

Striking LAUSD teacher: “All the issues we were fighting for in our 2019 strike are the same now”

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20 March 2023

The World Socialist Web Site interviewed Chelsea, an adult education teacher in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) with over 20 years experience. She spoke about the strike this week uniting classified staff in SEIU Local 99 and the teachers in UTLA and the conditions in the schools. (Her name has been changed to protect her identity.)

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Kimie Saito: *What do you think about the classified staff and teachers uniting in strike action?*

Chelsea: I absolutely support them. Their contract expired three years ago! And ours expired last June. We're all working under expired contracts. Meanwhile, cost of living is skyrocketing for everybody.

Last Wednesday there was a rally downtown with the SEIU and UTLA announcing the three-day strike. Some of the parents of my students told me they got a robocall saying, “Be prepared!” [Superintendent] Carvalho is trying to inflame everyone, saying the teachers don't care.

We have not heard a heck of a lot from the UTLA about it, only that we can join the SEIU picket line if we want to, and we're not to cross their picket lines. I'm not going to cross. I was raised in a union family. But this is all on me. Nobody's going to get strike pay. The unions should be paying the SEIU members and teachers for this strike!

KS: *What are your working conditions like?*

Chelsea: The district has made my schedule worse. I've been working a split shift for a long time, and I'm not getting any support from the union. I teach from 8:15-12:30, go back home and then teach from

6:00-9:00 at night. I live 22 miles away. This issue isn't being addressed. I have a bad right knee that gets aggravated when I drive. It just feels like they're trying to force me out. I'm going to be 60 this year, and this is very hard on me.

Because I work in adult ed, we don't have the regular cafeteria workers like at the rest of the schools. The district rents out the cafeteria on our site, and our meals are not supplied by the district. My students work with resource specialists, not with special ed assistants, who are the ones going to strike.

We have been working on an expired contract since June 2021. In addition, because adult ed is a small portion of the district, unfortunately our needs are not being addressed. We're just dragged into the K-12 group. We all need pay raises, but none of our specific issues are being addressed.

KS: *What do you make of the new superintendent?*

Chelsea: When the school year started, Carvalho visited all the campuses. It was like a stage production, really slick. Several of my teacher friends said he was very rude to the employees. When he became the new superintendent, the person who was in charge of adult ed was replaced by one of his friends he brought from Florida. Everything is very corrupt in this district.

He's portrayed as an immigrant; he is from Portugal. But he doesn't have anything to do with the day-to-day lives of our students, who are mostly immigrants and poor.

KS: *Are you getting strike pay?*

Chelsea: No, this three-day strike is on our backs. We're not going to get strike pay. We didn't get strike pay when we struck in 2019 for a week. And two years ago, the UTLA increased our dues. It's not like dues

that autoworkers pay, but still the union is not doing anything for us.

The current union President Cecily Myart-Cruz got reelected. But she has an agenda. She's using her position in the union to go into politics. She wants to create new programs, but we don't need more special programs. We need the union to support us teachers.

All the issues we were fighting for in 2019 during our last strike are the same. They weren't addressed. Our class sizes are very large, especially in K-12. My co-worker teaches fourth grade, and she has 35 students. She has a daughter in kindergarten, and her class has 28 kids. She's struggling and not getting it. The class is too big. There's not enough time for the teacher to work one on one with the kids.

So her daughter hates school because she just gets negative feedback. I told her she's got to get the school to do an IEP (Individual Educational Program) for her soon. Her son, who needed special services, had to wait four years before he got an IEP. That's four years wasted. That's ridiculous.

KS: What are the general social conditions like in LA?

Chelsea: Look at what's been happening in Southern California over the past 10 years. You've got some people who can afford those million-dollar homes, and then you've got masses of people who are homeless. This is a big problem, and it's getting worse. Most of the young adults I work with are 18 to 24 years old. They've got to work full-time just to try to make ends meet. And their parents are working two jobs, barely making it.

And then all the special programs and measures for COVID-19 are ending, while the military is having war exercises in Twenty-Nine Palms [near Palm Springs] getting ready for war with China.

Maybe I'm not so eager to have my son graduate from high school and face all this!



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