LA teachers and community unite
Fight billionaires’ plans to gut public education

By Scott Scheffer and John Parker

Los Angeles

Jan. 18 — Los Angeles shook this week. It wasn’t the shifting of tonic 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. Protesters formed caravans 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 feeling in their fashionable boots. The reverberations are felt as far as Las Vegas 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.

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.

The head of the union representing school principals, Juan Flecha, urged that campuses be closed entirely because of “dread 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. 15, 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.

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Globally

Iran

Pentagon prepares strike plan

The White House requested options for a military strike against Iran, the Wall Street Journal reports Jan. 13. The request was made by National Security Adviser John Bolton.

Meanwhile, the FBI has detained and imprisoned Marzieh Hashemi, an anchor on Iran’s Press TV. Hashemi, born in New Orleans, is known globally as an anchor for Press TV news programs. Press TV noted that the FBI has refused to provide any reason for her detention either to her or her family.

Venezuela

White House threatens embargo

We’ve imposed tough new sanctions on Nicolás Maduro’s sham of a government,” U.S. Vice President Mike Pence declared Jan. 16. “Just this week, we — declared Maduro’s presidency illegitimate.”

Now, the U.S. is considering an embargo of Venezuela’s premium oil. That’s what Trump administration officials told U.S. oil company executives. Reuters reports. U.S. refiners have few supply alternatives if the Trump administration were to cut off crude imports — which mean hundreds of off-the-books bases absent from the official rolls.” The Pentagon lists in its official property portfolio 4,775 sites, including 514 overseas outposts in 45 countries. But Turse points out that this excludes hundreds of unknown U.S. military bases in numerous countries. Read more at tinyurl.com/y37ogwfa

FRANCE

Gilets jaunes uprising continues

The Gilets Jaunes (Yellow Vests) protest movement has entered its usual reported Jan. 7. The request was made by National Security Adviser John Bolton.

Meanwhile, the FBI has detained and imprisoned Marzieh Hashemi, an anchor on Iran’s Press TV. Hashemi, born in New Orleans, is known globally as an anchor for Press TV news programs. Press TV noted that the FBI has refused to provide any reason for her detention either to her or her family.

WORLDWIDE

How many U.S. military bases?

The U.S. government has 95 percent of the world’s foreign military bases, with personnel in more than 160 countries, reports Nick Turse.

The U.S. Department of Defense is operating “hundreds of off-the-books bases absent from the official rolls.” The Pentagon lists in its official property portfolio 4,775 sites, including 514 overseas outposts in 45 countries. But Turse points out that this excludes hundreds of unknown U.S. military bases in numerous countries. Read more at tinyurl.com/y37ogwfa

Save the date

Vol. 2, No. 2     Jan. 20, 2019

Conference on revolution & socialism

Saturday, March 16

Los Angeles
Gov’t shutdown & Trump’s border wall obsession Impact on Indigenous peoples

By M. Tiahui

The U.S. federal government’s partial shutdown that began in December has resulted in 800,000 federal employees furloughed or working without pay. About a quarter of the federal government is without funding authorization from Congress. Millions of people have grave concerns over being able to file for and continue to receive basic life-sustaining benefits such as Social Security and SNAP (food stamps). If the Grinch-like government shutdown stretches into February, nearly 39 million people may face severe reductions in food stamps, and the Department of Agriculture won’t even say how long it can keep paying out benefits for those who depend on the program each month. All of this creates massive disruptions to people’s lives and wellbeing. But even with such widespread failure from the shutdown, there is a disparate impact on Indigenous peoples, as Trump and his cronies hold millions hostage unless funding is restored for the type of wall or barrier along the border between the U.S. and Mexico.

Indigenous people in the U.S. are adversely disproportionately impacted by any federal cutbacks and shutdowns because so many Native programs are funded by the U.S. government, often on a short-term basis rather than many months in advance. Contrary to what some believe, these programs are not some kind of giveaway to Native peoples. They exist because of the historical settler colonial theft of nearly all Indigenous lands and resources and the way in which the U.S. government largely stripped Indigenous people of even basic resources required to feed and house themselves — including forbidding Indigenous people from hunting or fishing on their own lands.

