

Former Los Angeles teacher: “Those people in the district and the unions up there, they need to respect us and our children”

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On Saturday, March 25, the West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Committee (WCE-RFC) held an online meeting to discuss the way forward after the end of the three-day strike by Los Angeles public school workers. Among the workers and youth in attendance was Juanita Garcia, a former LAUSD teacher who worked for the district for 26 years. She spoke passionately about her bitter experiences with the leaders of SEIU but especially with the UTLA. As a teaching assistant, she was a member of SEIU Local 99; as a teacher she was a member of UTLA. The following are her remarks to the meeting, edited for clarity and length.

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“I started working for the district in 1982 first as a teaching assistant, and then from 1986-2008 as a teacher. They forced me to retire after the accidents in the school, and they never let me back because of my restrictions! I opened a case that lasted 12 years. Obviously, the union attorney wasn’t strong enough. Finally, in December 2022, they ended my case, and somehow I lost all my rights and benefits.”

“I’m living by the Higher Power performing miracles in my life. I get \$1,545 in Disability and \$500 from Social Security every month. Nowadays to meet my needs, I’m cooking at home for other people. I do some arts and crafts, sell tamales, do translations and paperwork for people when they need help. Legally I can’t charge them for what I do, but people donate something. This is what I do to survive.

“Well, I didn’t see anything good from these unions in all these years. I never got nothing good with Local 99. I was working with them in different capacities and also with UTLA. I was on the board of directors of the

Center for Early Childhood.

“The only thing I got with the union was a 30-minute counseling with the attorneys. I lost my benefits; I lost everything. And that is not good. The problem is that the unions, who are supposedly defending the workers, they always follow the money. And it’s not right.

“It’s not only me. It’s all the people living in the same situation as mine. As soon as you start defending your rights, they call you an instigator, a troublemaker. Even when going to meetings and when representing my grandchildren, this is repeated in every school and at every level.

“They try to make obstacles for us to represent our kids. I know the unions represent the teachers and the classified staff. But we try to represent our children. They are the ones in the middle. They are the ones losing education because of these cuts. It’s so sad to see how this is affecting all these students.

“My two grandkids are special ed, and the district pretends that they give you all the programs that they need. Well, it sounds very good in meetings and on paper, but it is not the real life. I just feel destroyed inside to see my kids and other children in the same situation in my community in San Fernando Valley.

“Everyone deserves a good and decent life, a high education, a good education. It’s so sad to see these budgets, these millionaire budgets. But this is from the top all the way down, from Biden all the way down. Because our children deserve more, way more than what they have. We need to do something. Those people in the district and the unions up there, they need to respect us and our children.

“Talking about business, it’s those kids’ money that is going into their pockets. They are the ones that make

it urgent to make students come to school because otherwise they don't receive the money. But it's the teachers and the staff at the schools who are the ones who encourage the students, encourage them to do their best, to respect you for who you are. And I wish the same for every student.

“We have to do something about this situation. It's for the kids. It's for the workers. We need to build this rank-and-file committee among the teachers and workers to change the situation. The unions are working against us.”



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