

New Haven teachers strike enters third week

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On Monday, the strike of 600 teachers in the New Haven Unified School District (NHUSD) in Union City, California finished its tenth day, surpassing the length of strikes earlier this year in Los Angeles and nearby Oakland. Over the weekend, the New Haven Teachers Association (NHTA) lowered their demands even further from a cost of living adjustment (COLA) over the two-year contract to a mere three percent pay increase each year and pay for the days when the teachers were on strike.

The district denounced even these limited points and stressed that there would be no pay for any strike days. The last public offer from the district was a 3 percent, one-time bonus for the current school year, and a 2 percent raise beginning in January 2020. The teachers lose about 0.55 percent of their salary every day they are on strike and have sacrificed 5.5 percent of this year's salary so far.

At this point in the negotiations, even if the district were to meet the union's current demands, New Haven teachers would suffer a pay cut against the soaring living expenses in the Bay Area, and the district's schools will continue to be hammered by budget cuts over the course of the contract.

This year NHUSD has already cut \$4 million from the district budget and has planned cuts of \$3.9 million for next school year and \$4.7 million for the year after that. These measures include layoffs of teachers and support staff, as well as increased class sizes. Many high school teachers already have classes of between 36 and 42 students, while elementary school teachers will see theirs skyrocket from 25 to 30.

In short, as long as the strike remains within the framework set by the district and the union, teachers can expect worse pay and sharply deteriorating conditions in the immediate future. This is because the entire negotiating framework is based on the political lie that there is no money to fully fund education.

NHUSD lies in one of the richest regions, in the richest state, in the richest country in the world. California is home to 157 billionaires, with Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook and Larry Ellison of Oracle topping the list with a combined wealth of over \$120 billion, more than enough to personally fund the entire state's primary and secondary education budget of \$97.2 billion.

While the stock market has soared to record highs since the 2008 economic crisis, teacher compensation and school expenditures have stagnated. Housing prices in Union City have more than doubled, from a median list price of \$390,000 in 2012 to \$928,000 in 2019, according to real estate website Zillow.com, steadily pricing teachers and families out of the city.

Far from investing the wealth of society into education, there has been a bipartisan effort to defund public schools and open education spending to private profit through the expansion of charter schools, spearheaded in California by the Democrats. As a state senator, Democrat Tony Thurmond, the current State Superintendent of Public Instruction, voted for bills demanding budget cuts and school closures in districts across the state, including Oakland. Thurmond has been brought in by the NHTA to mediate negotiations, after he facilitated the betrayal of both Los Angeles and Oakland teachers strikes.

In their assault on public education, the Democrats' primary ally has been the teachers unions, which have suppressed the strivings of teachers to improve education for decades. Following the 2008 crash, there was no pushback by the California Teachers Association (CTA) or any of its local affiliates against the austerity budgets passed at the state and local levels. The CTA has deliberately prevented any statewide strike action, while in New Haven the NHTA assisted the district in implementing 24 furlough days over three years during the recession, effectively

exacting from teachers a one-time 13 percent pay cut.

In contrast to all the previous teachers strikes over the past 16 months, the New Haven teachers strike is financially benefiting the school district. State funding to school districts is primarily determined by their average daily attendance (ADA), and the last date ADA determines the majority of district funding, known as the Second Principal Apportionment (P-2), is May 1. Thus New Haven Unified will receive nearly full funding, despite an average attendance rate of roughly 10 percent during the strike. They are not obligated to pay teachers for their days on strike, and in all likelihood the NHTA will cave completely on this demand, as they have with every other demand.

New Haven teachers must ask themselves: why did the union time their strike to take place after the P-2 deadline?

The P-2 deadline is common knowledge among educators, and it applies to all school districts in California. NHTA leadership consciously chose to cede all leverage to the district prior to launching their strike. Further, every local teachers union consults with CTA leadership prior to engaging in strike action, and the CTA surely gave the NHTA the green light to go on strike, knowing full well the consequences that have now unfolded.

This decision alone exposes the teachers unions as anti-working class organizations that do not function in the interests of their membership. The CTA, which is one of the main props supporting the Democratic Party in California, is orchestrating the deliberate betrayal of New Haven teachers.

While allowing New Haven teachers to strike with no leverage whatsoever on their district, the CTA also worked behind the scenes to pressure the Sacramento City Teachers Association (SCTA) to call off their one-day strike, which had been scheduled to take place on May 22, the third day of the New Haven strike.

Further, the NHTA, CTA and their national parent organization, the National Education Association (NEA) are providing no strike pay to New Haven teachers, who are losing upwards of \$500 each day on strike. Multiple teachers with over 15 years experience informed the *World Socialist Web Site* that they lost over \$2,000 on their paychecks last week, which included four days of lost pay from the strike. If the strike continues to the end of the year, as the district

managers intend, teachers could lose over \$10,000 in pay.

While teachers pay more than \$100 each month in union dues, the majority of which goes to the CTA and NEA, they are receiving no strike pay whatsoever. Instead, a GoFundMe page set up by NHTA President Joe Ku'e Angeles has raised roughly \$21,000 from nearly 200 individual donations. Distributed evenly across the union, each teacher would receive a mere \$35 in strike pay, or 0.007 percent of their lost pay thus far.

New Haven teachers cannot remain confined within the straitjacket of the teachers unions. In open defiance of the unions, they should form independent, rank-and-file strike committees to turn out to the working class more broadly, including teachers in neighboring districts.

The fight to defend public education is a political struggle that requires a break from the Democratic Party and their union accomplices and will find widespread support within the working class. The Oakland Rank-and-File Committee to Defend Public Education, whose members fought for such an independent perspective throughout the Oakland teachers strike and have repeatedly joined the picket lines in New Haven, will do everything in its power to support their struggle and mobilize the working class in their defense. We urge all those interested in this perspective to contact us today.



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