Indigenous poverty persists because of this history and because of the ongoing colonialism and white supremacy that Native people continue to experience.

Attack on survival programs

The federal shutdown affects the Bureau of Indian Affairs and other federal programs that provide or fund programs for Native nations. Thousands of Indian Health Service — including other “Indian Country” employees have been working without pay since December. The IHS, urban Indian health programs and many others that provide services to tribal nations were already underfunded and are now facing large funding gaps.

Women in Indian Health Service waiting room.

Addicts may not be able to get services they need in the midst of an opioid crisis and Native treatment centers may need to shut down. Critically ill people and their families worry about whether they will be able to get the care that they need, in addition to tribal concerns about the availability of day-to-day services. Cash-strapped tribal governments are being forced to use their own resources to fill in the gaps as much as they can, but that is not sustainable.

Education, roads, the tribal justice system — all this and more are affected.

The shutdown also has a big impact on Indigenous women, who suffer the highest rates of sexual assault and domestic violence in the U.S. The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), intended to help survivors of domestic abuse and sexual assault, expired with the government shutdown. Payments for programs are cut off until funding is reauthorized.

If Congress does not restore funding to food programs such as the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, up to 100,000 tribal members may be negatively impacted. The consequences could last for months.

During the 2013 government shutdown, for example, FDPPIR found that the demand for their food increased. Some FDPPIR sites were forced to close, with food then left to rot in locked warehouses, while hungry people waited outside.

Even when funding was restored, the programs were so disrupted that many FDPPIR program sites locked access to fresh fruits and vegetables or adequate protein for 4 to 6 months afterward.

Who pays for border barriers?

As Chief Harold Frazier of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe recently said about Trump’s proposed border wall: “The President of the U.S. should quit trying to build a wall that would have been better served [if Indigenous people had put one up] at Plymouth Rock. Indigenous people are not immigrants to this land.”

Indigenous peoples traveled freely for millennia, long before the current borders were set. The current border was established after the U.S. grabbed millions of acres of land from Mexico — all of it land that was originally stolen from the many Indigenous nations who were there first.

The vast majority of refugees who have been coming to the U.S. or attempting to do so in recent years are not “Hispanic”; they are Indigenous peoples. When Trump and others use vicious anti-immigrant rhetoric, they are targeting and scapegoating Indigenous humans. The wall meant to keep largely Indigenous people out of the U.S. is part of an overall attack on Indigenous peoples everywhere.

Why are so many refugees seeking to come to the U.S.? Because they are trying to escape the extreme poverty and violence caused in large part by U.S. policies in countries like Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, policies enacted by Republicans and Democrats alike.

Ultimately, Indigenous peoples are paying for U.S. border policies and barriers with their lives.

Indigenous children are losing their lives in the custody of U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Jakelin Caal Maquin, 7, and Felipe Gomez Alonso, 8, both died in U.S. custody in December. Thousands of children and adults are locked up in barbaric conditions. Refugees have died in U.S. custody. We don’t even know exactly how many people die trying to cross every year.

We do know that the Border Patrol and other U.S. agencies (as well as racist vigilantes) engage in monstrous actions against those trying to cross, including destroying food and dumping out jugs of water that helps leave in the desert, physically attacking refugees and, in recent times, spraying tear gas on people trying to cross near Tijuana.

Indigenous people also pay a high price because the borders are an attack on their sovereignty and lands. Some Native nations, including the Tohono O’odham, would have proposed border barriers running right through their lands without their consent, and any of the barriers would also have a devastating wildlife and environmental impact in the areas.

Tohono O’odham protest against border wall.

STRIKE! 2018 was year of labor action

2018 saw a startling surge of labor strikes. More than 20,000 school employees walked out in West Virginia in February, followed by at least 20,000 more in Oklahoma. Probably the biggest educators’ strike came in Arizona, where more than 40,000 walked out. There were smaller, but still large, teacher walkouts in Colorado, Kentucky and North Carolina. In September, 6,000 hotel workers went on strike against 26 Chicago hotels. In November, 7,700 workers struck 23 Marriott hotels in eight cities, including Boston, Detroit, Honolulu and San Francisco. In November, 15,000 patient-care workers held a three-day strike against the University of California’s medical centers in Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, Irvine and Davis. An additional 24,000 union members — including truck drivers, gardeners and cooks — struck in sympathy. And in one of the most startling work stoppages of all, an estimated 20,000 Google workers walked out on Nov. 1 to protest how the company handles sexual harassment accusations against top managers. Read more at tinyurl.com/ydatsmrv

