

The bankruptcy of the California Teachers Association's "We Can't Wait" campaign and the way forward for educators

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Are you a California teacher? Fill out the form at the end of the article to join the fight for rank-and-file committees to defend public education and all democratic rights.

As the new school year begins, educators across the country confront a political and social crisis of epic proportions. Districts everywhere are running significant budget deficits, schools are being slated for closure and shuttering doors, while mass layoffs, program cuts, surging class sizes, and gutted health and counseling services plague public education.

Above all, the Trump administration, acting on behalf of the most powerful corporate-financial oligarchs, has set out to destroy public education. The president and his fascist supporters in various states and school districts are whipping up a McCarthyite atmosphere targeting educators with loyalty tests, religious mandates, and censorship laws. This goes hand in hand with plans to destroy Social Security, Medicare, public health and other gains won by the working class to further enrich the oligarchy and wage world war.

Well aware these efforts to eliminate the social achievements of the 20th century will provoke intense opposition, Trump has deployed the military to Los Angeles and Washington D.C. and has declared "war" on Chicago and other cities. Troops have been used to back the ICE gestapo, which has raided workplaces and kidnapped parents and even students. At least 10 documented cases of ICE raids at schools in Los Angeles and San Diego have taken place since classes resumed.

But the attack on immigrants is only a dry run for an assault on the entire working class. The deployment of troops to US cities is part of Trump's plans to establish a military-police dictatorship and crush the resistance by workers and young people to social counterrevolution.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* starkly warned in its Labor Day Statement, "Trump is operating in the White House as a fascist. He has deputized gun thugs and masked men to terrorize cities and working class communities. Trump is beginning with immigrant workers, but it will not stop there. ... The specter of Hitlerism now stalks the United States."

There is only one force that can stop this: the working class. The fight to defend public education and oppose budget cuts, layoffs and school closures must be combined with a fight to defend democracy. Educators in California and across the US must prepare statewide and national strikes as part of the preparation for a general strike by the whole working class to drive Trump out of power.

Such an industrial counter-offensive must be combined with the political struggle for the working class to take power, expropriate the oligarchy, end war and allocate trillions to vastly improve public education and raise the material and cultural conditions of the whole population.

Such a movement must be developed by rank-and-file educators themselves, independently of the Democratic Party and the trade union bureaucracies that run the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and

National Education Association (NEA) and their state and local affiliates.

The Democratic Party and union officials have done nothing to stop Trump's dictatorial measures. Instead, they have prevented strikes by educators and city workers in Chicago, Philadelphia and other cities, and told workers to rely on the courts and election of Democrats in 2026 to defend themselves. Having taken the measure of this bogus "opposition," Trump has only escalated attacks on the social and democratic rights of working people.

The capitulation of the Democrats and trade union officials to Trump cannot simply be chalked up to cowardice. The fact is they defend the same corporate-financial oligarchy as the Republicans and fear a movement of the working class from below far more than a fascist dictatorship.

The California Teachers Association's "We Can't Wait" campaign

It is within this social and political context that teachers must examine the California Teachers Association's (CTA) "We Can't Wait" campaign. The CTA apparatus hailed the campaign, launched in February, as an act of "historic unity" of 32 union locals facing contract expirations. Union officials pledged to carry out a fight for "fully funded schools" and "higher wages" in order "to give students, educators and communities what they need and deserve to thrive long-term."

This has been nothing but hot air. Far from mobilizing educators in common strike action, the CTA bureaucracy sent 80,000 teachers back into classrooms under expired contracts, including in Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Oakland and Sacramento.

The CTA apparatus—tied hand and foot to Governor Gavin Newsom, the Democratic Party and the big business interests they defend—has blocked strike action, not because there is any lack of public support for such action, but precisely because a teacher walkout has the potential to become the catalyst for a far broader movement of the working class across the US.

The "actions" included in the campaign are nothing but impotent PR stunts. Teachers and families are told to share things on social media, attend sign-making parties, "rally *before* school," sign petitions, "walk in all together," join "informational pickets," and participate in appeals to the very politicians gutting schools.

In reality, the "We Can't Wait" campaign is an operation to keep opposition within harmless channels, block a statewide strike which would rapidly develop into a confrontation with both Trump and the Democratic Party, and pave the way for even deeper cuts.

This is not an arbitrary assessment. The CTA is following the same playbook as the teacher unions in Chicago and Philadelphia, where the bureaucracy's blocking of strikes opened up teachers and students to massive cuts and only emboldened Trump.

