

Parents and students support growing rebellion of Las Vegas teachers

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Over the past week, Las Vegas students and parents have been organizing walkouts and rallies in support of teachers at the Clark County School District (CCSD), the fifth-largest school district in the US with over 300,000 students and 18,000 teachers. Faced with significant staffing shortages and a lack of funding for basic resources in the schools, in addition to the rising cost of living affecting all workers, a rebellion is growing among rank-and-file Las Vegas teachers who have entered into the new school year under an expired contract.

Last week, the district declared an impasse in bargaining with the Clark County Education Association (CCEA) and called for arbitration. This comes after the school district had filed an injunction, supported by district and state courts, against the union, in an attempt to halt work stoppages or strike action.

Since September 1, up to 11 schools have closed temporarily due to mass staffing shortages. These closures have taken place due to absences of staff who have called in sick, both as a result of the spread of COVID-19, as well as what have been effectively wildcat sickout strikes by teachers.

Last Friday, students at Basic Academy of International Studies in Henderson, Nevada—a suburb of Las Vegas—walked out of classes in support of teachers who are seeking a massive improvement in their wages and working conditions. Friday’s walkout followed student sit-ins that were held in the hallways earlier in the week.

On Tuesday, dozens of parents rallied outside of the CCSD district office in support of teachers. One parent stated that it was “disappointing” that an agreement could not be reached, especially considering the fact that an extra \$2 billion has been allocated to the education budget for the next two years, as well as an extra \$250 million earmarked specifically for teacher raises.

Multiple rallies by parents have been scheduled to take place at various locations throughout Las Vegas on

Saturday. While the rallies have been promoted as in support of teachers, they are also raising the demand for the resignation of CCSD superintendent Jesus Jara.

Students that took part in Friday’s walkout at Basic Academy have reported numerous retaliatory threats by school administration. This includes athletes being told that they would be taken off sports teams; threats of suspension; threats of being banned from attending prom; or being told that they would not be allowed to ride the bus home if they took part in a walkout.

CCSD has refused to comment on these allegations of threats made against students. There were also reports on social media that right-wing parents had called the police and asked for the striking students to be arrested.

The threats are entirely in keeping with the way the administration is handling the current contract dispute. Teachers across CCSD have reported receiving emails from administration last week, in which they threatened to investigate whether any teachers who had called in sick were really sick, saying discipline, up to and including termination, could be in the offing.

The CCEA for its part responded to the threats by sending an email to teachers telling them to be careful and not call in sick unless they were ill, essentially backing up the stance taken by administration instead of doing anything to defend teachers.

Nevada has antidemocratic legislation in place which prohibits strikes by public employees, and the district has been relying on these anti-strike laws and the complicity of the union to contain mass anger amongst teachers.

In July, CCSD filed an injunction against CCEA in order to prevent a strike. Two weeks ago, the judge denied the injunction. Then last week, another suit was launched by CCSD asking again for an injunction, with the claim that the union was engaging in rolling sickouts. This injunction was granted, with Clark County District Judge Crystal Eller asserting, “The idea that this can be

ignored, that these are sick callouts, and that they are actually due to someone being sick is preposterous.”

Eller’s statement was made just as Clark County was descending from the peak of the latest wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, which, due to the Biden administration’s scrapping of all COVID surveillance systems is now only detectable through wastewater analysis available at Biobot Analytics. The unsafe return to schools undoubtedly helped fuel this latest COVID wave in Las Vegas, as across the US.

It should also be noted that many school sites, in an attempt to avoid further school closures due to staffing shortages, are consolidating classes and corralling students into gyms and cafeterias, effectively creating more super-spreader events. Class consolidations are also taking place under conditions of high temperatures and lack of functioning air conditioning, as was reported at Gilbert Elementary.

Significantly, CCSD is officially short-staffed by 1,200 teachers, although that number is undoubtedly much higher. The district saw a record exodus of more than 2,400 teachers just in the last year, according to statistics released by CCSD.

On Wednesday, the Southern Nevada Health District issued a statement urging residents to get the new COVID vaccine when it becomes available. Chief medical officer Cortland Lohff noted, “It’s really hard to predict what’s going to happen with this in terms of when the next wave of cases is going to be or how severe it’s going to be.” Current wastewater levels of SARS-CoV-2 remain more than double that of late June, before schools reopened.

CCEA has done nothing to wage an actual fight for teachers demanding an end to untenable working conditions. Teachers have been isolated and suppressed by the union bureaucracy, which is working with local officials and Democrats, including members of the Democratic Socialist of America (DSA), who largely control the Democratic Party in Nevada, to strangle the growing rebellion from below.

In fact, just two weeks ago both the district and union met “together and separately” to appeal to Republican Nevada governor Joe Lombardo to assist with crafting an agreement.

The budding opposition among Las Vegas teachers, students and parents is part of a growing rebellion of workers across the US and internationally who are demanding better working and living conditions and are confronting the combined suppression of the trade union bureaucracies and the state.

Over 97 percent of the 150,000 United Auto Workers (UAW) members voted to strike upon the expiration of their contract last week, followed by 98 percent of their 18,000 Canadian counterparts represented by Unifor. But the UAW bureaucracy under Shawn Fain has enforced a “stand-up strike” that compels the overwhelming majority of members to continue to work, keeping workers within the same union at different plants divided, and under threat of retaliation under expired contracts.

Significantly, a major strike authorization vote among 53,000 culinary workers in Las Vegas is to be held on September 26, at the Thomas and Mack stadium. Thousands of Las Vegas casino workers in the UAW have their contracts expiring on September 30.

The working class has enormous potential strength, but to exert this strength it must be unified as a collective mass. It is the working class that creates all the wealth in society, that line the pockets of the rich. Teachers must unite with their true allies: their colleagues at other school sites, with workers in other states and sectors of industry, and internationally.

There is overwhelming support for the struggle of teachers for better wages and conditions among parents, students, and other workers, but this support cannot be subordinated to the diktats of CCEA leader John Vellardita and his cohorts.

Students, parents, teachers and other workers need to take the leadership of this fight out of the hands of those who have no interest in a real fight to improve working conditions and pay. This can only be done through the creation of democratically controlled rank-and-file committees that are independent of both the union bureaucrats as well as the two parties of big business.



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