LABOR

TEACHERS

Oakland, Denver to strike

Teachers are emerging as a national movement to save public education. The Los Angeles teachers are the latest to give the West Virginia message, going on strike Jan. 12. A few days later, teachers in Oakland, Calif., suffered their second wildcat walkout. Education workers in Oakland have been working without a contract since July 2017. The union is demanding a living wage, lower class sizes and funding for public, not charter, schools.

In Denver, the contract expires on Jan. 18 and the union will take a strike vote on Jan. 19. As in every other school struggle, the demands are to support public schools with a living wage for education workers and smaller class sizes.

FEDERAL WORKERS

Indentured labor

Hundreds of thousands of federal workers are working without pay, and often they have to do more because their co-workers have been furloughed. Federal workers have no legal right to a strike, but there’s no law against being sick, so there’s a spontaneous sickout of federal workers. That’s a suggestion that was floated on a pro-union website. That may be happening already; at least that’s what we’ve been told by someone who should know but who definitely don’t want to be identified.
By Jefferson Azevedo

On Jan. 1, Jair Bolsonaro was inaugurated as the new president of Bra- zil. Bolsonaro is a former army of- ficer who was expelled, while still a lieutenant, due to his involvement in a group opposing cuts in the military and demanding higher salaries for officers. It was discovered that this group planned to place explosive de- vices in some barracks to achieve its goals.

Forced to resign, Bolsonaro took advantage of his media notoriety and entered the political field. He became a popular figure with the military and other ultrarightist opponents of ci- vilian rule, which was re-established in 1985 after more than 20 years of popular struggle against military dictatorship.

It is important to point out that, even though Bolsonaro has been in the public eye for many years, he was never considered a leader or even a powerful politician. Bolsonaro took advantage of the congressional-judicial coup d'état that ousted former President Dilma Rousseff — the first woman to hold the office in the history of Brazil — and sent another former president, Luis Ignacio Da Silva, popularly known as Lula, to jail on trumped-up corruption charges.

Bolsonaro supported the strike.

The coup allowed Bolsonaro and his backers in the Brazilian ruling class to manipulate the dissatisfac- tion of the Brazilian people with the social-democratic Workers Party of Dilma and Lula, the country’s history of corruption, urban violence, and the decline of the economic power that Brazil had achieved during Lu- la’s presidency from 2003 to 2011. As scapegoats for the country’s problems, the Work- ers Party and its leadership, with Lula and Dilma at the forefront, became the favorite targets for reactionaries and fascists. To facilitate the at- tacks by these anti-progressive forces, the media used plenty of their time to talk about cor- ruption in a way that it made it seem that members of the Workers Party and their allies were the only ones to blame.

So, with a massive use of pro- paganda on social media plat- forms Facebook and Whatsapp (both owned by U.S. tech mogul Mark Zuckerberg) and the spread of false accusations against his opponent, Workers Party candidate Fernando Haddad, Bolsonaro was elected. U.S. media outlets, looking to turn back the “pink tide” in Latin Amer- ica inspired by Venezuela’s Bolivari- an Revolution, was only too happy to support Bolsonaro’s candidacy. Bol- sonaro has promised closer ties with Wall Street and the Pentagon, aiming to turn Brazil into a base for subver- sion against Venezuela.

Bolsonaro’s election is taken very seriously by those who under- stand the perils of fascism, right- wing nationalism and neoliberalism. Bolsonaro and those he represents are a threat to the Indigenous peo- ples of Brazil; to the Quilombolas — a group of Afro-Descendants that live in small communities in the interior of the country; to LGBTQ2S people, women, poor people and people of color — especially those who live in the slums or in the inner cities.

During the presidential campaign, Bolsonaro made his most frightening statement: He said that “minorities” had to change or else they would dis- appear. By change he meant they have to adhere to the customs, values and expectations of his wealthy, white, male, heterosexual, patriarchal elec- toral base.

