

Teachers around the world send in support for striking Los Angeles school workers

Our reporters
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The *World Socialist Web Site* has received numerous statements from educators involved in independent rank-and-file committees across the world supporting the strike by Los Angeles school workers this week. The three-day strike, which ended Thursday, involved 65,000 people and was the largest work stoppage in the US since 2019. We are publishing a selection of these statements below, edited for clarity and length:

Australia

This resolution was unanimously passed at a meeting of educators at a working class primary school in the northern suburbs of Melbourne:

Resolution:

“That this meeting of this Roxburgh Rise Primary School AEU sub-branch (Melbourne, Australia), stand in solidarity with the teachers and education workers during their three-day strike in Los Angeles this month. We too are seeing worsening conditions, crushing workloads, pay cuts in real terms and a crisis caused by a growing teacher shortage. Educators and all support staff across the world need to unify and stand together.”

My name is Carolyn Kennett and I am a university educator from Sydney, Australia. I send my support for and stand in solidarity with all the school workers in LA as you take strike action. Your fight against intolerable working conditions, huge class sizes and poverty wages will resonate with workers everywhere.

Education workers across the world are suffering similar conditions and are showing their willingness to fight. Here in New South Wales, Australia, the teachers union collaborated with the state government to enforce a contract that awarded a pay cut (well below inflation) that did nothing to address huge class sizes, massive workloads and staff shortages.

School workers are told there is no money for public education, but governments both in the US and Australia have money to spare when it comes to preparations for war. Biden’s war chest in the billions and Australia’s purchase of submarines also worth billions. This money should be spent on education, health, housing, etc, in other words, on the needs of the population.

The strike by LA school workers is an important step forward but while it stays within the straitjacket that the union is enforcing, it will be betrayed. The lessons from the past are clear.

The message is the same for education workers in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the UK and elsewhere. We need to take matters into our own hands, by forming rank-and-file committees to develop our struggle, that can unite internationally to conduct a coordinated fight against the root cause of the crisis in education, the capitalist profit system.

To all West Coast educators entering into struggle:

I am a long-time secondary school teacher from country Victoria in Australia and a member of the Committee for Public Education (CFPE)—an educator’s rank-and-file committee.

I am sending all Los Angeles teachers warm solidarity greetings in your aims to obtain the outcomes that you need and deserve. But this comes with a caution.

The three-day strike you are about to embark upon will be attempted to be contained by your union. They will seek to isolate your strike from other workers who share common experiences and end it without having taken any positive steps forward.

We have experienced this here in Australia, where the Australian Education Union (AEU) and New South Wales Teachers Federation (NSWTF) have, behind the backs of educators, been working closely and collaboratively with government and overseen a massive decline in teaching, resources and schools. After decades of sellout enterprise bargaining agreements, our public school system now finds itself with massive teacher shortages and ongoing declining conditions.

The lessons we have learned here apply equally all over the globe. Hence, the need to develop independent and democratic Rank-and-File Committees (RFCs), where workers themselves drive the direction they wish to take, not what is dictated to them. I encourage you to contact your local RFC—the West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee—to take your fight forward.

Regards,

Cam

I’m a retired teacher, who worked for 37 years in the public education system in Australia and a member of the rank-and-file committee, the Committee for Public Education. I want to solidarize myself with Los Angeles striking educators. The horrific conditions you face are common to educators across the world that have been imposed by governments of all persuasions and their lackeys in the unions. Your strike is part of an international struggle by educators to try to redress the terrible conditions, poverty wages and inadequate education for your students.

Frank Gaglioti

Educators, parents and students in the Committee for Public Education (Australia) stand in unity with the powerful strike of Los Angeles support staff, educators and teachers.

Your strike and determined opposition to appalling poverty-level wages and conditions—for not only yourselves but your students—ring true for education support workers internationally.

While governments are spending billions to prosecute criminal wars, schools, educators and workers are expected to pay for these catastrophes through ongoing and deepening cuts.

We warn against the union leaders’ antidemocratic maneuvers, lies and misinformation who will be working behind the scenes with the

government and employers to sell you out. Nothing they sign off on will properly address your needs. The union bureaucrats are complicit in every betrayal and act the same in every country.

It is urgent that rank-and-file workers take control of the struggle and break the stranglehold of the unions who are working to isolate you. Reach out to other workers facing similar conditions and join the West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee who will provide advice and assist in taking forward your struggle.