After the Chicago Teachers Union claimed that it had won a "transformative" four-year contract that would "Trump-proof" the district, Mayor Brandon Johnson, a former CTU official, declared that cuts were necessary due to Trump's "takeover" and the district's financial crisis. School officials have already floated proposals of up to 1,700 layoffs.

In late August, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) union rammed through a sellout contract to prevent a strike by 14,000 educators. After claiming that there were no changes to health care costs for workers, PFT leaders agreed to a deal that offered only 3 percent wage increases and skyrocketing health care costs for new-hires. The deal has no protections against budget cuts, school closures or layoffs, as the district has a \$306 million budget deficit for the 2026 fiscal year, which is expected to rise to \$774 million by 2030.

The "We Can't Wait" campaign is also modeled on the bogus "strike ready" campaigns employed by the Teamsters and the United Auto Workers bureaucracy. In 2023, Teamsters President Sean O'Brien held similar PR stunts before imposing a sellout agreement on 340,000 United Parcel Service (UPS) workers, which paved the way for massive job cuts.

In the case of the UAW, President Shawn Fain called the phony "stand up strike," which kept the majority of the union's 140,000 members at GM, Ford and Stellantis on the job before signing a supposedly "historic" contract. The deal has resulted in massive job cuts and the deaths of at least two Stellantis workers—Antonio Gaston and Ronald Adams Sr.—due to UAW-backed speed-up and safety violations.

After being promoted by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) as great labor "reformers," O'Brien and Fain have become some of Trump's biggest supporters. The Teamsters president has openly backed Trump's anti-immigrant attacks and the UAW head has supported his tariffs, bolstering the fascist president's claims that Mexican, Canadian and Chinese workers are taking American workers' jobs.

Leading members of the DSA and other pseudo-left organizations have achieved key positions in the Chicago Teachers Union, the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) and other unions. Their role is not to lead a fight against Trump and austerity, let alone to fight for socialism, but to prop up the trade union apparatus and contain the emerging movement of the working class within the capitalist Democratic Party.

Build rank-and-file Committees! Transfer power from the union apparatus to educators in the schools!

In opposition to the CTA's bankrupt strategy, rank-and-file educators must take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands. This requires building rank-and-file committees in every school and neighborhood, controlled by educators in the schools themselves. These committees will be fighting bodies, breaking through the wall of silence of the union bureaucracies and establishing lines of communication and coordination between schools and districts. They will be the democratic voice of educators to counterpose their will to the will of the corporate-political establishment and their stooges in the union bureaucracies.

These committees must outline their demands, including to oppose all cuts and win substantial improvements in wages and working conditions. But they must take up a struggle for demands that meet the urgency of the situation. A fight to save, defend and expand public education must be carried out now to prevent the Trump administration and his Democratic Party enablers from destroying it completely.

These demands should include:

- Immediate statewide strike of California educators to fight the bipartisan assault on public education, including the expansion of for-profit charters and other privatization measures.
- Rank-and-file control of the struggle: Committees, controlled by educators, not the bureaucrats, must oversee all negotiations and contracts. Full transparency.
- Prepare a general strike: Unite educators and workers nationally and internationally to defeat the attack on public education and all democratic rights.
- Defend immigrant students and families: An injury to one is an injury to all! No deportations! Oppose ICE raids and militarized police deployments. Not at schools, not anywhere!
- No censorship or repression: Defend free speech, oppose loyalty tests and right-wing religious mandates. Protect historical truth in classrooms.
- Full funding for public schools. The claim that there is no money for living wages, healthcare, pensions, smaller classes, more support staff and safe buildings is a lie. Expropriate the ill-gotten fortunes of the tech giants and other billionaires. Redirect trillions from war, policing and corporate handouts to education, healthcare and social needs.

The basic issue today for educators and workers more broadly is the development of a mass movement against the threat of dictatorship, combining the fight against the impossible cost of living, exploitation and inequality, with the fight against fascism and war, and in defense of democratic rights.

The vast concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a tiny oligarchy is the inevitable outcome of the capitalist profit system. Such levels of inequality are incompatible with democracy. That is why the fight against dictatorship can only be waged successfully if it is a conscious political fight against capitalism and for socialism, i.e., for social equality and democratic control of working people over the direction of society.

Contact the WSWs.org for assistance in setting up a rank-and-file committee in your schools and workplaces.



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