To the LGBTQ2S community, he was saying to become heterosexual and gender-normative; to the Indig- enous, to abandon their culture and habits and adopt European ones; to women, to stop complaining about sexual harassment and unequal pay; to poor workers, to stop complaining about low wages as it was better than being unemployed.

This election showed that people who voted for Bolsonaro did so because he was the best candidate, the most intelligent, nor the most apt to lead the country. They voted for him because they saw a reflection of their own prejudices in him. Bolson- aro and those he represents understood this very well, and exploited it all the way to the presi- dential office.

Although the majority of Brazil’s population is made up of African de- scendants, the country is still in the grip of racism and has not freed itself from its past. The mentality of slav- ery and colonialism still lingers in the population, causing trauma to those who suffer the abuses of racism.

Not just the most oppressed groups, but the whole working class is the target of Bolsonaro’s attacks. Now it is urgent for all sectors of the work- ers and oppressed to unite and fight back — and for people in the U.S. to give them the utmost solidarity and assistance in their struggle.

Workers strike against right-wing government

By Lallan Schoenstein

On Jan. 8 and 9, Indian workers, 200 million strong, carried out a gen- eral strike that may be the largest in labor history.

The fury of the strike took many forms, without a unified agenda. In rural areas, protests by agricultural workers and small farmers were orga- nized to shut down rail and road traffic. Transport workers’ unions supported the strike. Laborers, factory workers, govern- ment and bank employees led protest marches. In cities, in the capital New Delhi, all industries and fac- tories were shut down.

Students supported the strike and, in some states, schools and colleges declared holidays. In many states, especially those without repressive labor laws, hospitals, post offices and banks were closed.

Right-wing Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi campaigned for office in 2014 by promising jobs. Behind the false economic promises of Mo- di’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) gov- ernment, is a sinister program of using religious fundamentalism to aggressively divide and rule the country.

This national strike, the third since Modi took office, has strengthened class solidarity, crushing the efforts to divide people along religious lines, Hindu vs. Muslim.

Union-busting legislation

Plans to organize the strike were initiated by the country’s largest unions last September when Modi proposed the 2018 Trade Unions Amendment bill. The central labor unions (CTUs) responded to Modi’s legislation by jointly calling a na- tional strike.

Modi’s proposed legislation would give to the state and central govern- ment sole authority to recognize la- bor unions. It would deny the unions their independence from govern- ment and the ability to labor to speak for itself.

Modi prepared the legislation in secret talks, abandoning the long established practice of negotiations between the bosses, the government and unions representing the workers.

The CTUs had 12 demands for the national strike, some of which tar- geted Modi’s proposal to alter the ex- isting laws that protect labor rights and jobs, proposals which aim to make conditions “easier” for busi- nesses. The trade unions have also called for the protection of rights of the large population of informal workers and to immediately address the agrarian crisis that has been plaguing the nation.

Other important demands of the labor strike ranged from raising the monthly minimum wage to Rs. 18,000 ($250) to protecting the public sector from rising food prices. A significant demand, meant to protect India from imperialist ex- ploitation, centered on preventing foreign or private investment in key public sector areas, including defense manufacturing, railways and other public transport, and banking and finance.

Only a small portion of India’s workers are unionized. Most union members work in the public sector. Roughly 62 percent of the employed are daily wage workers. Their sources of income are seasonal and very vul- nerable to market fluctuations.

Despite having one of the world’s largest economies, India is also among those having the lowest aver- age wages. A new study by the Cen- tre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) estimates that India lost al- most 11 million jobs in 2018, making it the worst year for employment in decades.
¡Apoye a lxs maestrxs, trabajadorxs escolares y estudiantes de Los Ángeles!