Our rank-and-file committee in Australia, is connected with the West Coast Rank-and-File Safety committee through our affiliation to the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees that is growing in strength and influence as workers in countries come forward to fight. We pledge to publicize your fight among educators and workers here.

Sue, a primary school teacher, Melbourne

Asia

As a teacher from Colombo in Sri Lanka, I stand in complete solidarity with the Los Angeles school workers' three-day strike. I appreciate the courage of their initiative to be a part of the development of the growing wave of the global class struggle.

The striking workers are facing the worst conditions in LAUSD, the second-largest school district in the US, including overcrowded classrooms with inadequate staffs, while wages are further eroded by inflation. The opposition to these conditions by school workers shows that the working class no longer tolerates this terrible situation, and provides a great example and inspiration to teachers and workers around the world.

In the midst of the unprecedented economic crisis here in Sri Lanka, due to President Ranil Wickremesinghe's ruthless implementation of austerity policies dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), acute employment and wage problems have been created in every working class sector well as in the school worker sector.

As a part of slashing public expenditure, the government has stopped the recruitment of new teachers and also suspended the competitive examination for it. Earlier, any graduate could get a job as a teacher after passing the exam. On top of this, our very low wage levels are not enough to meet even the minimum requirements in this inflation. The Sri Lankan teachers participated in a one-day general strike two weeks ago in Sri Lanka, demanding to bring down the unaffordable cost of living, to reverse unfair tax policy and to resolve teacher-principal salary disputes.

But Sri Lanka's teacher unions limited our strikes to one day and isolated us from the struggles of other sections of the working class. They only wanted to dissolve the hatred that was raging among teachers. The unions leading the Los Angeles teachers' strike, which are deeply entrenched in the capitalist political establishment, are trying to reverse the strike by reaching some sort of sellout deal with the administration.

The same problem facing the teachers in Sri Lanka as in Los Angeles is that these struggles cannot be advanced to victory under the leadership of the trade unions that betray them. We must realize in our struggles, the critical importance of overthrowing the capitalist system internationally in a united fight independent from the trade unions.

Prageeth Aravinda, a Physics teacher from Colombo, Sri Lanka

Latin America

Despite the 10,000 kilometers separating us, educators in São Paulo and Los Angeles face a very similar situation: low wages, precarious working conditions, and extensive pro-corporate programs in education. What seemed like it couldn't get any worse has been compounded by the uncontrolled spread of COVID-19 at schools, which has killed thousands of educators and debilitated hundreds of thousands.

While this situation has led to a desperate scenario at schools—with teachers feeling discouraged, frustrated, and sick—it has escalated the anger of educators that is taking the form of work walkouts and protests. The educators' strike in Los Angeles is taking place as thousands of teachers in São Paulo and across Brazil protested nationwide on March 22 against low wages and a pro-corporate high school reform.

This movement is not limited to the American continent but expresses itself in every major urban center like São Paulo and Los Angeles. Significantly, Portuguese striking teachers this year led the largest demonstrations in Lisbon since 1974, when a mass movement overthrew the fascist dictatorship of the Estado Novo.

The struggle in defense of public education in the US, Brazil or Portugal has clashed with the entire political establishment, including its supposedly more "progressive" side—the international allies of the Biden administration and the Democrats. In Brazil, the Workers Party (PT) state governors forced the early reopening of schools during the pandemic and carried out broad attacks on public education, and President Lula's government has filled its education ministry with pro-corporate officials. In Portugal, teachers are mobilizing against the Socialist Party government of António Costa.

But the educators' struggle is also a struggle against the unions controlled by these parties, which have a long history of isolating and betraying the struggles of educators and other sectors. Educators must overcome the illusion that they can pressure unions or governments to achieve their demands. They must take the struggle democratically into their hands, build rank-and-file committees in schools and neighborhoods and turn to this immense social power with the same interests as themselves: the workers internationally.

Here in Brazil, we are closely following the education strike in Los Angeles. Be sure that your struggle is strongly resonating here in São Paulo and around the world.

Guilherme, a teacher at a state public school in São Paulo

Europe

I send fraternal greetings and solidarity from the UK to your powerful struggle against staff shortages, high workloads, burgeoning class sizes and poverty wages within the context of spiralling inflation.

Because educators here in the UK confront these issues also, your struggle is our struggle too and has to be viewed as part the global offensive of workers everywhere.

I am in agreement with your demands and the conception behind them. They can only come to fruition as part of a concerted fight by the working class.

Yours in struggle,

Harvey T.

UK Educators Rank-and-File Committee

Primary school classroom assistant



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