

Under cover of “We Can’t Wait” campaign, California Teachers Association seeks to block united, statewide action

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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.

Educators in Oakland and Sacramento in California have already been forced into tentative agreements paving the way for deep cuts, while teachers in San Francisco and Contra Costa are being made to wait weeks until potential strikes next month.

For months, the California Teachers Association’s (CTA) has claimed to be organizing a statewide struggle by the more than 80,000 teachers in most of the state’s largest cities who are currently on expired contracts. But more than a month since the semester has started, this “We Can’t Wait” campaign has not led to a single strike and no district has even held a strike authorization vote.

This cynically misnamed campaign is in reality aimed at delaying, disrupting and sabotaging joint action by teachers across the state, in order to protect officials’ close ties to the Democratic Party and corporate America.

By their actions, the CTA bureaucracy is not only attempting to help local Democratic-controlled governments impose massive cuts. By sabotaging a movement of the working class, the most powerful and progressive social force in society, they are also aiding Trump’s bid for dictatorship. A key element of the would-be führer’s plan is to smash public education, converting schools into centers of propaganda.

Teachers must reject the sellout strategy of the CTA bureaucrats and begin organizing themselves to force the issue, organizing themselves for a statewide strike in order to demand a massive reallocation of wealth from the oligarchy to fund schools and other essential public services. The construction of new rank-and-file committee leadership structures can form the basis for the mobilization of the working class as a whole against dictatorship and its source in corporate oligarchy and the massive inequality upon which it rests.

Sellouts in Sacramento area and Oakland

Before the ink was dry on a new contract this summer for the **Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD)**, SCUSD had already locked in a “right-sizing” plan, including hiring freezes, program eliminations, calendar shifts and millions in cuts. Two smaller Sacramento-area districts, Twin Rivers and San Juan, also have tentative agreements which have not yet been approved.

Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), which serves 40,000 students in one of the poorest parts of the San Francisco Bay Area, has emerged as a hotbed of opposition over the past decade, with walkouts in 2019, 2022 and 2023. In April, a one-day strike was called off after a last-minute agreement between the Oakland Education Association (OEA) and the district.

Even as OEA declared victory, OUSD was running a \$4 million monthly deficit, burning through reserves now slashed from \$118 million to just \$55.8 million for 2025–26. Projected shortfalls will hit \$78 million in 2026–27 and \$72 million in 2027–28, putting OUSD at serious risk of a return to state receivership unless major cuts are enacted.

The contract includes inadequate pay increases, but even these “gains” are in question. District officials have warned that all options—school closures, layoffs, further program cuts—remain likely.

San Francisco and Richmond area teachers signal strike action

San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) educators remain without a contract after more than three months. Facing a \$192 million shortfall, the district has announced sweeping “budget balancing” measures, including tripping professional development funds, cutting internships, and eliminating critical non-classroom staff.

Teachers in the United Educators of San Francisco (UESF) union are preparing for a potential strike in mid-October. However, no strike authorization vote has yet been scheduled

by union officials. Instead, they are promoting signature drives, symbolic pickets and unofficial “strike readiness” petitions.

West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) educators face a similar crisis. Bargaining has officially stalled for seven months, with administrators demanding no raises and increased class sizes. After declaring an impasse, President Demetrio Gonzalez warns that a strike authorization vote may occur in mid-October, possibly in conjunction with San Francisco.

WCCUSD faces \$19 million in cuts for 2024–25, another \$7 million in 2025–26, and further reductions to come. A 7 percent raise last year has been eroded by inflation, and staff shortages mean hundreds of students start the year without permanent teachers. Critical electives and supports have been gutted, hitting working-class and immigrant families hardest.

There is no guarantee that either strike will take place. A similar “strike ready” campaign was used by the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers last month to get out in front of educators, before officials announced a deal only days before an August 31 deadline. There, union negotiators claimed that talks had stalled until they suddenly announced a deal.

Only two weeks after the deal was ratified in a snap vote, the school district declared it would prepare emergency measures to close a \$300 million deficit. A similar bait and switch was carried out over the summer in Chicago, where a contract the union hailed as “historic” is now under threat of being nullified by the city government to cut costs.

In reality, in spite of the official “impasse,” union negotiators were in fundamental agreement with the district over imposing cuts, with the only real issue being how this could be imposed in spite of massive opposition from below. In 2018 and 2019, this opposition briefly escaped officials’ control with a series of wildcat strikes by teachers in West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona, while autoworkers, railroaders and other industrial workers have sought to defy scare tactics and strike injunctions in order to reverse decades of concessions.

Over the past two years, “Strike ready” campaigns and shows of “tough” bargaining have emerged as key tactics by union bureaucrats to confuse and demobilize rank-and-file anger and present the same sellouts as the product of “credible strike threats.”

Los Angeles and San Diego teachers kept on the job

Meanwhile, the state’s largest teacher unions, United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) and San Diego Education Association (SDEA), are refusing to set any timeline for action, cynically covering for themselves with loud proclamations about “strike readiness.” LAUSD and SDUSD face major budget shortfalls and the city of Los Angeles declared a

financial emergency over the summer over a \$1 billion deficit. But the union officials are limiting teachers to staged rallies, press conferences, and other symbolic actions.

Their main efforts have been to drive support behind the Democratic Party. In a recent press conference, SDEA President Kyle Weinberg stumped for State Proposition 50, which would approve a plan to gerrymander California congressional districts in favor of Democrats in response to Republican redistricting in Texas. “It is now more important than ever to maintain our united front... our statewide union the California Teachers Association alongside district leadership, labor, and community allies is fighting back and we support Prop 50.”

The real “united front” teachers need is not with corporate Democrats, but the working class of California, the US and the world. It is high time that workers break out of the dead end of appeals to the corporate parties, and build an independent movement mobilizing their immense power to impose a working class solution on the crisis gripping the country.

This includes the expropriation of the corporate oligarchs and major corporations and a vast redistribution of wealth to pay for high quality schools, healthcare, housing and other basic social rights for the working class. A movement by workers against capitalist inequality is the only viable basis to defend democratic rights, since the source of fascism is fear and hatred of the ruling class for the workers. This is why the Democrats, no less a party of Wall Street than the Republicans, refuse to fight Trump and instead enable him at every turn.

The organizational structure for a working class movement is a nationwide network of rank-and-file committees, consisting of workers themselves and excluding union officials. Such a network in California, uniting teachers in every district against the divide-and-conquer tactics of the CTA, would pave the way for statewide action and raise the possibility of a general strike involving workers in every industry.

The CTA’s “We Can’t Wait” campaign works actively to demobilize educators and block unified struggle, leaving teachers isolated while the destruction of public schools accelerates. Only independent mobilization, statewide unity, and rank-and-file committees can defeat the bipartisan assault; teachers must break from this apparatus and fight for the revolutionary defense of public education and the entire working class.



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