¡Educación es un Derecho de Todxs! La próxima huelga de la UTLA — maestras, enfermerxs, bibliotecar-ixs, consereyxs y trabajadorxs sociales en el LAUSD (Los Angeles County Unified School District) — es importante no solo para lxs maestrxs, trab-ajadorxs escolares y estudiantes en Los Ángeles, sino también para todas las comunidades en todo el país. El centro de la cuestión es una campaña nacional antisindical que tiene no solo el propósito de erradi- car la negociación colectiva de lxs trabajadorxs escolares públicos, sino que también ataca los derechos educativos de estudiantes pobres y de clase trabajadora. La intran- sigencia del LAUSD y el superinten- dente escolar Beutner nos indica sus intenciones de privatizar aún más las escuelas públicas y seguir per- mittiendo que las escuelas charter continúen funcionando sin supervi- sión ni reglas en el distrito que es el segundo más grande del país. La falta de supervisión en las escuelas charter y en las escuelas privadas equivale a la re-se- gregación y la mayoría de los estudiantes de color, estudiantes con necesidades especiales y en general de familias con bajos ingresos — tienen necesi- dades que no pueden seguir siendo ignoradas. Las lxs firmantes, extendemos nuestra plena solidaridad con UTLA en esta importante lucha. Llamamos a todos los sindicatos, comunidades y a lxs estudiantes a que cuando les sea posible se unan a los piquetes y se acerquen a orga- nizaciones comunitarias, iglesias, cooperarías de trabajo, familares y amigxs para educarles acerca de esta batalla tan importante para los derechos de lxs sindicatos y para la salud y el desarrollo de 640,000 estudiantes. Si no está en Los Ángeles, consid- ere organizar una acción de solidaridad y piquetes en su ciudad, pueblo o estado. Haga que su sindicato o grupo apruebe sus resoluciones. Haga circular esta declaración y llame al superintendente Beutner al 213-241- 2000 para decirle que apoya a lxs tra- bajadorxs escolares de Los Ángeles. Iniciado por el Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice, Los Ángeles. Para añadir su nombre u organi- zación manda un correo electrónico a: harriettubmancenter@gmail.com o facebook.com/SupportLATeachers.

Support Los Angeles teachers, school workers and students!

Education is a right for all!
The upcoming strike by United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) — teachers, nurses, librarians, coun- selors and social workers in the Los Angeles County Unified School District (LAUSD) — will be critical not only for teachers, school work- ers and students in Los Angeles but for communities across the country. What's at issue is a national anti-union drive whose goal is not only to eradicate collective bargaining by public school workers but also to attack education rights for poor and working-class students. The intranis- gence of LAUSD and School Superintendent Beutner indicates their intent to further privatize public schools and to continue to allow charter schools to function without oversight or regulation in the second largest school district in the country. The lack of oversight of charter schools and private schools is tantamount to the resegregation of our public school system nationally. Those students remaining in Los Angeles public schools — largely students of color, students who are entitled to special education ser- vices and overall from low-income families — have needs that cannot continue to be neglected. We, the undersigned, extend our full solidarity with UTLA in this important struggle. We call on unions, communities and students to join the picket lines when possible and to reach out to community organizations, church- es, co-workers, family and friends, and educate them about this im- portant battle for union rights and for the health and development of 640,000 students. If you are not in Los Angeles, con- sider holding solidarity actions and pickets in your own city, town or state. Have your union or group pass resolutions. Circulate this statement and call Superintendent Beutner at (213) 241-1000 to say that you sup- port Los Angeles school workers. To add your name or organization, message us on Facebook at facebook.com/SupportLATeachers or send an email to harriettubmancenter@gmail.com.

Endorsers / Endosantes:
United Medical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE Union) California
American Federation of Teachers Guild 1931, San Diego
Service Employees (SEIU) Local 721 Latino Caucus Association of Raza Educators San Diego Chapter
Los Angeles Tenants Union: Eastside Local
Steve Gillis, Financial Secretary, United Steelworkers Local 8751, Boston school bus drivers’ union
Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice, Los Angeles
Maryland Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines (CHRP)
American Indian Movement – Southern California Harvard Blvd Block Club – South Central Los Angeles
Los Angeles Workers Assembly
Youth Against War & Racism, Baltimore
Peoples Power Assembly, Baltimore
Prisoners Solidarity Committee
Puerto Rican Alliance - So Cal
Youth Against War & Racism, Baltimore
International Action Center, West Coast
Liz Toledo, LCSW, Latinx LGBTQ activist
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International Action Center, West Coast
Liz Toledo, LCSW, Latinx LGBTQ activist
Baltimore Bus Riders Union
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