

LA teachers and community unite

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Parents and students rally in support of UTLA strike at Maya Angelou High School, Jan. 18. Photo: Union del Barrio - Los Angeles

Jan. 18 — Los Angeles shook this week. It wasn't the shifting of tectonic plates that made the earth move, but the shifting of class forces.

Working-class people of all nationalities came out in the streets, inspired by the strike of 30,000 members of United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA), determined to

fight for the future of public education and for workers' and students' rights.

An old song claims, "It never rains in southern California." This week the rain poured. But that didn't stop students, parents, community members and trade unionists from coming out, umbrellas raised, to join picket lines and a series of mass rallies in downtown Los Angeles, targeting the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) — the strikers' employer — and the California Charter Schools Association, a band of profiteers trying to privatize public schools by starving them of funds and space.

By Thursday, the fourth day of the strike, UTLA President Alex Caputo-Pearl reported that 15,000 parents had signed in to join morning picket lines at their local schools. Protests and press conferences organized by community groups, banner drops above Los Angeles freeways and a [poll by Loyola Marymount University](#) showing 80 percent support for the teachers, all offered evidence of the vast and deep solidarity with the strike.

Numerous sympathy strikes are happening and 1,000 charter school workers represented by UTLA also struck against their own private employer.

The city of Los Angeles and the state of California [have some of the biggest gaps between rich and poor in the world](#). But it isn't just the wealthy and powerful on the West Coast who are quaking in their fashionable boots. The reverberations are being felt as far as Wall Street and Washington — and everywhere in between.

Workers everywhere, though, are taking heart at this resurgence of school worker militancy following last year's wave of strikes in the South and Southwestern U.S.

Inspired by the UTLA strike, teachers and students from [Chicago](#) to [Richmond, Va.](#) to [Oakland, Calif.](#), have announced plans to push forward their own struggles for higher wages, smaller class sizes and desperately needed resources.

Through it all, activists and reporters from Struggle-La Lucha have been there — joining the picket lines, talking to strikers, students and parents, and helping to organize community support.



More than 50,000 rally at Los Angeles City Hall, Jan. 18. Photo: UTLA

Workers flex muscles, bosses' unity crumbles

By midweek, cracks were already showing in the armor of the LAUSD bosses headed by Superintendent Austin Beutner.

Significantly, the number of students attending scab-run classrooms fell dramatically, down from 159,000 on Tuesday to 132,000 on Wednesday. That means only 27 percent of enrolled students showed up for classes.

One reason for the decline is that union members and supporters are succeeding in breaking through the lies and rumors spread by LAUSD through the media that students might face penalties for being absent during the strike.

“In all, the district says it has lost \$69.1 million in state funding based on attendance” since the start of the strike, [reported the Los Angeles Times](#). “Subtract the \$10 million a day in wages it hasn’t had to pay its striking workforce, and that’s a net loss of \$39.1 million.”

The head of the union representing school principals, Juan Flecha, urged that campuses be closed entirely because of “dire and unsafe working conditions.” And [School Board member Scott Schmerelson broke ranks](#) with Beutner, declaring, “I believe that there are resources available to end this strike.”

School Board President Monica Garcia, a staunch supporter of Beutner’s anti-union hard line, found herself confronted by more than 100 protesting students, parents and teachers who held a rally outside her home, chanting “Monica, come out!” Instead of responding to the protesters’ demand to meet with them, [Garcia called the cops](#).

Negotiations between the union and LAUSD, which broke off on Jan. 11, resumed Jan. 19. These negotiations will include Mayor Eric Garcetti, who claims to be playing the role of mediator. However, it’s been reported that Garcetti referred to Beutner’s “strategic plan” to divide the district into 32 small units as a possible vehicle to resolution, if the union would collaborate with him.

Beutner once admitted to a group of businesspeople that this strategic plan could

mean that there would be no public education system in Los Angeles by 2021. His plan to turn all education into education for profit has been clearly and forcefully rejected by the people of Los Angeles this week.

Teachers and other school workers have already won a resounding victory by bringing working-class Los Angeles into the streets in a united fight for their children's futures. Continuing to organize our co-workers, neighbors and families to show solidarity with the strike is the best guarantee that the union will continue to stand strong in its demands and be on guard for any bad deals pushed by politicians claiming to be "friends of labor."

Victory to UTLA and Los Angeles parents and students!

Visit [Struggle-La-Lucha.org](https://www.struggle-la-lucha.org) for regular strike updates, including exclusive videos, photos and interviews.

