

California teachers, take the lead to stop the attacks on public education!

Mobilize against Trump and Newsom, build the Educators Rank-and-File Committee to prepare a general strike!

Educators Rank-and-File Committee
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More than 80,000 California teachers are in contract negotiations across the state this summer, with 10 of the largest districts teacher contracts including Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Oakland and Sacramento, expiring on June 30.

The California Teachers Association (CTA), which has 310,000 members across the state, says it is coordinating contract negotiations across 32 school districts in what union officials claim will be a historic, unified campaign.

A united fight is certainly necessary! The Trump administration is implementing a deliberate policy of starving public education of resources in order to privatize it. This follows decades of austerity, implemented by both Democrats and Republicans, including the loss of nearly \$200 billion in state ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) funds, which has rendered teaching and learning conditions intolerable.

The CTA bureaucracy, tied hand and foot to the Democratic Party, has no intention of waging a serious fight. But the Educators Rank-and-File Committee (US), affiliated with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), does. We are building new leadership, independent of both the big business parties and the well-funded union apparatus, determined to use the power of the working class to fight for what educators and young people need.

Committees of educators, parents and students should be established in every school and neighborhood to build up support for a statewide walkout by all California educators. This would be a powerful catalyst for an industrial and political counteroffensive by the working class against the Trump administration, including a political general strike to force the fascist president and his co-conspirators from office.

A powder keg of opposition

A December survey of California teachers gives a glimpse of the conditions that are radicalizing educators:

- More than three-quarters of teachers say overcrowded classrooms are a serious problem at their school.
- California is 48th in the nation for student access to counseling and/or mental health support. The ratio of students to social workers is 25 times

the recommendation.

- 81 percent of California educators say salaries are not keeping up with the cost of living, with 60 percent facing financial insecurity.
- 37 percent of educators are delaying or skipping medical care because they can't afford it. Among young educators, nearly half are.

Layoffs and cuts to vital programs have been coupled with relentless censorship of curricula and libraries and the erosion of democratic rights in our schools. Educators are particularly incensed at the vicious ICE raids targeting students and their communities. Speaking to Educators Rank-and-File Committee supporters, teachers denounced all these attacks.

The CTA's "We Can't Wait" campaign: A bureaucratic maneuver

The CTA apparatus has no intention of mobilizing educators statewide for a fight. Instead, the bureaucracy has crafted a public relations stunt under the vague and noncommittal slogan, "We Can't Wait."

In partnership with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA), this campaign is meant to give union officials a political cover and the prepare another round of sellout contract deals. As the record shows, the AFT, NEA and CTA officials intend to block any unified struggle, even though this will only encourage Trump and his enforcers in the Democratic Party to accelerate their drive to gut and destroy public education.

The CTA "demands" are completely vague: "fully funded and fully staffed" schools and "higher wages." How this is to be achieved in the face of the deliberate defunding of public education, CTA officials do not say.

Instead, they are trying to sow complacency, and the fatal hope that the Democrats in Sacramento and local school districts will come up with "creative revenue-raising" schemes. For example, the largest of the CTA locals, the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA), claims the district's issues can be solved by tapping into financial reserves. Yet the district itself is projecting a multi-billion-dollar deficit.

On top of this, the Trump administration and the Republican Congress are preparing to implement historic attacks on federal school funding through their budget bill. Trump and his billionaire wrestling magnate Education Secretary Linda McMahon are also specifically targeting

California for political retribution over diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policies.

The administration has leveled an unprecedented and illegal threat to withhold Title I (for low-income schools) and IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) funding to California. The state receives about \$8 billion from these formulary appropriations, with the bulk of funding expected imminently. To say this would compound districts' fiscal crises is a vast understatement, as 63 percent of California's 5.8 million K-12 students are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and more than 14 percent are students with disabilities.

Far from warning educators about this looming catastrophe, let alone mobilizing their collective strength to fight it, the CTA bureaucracy is aligned with the Democrats who will be tasked with imposing these savage cuts.

At a recent rally, CTA President David Goldberg called on corporate stooges in the governor's office and state legislature to "be a real resistance and tell the Trump administration to keep your hands off our students!" This is a fraud. Governor Gavin Newsom has repeatedly rubber-stamped Trump's policies and imposed austerity on public schools.

At bottom, "We Can't Wait" is designed to keep teachers' struggles channeled into "safe" actions—petitions, rallies and appeals to the very politicians overseeing the attacks. The real fear of the CTA bureaucrats and the Democratic Party is not Trump—it is the possibility that the mounting opposition among educators will escape their control and become a genuine, independent movement of the working class.

