

Striking Los Angeles education workers speak out on second day of strike

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Are you a striking Los Angeles school worker? Tell us what you're fighting for by filling out the form at the bottom of this article. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Picketing continued in the three-day strike by 65,000 workers in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the second-largest school district in the United States.

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which covers roughly 30,000 teachers' assistants, maintenance workers, bus drivers and cafeteria workers within the district, was compelled to call the strike due to the seething anger after keeping them on the job without a contract for three years. They are joined by 35,000 teachers in the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) union, who are also working without a new contract.

While the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Los Angeles is about \$2,500 a month, the average pay for education workers is roughly \$28,000 a year, while starting teacher pay in LAUSD is about \$52,000 a year.

Despite another day of heavy rain, on Wednesday thousands of school workers demonstrated at district buildings throughout the city. Unlike the mass rally called at LAUSD headquarters the previous day by the SEIU and UTLA, on Wednesday, the union bureaucracies directed workers to picket at their local schools and worksites for an hour, followed by a three-hour "post rally."

In interviews with the *World Socialist Web Site*, education workers and teachers called for improved wages, better working conditions and hiring of thousands more staff to alleviate overburdened workers.

Enrique, an IT (Information Technology) worker for the district, spoke about the cost-of-living crisis facing workers in Southern California. "The rent for a one-bedroom apartment in LA is at least \$1,400 a month. There's also no parking available. I do have a car, but it gets really tough

when even doing grocery shopping because I have to carry bags of groceries up to my apartment. It's so expensive to buy groceries these days. Look at how much eggs and milk cost.

"I'm single, and the low wages I get are keeping me from even thinking of starting a family ... the net pay is very bad."

Alexander, an intervention coordinator for the district, said that "inflation has just gone through the roof since [the last contract]; that's already four years. So you know, cost of living just for rent for a one-bedroom apartment went being like, easily \$600, to \$1500 now. That's double, that's double easily and they're trying to earn \$19 an hour, not full-time, no benefits with kids at home, so it's just obviously a struggle."

"We have students in the Valley who are students in certain communities doing a lot better off and then I come from a community in the San Pedro area, Wilmington, where they experience a lot of poverty there," Alexander said. "So within the same district, there's a lot of discrepancy over the funding."

"Right now, the LAUSD has a more than 3,000, nearly 4,000 educator shortage," Alexander continued. "Part of the reason for this is the stress, disrespect, and possibly giving more and more to over-testing, just a lot of, you know, memos and things that we have to comply to, but it's also compensation and we're not gonna be able to attract those educators."

Lorraine and her husband both work for the district and are currently on strike. Lorraine is a school teacher and her husband is a forklift driver.

"We have had to learn to live on humble means. It's a struggle," Lorraine explained. "We both have decent jobs, we both went to college, and thank goodness we were able to buy a home before the housing market skyrocketed."

"Newer teachers trying to buy a home now? They cannot buy a home. We have two incomes that we depend on, paycheck to paycheck." Her husband, Joe, (whose name has been changed for this article) added, "We are one paycheck

away from being out on the streets.”

Lorraine added, “There is a lot of turnover, we don’t have the assistance we need in the classroom. The consistency, the stability, it is at a loss. It affects how the education setting works, you have people coming in and out, you have to retrain people.

“In the cafe, they are always hustling and bustling because they have two people doing the jobs of four or five people. The turnover there is crazy. They have to borrow people from other schools to send down.

“Everyone is struggling and that rolls over to our students and their families and the success they have with academic achievement, meeting their social and emotional needs. It is a domino effect no matter where you look. It feels like a desperate situation ... which has only been exacerbated by the pandemic and inflation.”

Referring to the 2019 contract, Lorraine said, “We thought we got a pretty good contract then, but now, ugh, nope, we did not get everything like you guys stated. And so here we are again, and we are here to stay and if we need to come back out again we will.”

“We have three kids,” Lorraine explained. “If we are struggling, I can’t imagine fellow SEIU local 99 members, who are our cafeteria workers, our bus drivers, gardeners, our custodial staff, our heart goes out to them.”

Lorraine called on other workers to “take the strike to your area, if you are struggling in San Diego, in Escondido, it’s about organizing and making your demands heard. They will not survive without the workers. We are the workers. We make the economy work, if it wasn’t for us, there would be nothing.”

Lorraine’s husband, Joe, explained that as an SEIU member, “We have been three years without a contract, come June it will be three years. We haven’t had a pay increase in those three years. We are short-staffed and worked to the bone. There is overtime all the time, because, guess what, there is not enough people to spread the work out.

“We want better working conditions. We don’t need to be going to work every day like we are slaving away, and for what? We don’t even get a fair living wage.”

“For me and a lot of my co-workers,” he said, “they have to shop at the Dollar Tree for groceries. That affects the work production, the environment, the attitude, the morale, because ... instead of focusing on the job, he is focused on how he is going to get food for the night. How am I going to pay for my laundry, gas, rent?”

“We are told we have to be here ‘150 percent’ for these kids, when we are stressing out in a world of poverty.” Referring to the demands put forward by SEIU, Joe said, “We want 30 percent, \$2 bump and 12-month contracts, not

10-month. We want our benefits back, and our rights back that were taken away.”

“As far as the warehouse is concerned, it’s the same,” he said. “Everybody is short staffed, having to do double duty, working overtime, coming in on the weekend, doing all kinds of stuff, and there is no compensation, or merit for what you have done.

“You can be on a promotion list, whatever list, it doesn’t matter, they could care less about who you are and what you have done. They know who they want, there is a lot of nepotism within the district. A lot of corruption, people need to look into that, not a lot of people know about it.

“At the end of the day it’s not what you know, it’s who you know, and that goes from the top to the bottom. We found out that [LAUSD Superintendent Alberto] Carvalho gave himself a 26 percent wage increase. He hasn’t even been here a year. We have been working for the district for over 20 years and we are fighting over 5 and 6 percent wage increases, 30 percent over three years.

“On top of that, we find out this guy goes and builds a private bathroom for his office, over \$100,000 of taxpayers’ money and for what? [Carvalho] is not for the people. He is for profit and that’s what it boils down to. They get these corporate people, put them in these public entities and try and turn the public entity into a corporation.”

He added, “It’s just the tip of the iceberg, and the people are waking up. The people are seeing what is going on.”

Referring to the over \$5 billion LAUSD has in its reserves, the forklift worker said, “That money belongs in the community, not in a reserve account. At the end of the day, that is our money. At the end of the day they are stealing from the workers, they are stealing from the teachers and they are stealing from the students.”



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