

# The global significance of the Los Angeles school workers' strike

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The three-day strike by 65,000 public school workers and teachers in Los Angeles, the largest strike in the United States since 2019, is the latest manifestation of a growing wave of international working class struggles. The worst inflationary crisis in decades, triggered by three years of the COVID-19 pandemic and one year of the war in Ukraine, is impelling workers globally to fight for their interests.

The conditions facing public school workers in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the second-largest school district in the US, are among the worst in the country. LAUSD schools are chronically overcrowded and short-staffed, with workloads steadily increasing while wages are further eroded by inflation.

The average annual salary for a striking school worker is just \$25,000, condemning them to poverty in one of the most expensive cities in the world. A staggering one-third of these workers “have been homeless or at high risk of becoming homeless while working at [Los Angeles schools],” and nearly one in four say they “very often do not have enough to eat,” according to the union which claims to represent them, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Ten thousand workers on strike do not even receive health insurance through the district.

Celene, a striking Special Education Instructional Assistant, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “This is my first year as an instructional aide, and the amount of work has been a real shock. We need more support for our jobs. I work three jobs. I clean houses, work at a warehouse, and work as an instructional aide for special education in the district. I work at least 60 hours a week.”

LAUSD school workers, who have been joined in a sympathy strike by teachers, should be aware that their struggle is unfolding as part of a global movement of the working class. It follows a wave of strikes among US educators last year, including in Minneapolis, Sacramento, Seattle and Columbus, as well as a weeks-long walkout of 48,000 graduate students at the University of California.

Alongside the struggle in LA, in recent weeks mass strikes and protests have taken place in France, Greece, the United

Kingdom, Germany, Portugal, New Zealand, Israel, India, South Africa and other countries. These have involved educators, postal workers, students, retirees, health care workers, garbage handlers, public workers and other sections of the working class.

A highly explosive situation now exists in France, where the despised “president of the rich” Emanuel Macron is forcing through pension cuts in the face of overwhelming opposition in the working class. Millions of workers, youth and retirees have mounted nationwide demonstrations since January, with the French state responding with the deployment of tens of thousands of *gendarmes*, turning Paris and other major cities into armed camps.

The fundamental issues motivating the Los Angeles public school workers' strike are the same as those driving workers into struggle in every country.

The past three years of the pandemic witnessed a qualitative deepening of the decades-long assault on public education in Los Angeles, across the US and internationally. Already overcrowded and dilapidated schools have rotted even further. According to an investigation by the WSWs, at least 10,000 active and retired educators have likely died of COVID-19 in the US alone, part of the horrific global death toll of over 20 million people.

The refusal of both the Democrats and Republicans to implement a scientific public health strategy to eliminate COVID-19 turned schools into the primary centers of viral transmission. Students and educators, packed 30, 40 or more into poorly-ventilated classrooms, contracted COVID-19 *en masse*, bringing it home to infect their loved ones.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—itself guilty of manipulating science to unsafely reopen schools—roughly 65.7 million US children, or 96.3 percent of the pediatric population, have been infected with COVID-19 at least once. This will have untold long-term ramifications, with thousands of children in Los Angeles alone now suffering from Long COVID.

The catastrophic war in Ukraine, provoked by the US-NATO imperialist powers in their pursuit of geopolitical

dominance and resources, is escalating towards World War III. Such a conflict would rapidly draw in and destroy the youth for whom Los Angeles educators are now fighting. The danger of nuclear war, which threatens the annihilation of mankind, has never been greater.

Over the past year, US imperialism has funneled over \$100 billion to the Ukrainian military for its proxy war against Russia. Earlier this month, the Biden administration requested an unprecedented \$1 trillion military budget for the coming year. Similar record military spending has been passed in Germany, Japan, France and other imperialist countries, to prepare for direct conflict with both Russia and China.

The pandemic and the war have wreaked havoc on global supply chains. Combined with the financial bailouts of March 2020 and the military budgets of the past year, these global economic forces have produced the greatest inflationary crisis since the 1980s. Every day, the value of workers' wages falls as corporate profits and the billionaires' wealth increase. Another looming bank collapse would prompt further bailouts, exacerbating the same spiral of inflation and declining living standards for workers.

While the city government and the corporate media hypocritically invoke the plight of the children to denounce the school workers' strike, by the very nature of their profession these workers are acutely sensitive to the social crisis confronting youth which finds constant expression in their daily lives. They are fighting not just for themselves but for the future of the next generation.

To carry forward their struggle, Los Angeles school workers must adopt an international and revolutionary strategy in opposition to the political forces arrayed against them.

First and foremost, this requires a break with the Democratic and Republican parties and the initiation of a rank-and-file rebellion against the union bureaucracies which seek to subordinate workers to the Democrats and the capitalist system.

On Tuesday, Democratic politician Adam Schiff was invited by the SEIU and United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) to speak at their choreographed rally. Schiff, the former chair of the House Intelligence Committee, is a war hawk who has rabidly supported the escalating conflict with Russia. While pretending to be an ally of school workers, Schiff is directly responsible for the war and austerity which are devastating the entire American working class.

Behind Schiff stood UTLA President Cecily Myart-Cruz, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). While the DSA postures as being "socialist," they are in fact a caucus within the capitalist Democratic Party. The DSA

has three members on the Los Angeles City Council and two members on the LA Board of Education, including board President Jackie Goldberg.

Last year, DSA members in Congress voted to support the war in Ukraine and to enforce a reactionary contract on 120,000 railroaders, preventing a powerful strike that would have brought the country to a standstill.

There is deep and growing disaffection with the unions, whose tepid demands will do nothing to improve the living or working conditions of Los Angeles school workers. The betrayals of the UTLA and SEIU in 2019, when teachers were given just hours to vote on a sellout contract, and 2021, when both unions colluded with the Democrats to reopen schools before educators were even vaccinated, have not been forgotten.

On Wednesday, the SEIU announced that their bargaining team has entered discussions with the school district that are being hosted by Los Angeles' Democratic Mayor Karen Bass. This must be taken as a warning. The same process unfolded in 2019, when then-Mayor Eric Garcetti mediated the UTLA's sellout contract with LAUSD.

The unions were forced to call this week's limited three-day strike under immense pressure from rank-and-file workers, which threatened to break out of their control. This tendency towards independent action is developing everywhere. On Friday, educators in Oakland, California, are planning a wildcat strike in solidarity with their class brothers and sisters in Los Angeles.

The growing strike movement in the US and internationally must be broadened to encompass all other sections of the working class. This requires the building of rank-and-file committees at every school and workplace, democratically controlled by workers themselves. These committees must fight for a scientific strategy to stop the pandemic, for a vast expansion of public education resources and funding, and to advance the social interests of the international working class.



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