Lessons from Chicago, betrayal by the CTU

The recent betrayal of the Chicago teachers by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), also an affiliate of the AFT, is a warning. The CTU, under similar "social justice" Democratic Socialist of America-affiliated leadership as the UTLA, pushed through a sellout agreement, falsely claiming it would be "Trump-proof." Three of the four years of the contract were unfunded, and now the district faces a \$739 million deficit, mass layoffs, school closures and cuts. This was no accident—the union bureaucracy knew this would happen and consciously lied to teachers.

AFT President Randi Weingarten intervened to block strike action, advising teachers to "go to the courts, go to Congress," while Trump defies the courts and the Democrats aid and abet his efforts to establish a presidential dictatorship.

If the CTA is forced by the membership to call a strike, they will do everything to try to isolate and defeat it. The CTA's campaign is modeled on other recent union maneuvers—the Teamsters' "strike ready" campaign at UPS, the UAW's "standup strikes" in the auto industry, and the University of California academic workers' contract campaign. All were orchestrated by pseudo-left groups like the DSA, Labor Notes and "democratic unionism" advocates, who specialize in creating the *appearance* of rank-and-file engagement while ensuring the bureaucracy retains control.

The Educators Rank-and-File Committee

The crisis facing public education cannot be solved by halfway measures or appeals to the capitalist parties. Only a serious mobilization of the working class—including the preparation of general strike action—can defend public education and halt the drive toward dictatorship.

This requires:

- **A political break with the union bureaucracy and Democratic Party:** The organizations that claim to represent us are the main obstacles to a genuine struggle. They must be confronted, bypassed, and replaced by new organs of struggle—independent rank-and-file committees answerable to educators, parents and students.

- **Building rank-and-file committees in every school and district:** These committees must be made up of the most class-conscious, trusted, and militant educators. Their purpose is to unite teachers, parents, students and workers across industries and regions, laying the groundwork for a political struggle against austerity, dictatorship and war.

- **Real rank-and-file control over all negotiations and actions:** The committees must have the right to countermand any decision by the union apparatus that violates the will of the rank and file, ultimately replacing the apparatus with genuine workers' democracy in the workplace.

- **Educators must fight for what they and their students need, not what the corporations, politicians, media and union bureaucrats say is affordable:** This includes inflation-busting wage increases, fully paid health care and pensions, a vast reduction in class sizes, the hiring of thousands of Special Education teachers, aides and other support staff, and a crash program to build new schools and improve existing buildings, including state-of-the-art ventilation systems and other measures to protect against COVID and other health threats.

- **Defend immigrants and oppose the ICE Gestapo:** The mass deportation of immigrant workers and young people, and the deployment of the national guard and US Marines in Los Angeles is an attack on the entire working class. Immigrant workers are not the cause of overcrowded classrooms and declining social services—capitalism is! Unite all workers, black, white and Latino, native born and immigrant, in a common fight to stop deportations and defend the right of workers to live and work in any country they choose with full citizenship rights.

- **A massive redistribution of wealth:** There is no solution to the nationwide attacks on education without a frontal assault on the wealth of the oligarchy, including the 186 billionaires in California—the most in the US. The defense of public education as a social right is inseparable from the fight to expropriate the oligarchy's wealth and redirect trillions from war and corporate handouts to schools, healthcare and social needs.

The fight to transfer power from the union apparatus to rank-and-file educators and prepare state-wide strike action must be fused with the political fight for a workers' government and socialism, that is, a society based on social equality, not corporate profit. The historic turnout for the "No Kings" protests across the country and the victory of Zohran Mamdani in the New York City Democratic mayoral primary show that socialism can gain mass support in America, and in a far more radical form.

The working class is the only force capable of stopping the gutting of public education and the attack on democratic rights. Across the world, educators and workers are fighting back—from Argentina to Germany, from Brazil to California. Oppositional sentiment continues to grow with recent overwhelming strike votes among educators in Philadelphia, Colorado Springs and Alberta, Canada, and massive teacher demonstrations in Denver, Iowa and Ohio.

We must link our struggles through the expansion of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), and the preparation for mass action, up to and including a general strike, to defend public education and all democratic rights.

No more appeals to the politicians and union bureaucrats who have consistently betrayed us. The future of public education, and of democracy itself, depends on the independent action of the working class.

Join us in building the Educators Rank-and-File Committee and the IWA-RFC by filling out the form below.



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