

Massive popular support for San Francisco teachers in first strike since 1979

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On Monday, 6,400 educators went on strike against the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), setting up picket lines at 120 sites across the city. About 10,000 school workers, students and supporters rallied at Civic Center Plaza in a massive show of public support for the walkout, with thousands more gathering Tuesday at Mission Dolores Park and again at the Civic Center.

It is the city's first teachers' strike since 1979 and marks a significant escalation in the growing class struggle against austerity. On Monday, hundreds of custodial and food service workers, principals and administrators joined the 6,400 educators on the picket lines in a sympathy strike.

San Francisco educators are demanding higher wages, fully-funded family healthcare, and increased support for special education. While the average teacher salary in the city is \$85,000, the cost of living for a family of four has soared to \$339,123, according to the MIT Living Wage Calculator.

Conditions are even more dire for other school workers: paraprofessionals, who provide vital classroom and special education support, earn just over \$31 an hour. Housing costs have skyrocketed, fueled in part by a doubling of the city's millionaire population.

The struggle of teachers is part of a growing movement in the working class.

Last week, 35,000 members of United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) voted to authorize strike action, while teachers in San Diego have called a one-day strike for January 26. At least 18 other districts across California remain without contracts, as school officials continue to stonewall negotiations, primarily over wages.

Now in their third week of strike action, 31,000 Kaiser Permanente nurses and healthcare workers across California and Hawaii are fighting eroding

wages, chronic understaffing and unsafe patient loads. On Monday, 4,000 pharmacy and laboratory workers joined the strike throughout Southern California.

In New York City, 15,000 nurses have been on strike for nearly a month, demanding safe-staffing ratios and livable wages. On Tuesday, in an effort to cut off a united movement of workers on both coasts, the apparatus of the nurse's union in New York announced a sell-out agreement covering only some of those on strike, which it is seeking to ram through.

Significant sections of the working class are also seeking to fight back against a wave of rising layoffs, including workers at UPS and other logistics companies, the US Postal Service, Amazon, major newspapers, auto plants and in the tech industry.

The explosion of class struggle is unfolding alongside widespread opposition to the assault on democratic and social rights spearheaded by the Trump administration. In the Bay Area alone, thousands of students have walked out of schools in recent weeks to protest ICE raids and the growing climate of repression.

Tatiana, a paraeducator who has worked in the district for five years, spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* from the picket line on Monday. "It's ridiculous. We're one of the richest cities in arguably the world and we're not paying our educators? I have two jobs. I work another job so I can do the job that I do at school. I babysit on the weekends so I work six to seven days a week. There's no way that you can live in the city of San Francisco on a paraeducator's wage. It's impossible."

San Francisco epitomizes the massive concentration of wealth in the US. The strike is taking place in the shadow of some of the richest corporations and individuals on the planet.

San Francisco is home to 58 billionaires with a

combined net worth of roughly \$217 billion. According to AI computations, San Francisco's millionaires and billionaires are likely to receive collective windfalls in the low- to mid-tens of billions of dollars from the tax cuts enacted this year.

The city faces a \$100 million deficit, with the Democratic Party-led administration and state government insisting there is "no money" for livable wages. California Governor Gavin Newsom's most recent budget proposes withholding approximately \$5.6 billion in school funding guaranteed under Proposition 98, citing "revenue uncertainty."

In other words, the state is deliberately underfunding education, forcing cuts particularly in districts like San Francisco that are under direct state supervision. To that end, SFUSD Superintendent Maria Su has stated that while negotiations continue, teachers' demands cannot be met because cuts are necessary to "restore local control."

Local San Francisco Democrats have likewise sought to undermine the strike. Mayor Daniel Lurie, former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senator Scott Wiener—all Democrats—issued a statement last Sunday urging teachers to take a 72-hour "pause" and refrain from striking, while hypocritically feigning sympathy for educators.

"We're already chronically underfunded," Kelly, a paraprofessional in special education, told the WSWs at the Dolores Park rally on Tuesday. "It is very frustrating that we're in a wealthy city, and I know a lot of our money comes from the state, some from federal and some from the city. But we're funding billion-dollar Super Bowl parties and ballrooms. Let's put some money into the kids.

"Let's figure out why the schools are underfunded. It doesn't make sense when there's so much wealth and there's so much inequality."

The United Educators of San Francisco (UESF), closely tied to the Democratic Party, has limited its demands to a paltry and inadequate 9 percent raise over two years for teachers and 14 percent for paraprofessionals. The district, for its part, is offering just 6 percent and 10 percent, respectively.

While the union is calling for "fully funded" healthcare, the district has proposed covering only 75 percent. Teachers report paying as much as \$2,000 a month in co-pays for family coverage.

The union bureaucracy's lowballing of wage demands comes after nearly 11 months of doing everything possible to block a statewide strike, forcing up to 75,000 teachers to work without contracts.

Despite adopting the entirely hypocritical slogan "We Can't Wait," the California Teachers Association—affiliated with both the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association—has actively sabotaged coordinated action across the state. Even now, with an overwhelming strike authorization in Los Angeles, United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) refuses to set a strike date.

Educators should demand the immediate expansion of their strike across California, uniting school workers throughout the state, the country and internationally.

The WSWs urges workers to form rank-and-file committees in every district to establish non-negotiable demands, including livable wages and fully paid healthcare for all. These committees should be completely independent of the CTA, NEA and AFT, which function as arms of the Democratic Party, working to suppress an all-out struggle.

This struggle should become a rallying point for all workers facing attacks on their jobs, wages and living standards.

To join the fight for rank-and-file committees, fill out the form below.



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