

Following latest student walkouts, thousands of teachers and their supporters hold mass rally in Las Vegas, Nevada

Jacob Crosse
8 October 2023

This past Saturday in downtown Las Vegas, Nevada, well over a thousand teachers and their supporters rallied to demand better pay and staffing levels.

Throughout the summer, and into the school year, southern Nevada teachers and students have held multiple demonstrations and sickouts in response to the crisis of public education in Clark County, the fifth-largest school district in the nation. Throughout September, rolling wildcat sickouts forced the closure of multiple schools throughout the district.

In the last year, according to the teachers' union president, nearly 2,000 teachers out of 18,000 have left the district.

Saturday's march and rally was held less than 24 hours after student demonstrations began at Mojave High School and Las Vegas Academy of the Arts in support of teachers. Over 50 students rallied outside Mojave High School on Friday before noon, where they remained until the end of the school day. Fox5 reported students chanted "pay our teachers."

At the Las Vegas Academy of the Arts, 100 students walked out of class at about 1 pm. Students held signs calling for pay raises for teachers and a contract. Some of the signs were homemade, while others were from the Clark County Education Association (CCEA).

The CCEA organized Saturday's rally, which began on Fremont street, a popular tourist destination, and ended in front of the federal courthouse. Featured speakers at the rally included Democratic politicians such as Nicole Cannizzaro, the majority leader of Nevada Senate, and union bureaucrats.

Seeking to contain the growing movement of students, teachers and parents safely within the confines of bourgeois legality, CCEA President Marie Neisess announced at the end of the rally that the union is preparing to file a lawsuit challenging the 1969 law that makes it illegal for public school teachers, and all public employees, to strike in

Nevada. The *Nevada Independent*, citing a "briefing paper on strikes from the State's Employee-Management Relations Board," said that the law was passed "as a way to resolve a walkout by CCSD teachers and came at the urging of Strip casino owners who felt their picketing was disrupting their businesses."

"This is our moment to fight. This is our moment to take back what rights were taken away from us many many years ago," Neisess told the crowd. But Neisess did not explain to teachers why it has taken over 54 years for the union to challenge this anti-worker law and none of the Democratic politicians who spoke before Neisess declared their support for overturning the law.

That the union waited to file the lawsuit well into the school year and after the union and the district had moved into the arbitration process, which can take up to a year and half, shows that the union has no real intention of striking. CCEA Executive Director John Vellardita told local news reporters that, "By the time we get a decision, this school year will be done."

WSWS reporters spoke to teachers at the demonstration. Marie, an elementary school teacher since 2001, spoke in favor of joint strike action with the nearly 60,000 casino workers who overwhelmingly voted to strike less than two weeks ago. "I wish they would. I wish they would join in. Other unions together, that's what unionism is...all together so we can help each other."

On the wildcat sickouts by teachers, Marie said teachers "were taking it in their hands. They knew they couldn't...their hands were tied, so we are trying to make a point, trying to get some attention...I don't think it was part of the union.

"The teachers are rallying together, trying to support each other and the students are walking out," she said. "That's pretty neat, how social media and social justice work together."

"I feel like with the gas prices going up, the house prices

are going up, and in order for the teachers to survive...young people, that are first year and second year, they are struggling. They are having to take on second jobs.

“Now I feel like everybody is having to fight for anything.”

Andrea, a teacher for over seven years whose husband also teaches, told the WSWS that she had to replace their air conditioner, a necessity in the desert, which drained them of all their savings.

“And now we’re a little bit stressed because we don’t make enough money, and we don’t even have children of our own. It’s just my husband and I, we’re both teachers. And it’s just with inflation happening, everything’s more expensive. Our insurance went down, so they took money away from our insurance fund. So we got a ‘raise,’ but it was actually not a full raise. We’re having to pay more in medical bills. We honestly, we don’t even really go to the doctor unless we absolutely have to, because we don’t want to pay those higher premiums.

“In terms of work, we got new curriculum this year. I teach first grade, and we got a new reading program, a new phonics program. Last year, we got a new science program. The year prior, we got a new math program. We have to use these programs...but I don’t get the proper training, I didn’t get any training.

“It’s very stressful. And the program... like, we haven’t seen the research on the program and they’re taking away our autonomy as teachers... I’ve learned a lot teaching over the years, and I also did the National Board certification so I’m waiting to get my results for that, but I did that training on my own. I wanted to become a better teacher. I did it on my own money for that training, it was \$2,000. I want to be a great teacher. I want to get paid well, but they’re taking away my autonomy of all these things I’ve learned over the years about the students.”

Andrea explained that she was recently sick for the last three weeks, but that she only took two days off. “I feel very guilty to take days off, because I know that they are going to have to split my class to other teachers, or the teachers are going to have to sell their prep to cover my class throughout the day. So I’m going into work sick—I think that’s why I stayed sick so long, because I only took a couple days off.”

Andrea explained that many teachers are pressured to sell their “preparation” time due to the lack of available teachers. “I get a 50 minute prep every day for my students to go to specials. PE or music or art or science. And we get that time so we can grade papers, we can plan our lessons,

we can deal with the paperwork, anything you need. 50 minutes a day, which is great because again, in other districts, they didn’t get any prep at all. So this is great, but sometimes they’ll ask us to sell our prep, which will give us like for 50 minutes. We get paid \$31.50, but for 50 minutes it will be less than that.”

On the question of a joint struggle with casino workers, Andrea said, “The more people that are able to get a good living wage and able to save money, not just with paycheck to paycheck, I think the more people who come together and get money, I think that will help everybody in society.

“Inequality, the polarization of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, the middle class dwindling for the past, what, two, three decades? I think the more people coming together to say, ‘No, we are not waiting.’”

Asked why she thought the Democrats, which have dominated Nevada state politics, have yet to repeal the anti-strike legislation, Andrea replied, “I think that the Democrats and the Republicans are basically the same...it’s just kind of Republican and Republican-light. And now Republicans are becoming like, extreme terrorists.

Andrea continued, “‘For the people, by the people,’ not for the rich, and not for the wealthy. So, I think that’s the biggest goal and I think that’s the way our society has gone, the fear that it’s ‘us against them’ instead of everybody on the bottom being together. It’s not about race...it’s about the rich trying to be happy and trying to be greedy and mentally ill.

Asked to comment on Biden resuming the construction of Trump’s anti-human border wall, Andrea said, “I’m always about the environment because that’s our bedrock, that’s our place where we come from and it’s the basis of all human life and animal life. But no, I don’t, I think [Biden] said, ‘Well I have to, the money was allocated for that.’ Well, things change, and can you work towards changing that? That money was allocated there, but maybe it can be changed to be allocated somewhere else? And let’s see what the people think. So again, let’s go back to ‘By the people, For the people,’ and see what the people want throughout our country.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact