expansion of struggles or any significant gains for teachers. During the Oakland teachers strike, the Oakland Education Association (OEA) leadership similarly invited Tony Thurmond to join the negotiations, hailing him to their membership as a solution to the bargaining impasse. In the negotiations, Thurmond demanded that the union bargaining team end the strike as quickly as possible, despite near universal support for teachers across Oakland and the entire Bay Area. Within less than a week, the OEA had forced through a sellout contract predicated on over \$22 million in budget cuts.

Behind closed doors, Thurmond is now undoubtedly pressuring the NHTA to acquiesce to whatever demands the district managers impose upon them. The school board has already cut \$4 million in services this year, with plans to cut another \$8.6 million in the coming two years. Whatever agreement is reached to try to end the strike will then be used to justify even further budget cuts.

The NHTA's breathless enthusiasm for this strikebreaker reveals plainly that the union and state Democrats do not function in the interests of teachers. With every teachers' strike over the past 15 months, the unions have done everything in their power to isolate teachers district-by-district, imposing sellout contracts that only deepen the crisis in public education through further budget cuts. While teachers in each state, across the US and internationally face the same assault on public education, the unions have prevented teachers from uniting in their common struggle.

In this case the NHTA, the California Teachers

Association (CTA), and the National Education Association (NEA) are working to confine New Haven teachers and prevent them from forging links with teachers in neighboring districts and across the US.

In an interview with the *East Bay Times* Wednesday, OEA President Keith Brown stated, “Our members are ready to spend summer vacation in Union City and South Hayward if the New Haven school district doesn’t come to an agreement with New Haven educators.”

The *Times* article notes, “Brown said a ‘significant number’ of Oakland teachers could be joining pickets around New Haven’s schools” on Friday afternoon, at the start of Oakland teachers’ summer vacation. Brown’s claim is a blatant lie; the OEA has done nothing to mobilize Oakland teachers to unite with New Haven teachers. As of this writing, there has been no email sent to OEA members or posts made on social media encouraging Oakland teachers to join pickets in New Haven.

The NHTA deliberately timed the strike to take place when there is no financial harm to the school district, which no longer has to report the daily attendance figures that determine school district funding. In fact, the strike is financially benefiting the district because they do not need to pay striking teachers, who have now lost roughly five percent of their annual salary for this year.

It is now evident that district managers, who are themselves more affluent members of the Union City community, are determined to drag out the strike until the end of the school year. They have refused to continue negotiating over the weekend, and have not relented whatsoever, despite the complete prostration of the NHTA leadership and downgrading of their demands to a COLA increase.

New Haven teachers must reject the pro-capitalist framework put forward by the teachers unions and the Democratic Party, who maintain a symbiotic political relationship with each other while living as social parasites upon the working class. As shown in the climb down of their demands and their efforts to end the New Haven teachers strike, the unions have worked with the Democrats to peddle the basic premise that there is no money for public education, and to insist that teachers must accept the status quo of unending austerity.

There is more than enough money to fully fund a high quality public education for every child and a high standard of living for every teacher, but the wealth of society, produced by the working majority of the population, is monopolized by a handful of parasites. There are, in fact, 144 billionaires in California alone, most of whom live in the Bay Area and own the major tech giants that increasingly dominate economic life around the world. The wealth of the super-rich, in California and around the world, must be expropriated to provide for the social needs of the working class, including the universal right to free, high quality public education.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact