

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT

SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 778

TEACHERS STRIKE IN LOS ANGELES

It takes a lot for teachers and nurses to go on strike. As the caring professions, it is so easy to blackmail them with the ‘professional’ shibboleth.

In Australia it was not until the 1960s that teachers went on strike. It took until the 1980s for nurses.

But in Trump’s America, in the nation’s largest school strike, [30,000 Los Angeles public school teachers have walked out.](#)

Close to 30,000 Los Angeles-based teachers took to the streets on Monday 14 January 2019 in the newest wave of educator activism. The strike affected half a million students

This is the largest school strike in the nation’s second-largest school district.

The [Huffington Post](#) reported that the strike followed months of failed negotiations between the Los Angeles Unified School District and the teachers union, United Teachers Los Angeles, to reach a deal for smaller class sizes, and increased support staff along with pay raises,

What. On the surface, is the strike about?

The teachers union is bargaining for a 6.5 percent pay raise effective immediately. But the district came back with a 6 percent increase over two years of a three-year contract, The district released its latest negotiations on Friday 11 January offering an additional \$24 million and 200 more teachers than their previous offer.

The district hired close to 400 non-unionized substitute teachers and 2,000 reassigned administrators to replace the 30,000 teachers while on strike and encouraged parents to still send their children to school in an attempt to have a “normal day,

But— Even charter schools teachers are part of the protest movement.

As the [Los Angeles Unified School District strike](#) headed into its third day on Wednesday 16 January 2019 with no immediate end in sight, charter schools joined in.

Among the crowd of protesters were teachers from Accelerated Charter Schools, union. Educators from the Accelerated Charter Schools — a network of three schools. They stood in solidarity while fighting for their own needs.

A strike of charter school educators is unprecedented in California and nearly unprecedented in the nation — the vast majority of charter school educators are not unionized, unlike those from Accelerated Charter Schools.

A strike involving charter school employees — who are deeply critical of the system in which their schools operate — only invites more criticism and is symbolic of the microscope that charters are currently under.

But the strike is about more, much more than teacher’s remuneration, however, important an issue that may be in both America and Australia.

Erin McHenry Sorber of West Virginia University in [The Conversation of January 15](#) 2019 lists three reasons for taking particular notice of this strike.

1. The Los Angeles strike stands out because of the size of the district.

With [640,000 students](#), and about [500,000](#) enrolled in the district’s public schools, Los Angeles represents the [second largest school district](#) in the United States. The only bigger district is New York City.

The Los Angeles strike involves 34,000 teachers. To compare, the statewide 2018 teacher strike in West Virginia involved about 20,000 teachers and affected approximately [270,000 students](#).

Also, the political context is different. When West Virginia teachers walked out of the classroom, they were battling a [conservative state legislature](#) in a largely rural, majority-white state. Los Angeles is urban, far more diverse, and located in a state that has voted mostly Democratic in presidential elections [since 1992](#).

Los Angeles Unified School District’s [student population](#) is 73 percent Latino, 10.5 percent white, 8.2 percent black and 4.2 percent Asian. The district serves over 150,000 students whose first language is not English.

The situation for the Los Angeles teachers union is also different in several ways. For instance, it is engaged in an active fight against the rapid growth of charter schools. Los Angeles is home to the [largest number of charter schools](#) in the U.S. with [277](#).

Since 2008, the charter industry in Los Angeles has grown 287 percent. According to the Los Angeles teachers union, this is effectively siphoning [US\\$550 million per year](#) from the district’s traditional public schools.

The union argues that Los Angeles Unified School District superintendent, Austin Beutner, is a [pro-charter school superintendent](#) with [no education experience](#).

The teachers union has proposed greater transparency and more accountability for Los Angeles [charter schools](#) and has called for an [immediate cap](#) on charter school growth in the school district. The district has provided no counter offer to these demands.

Teachers in Los Angeles have negotiated the current contract under dispute for over [20 months](#), and have been working without a contract for [over a year](#). This is not uncommon.

For example, teachers in Oakland, California, have been working without a contract for [more than a year](#). And a recent contract resolution following a Pennsylvania school district strike came after teachers worked without a contract for [three and a half years](#).

2. A Strike about Pay is also a Strike About Investment in Public Education

Like strikes in Oklahoma, Arizona, Kentucky, Colorado and North Carolina, the Los Angeles teachers' strike is essentially about greater investment in public education.

For the Los Angeles teachers, this includes a [6.5 percent salary increase](#) to make up for what the union calls "[stagnant wages](#)."

The average teacher makes almost [19 percent less in wages](#) than comparable workers. In California, specifically, this figure is about 15 percent. Los Angeles teachers make between [\\$50,000 and \\$80,000](#), but the cost of living in LA is so high that a two-bedroom apartment requires a [six-figure income](#). This means many teachers have second or even [third jobs](#).

Beyond wages, teachers have begun to demand a greater commitment to investment in public education from their governing bodies, either school boards or state legislatures.

In Oklahoma for example, striking teachers protested inadequate instructional materials, including outdated and [deteriorating textbooks](#). And in Los Angeles, striking teachers are demanding, among other things, a reduction in classroom sizes, which can be up to [46 students](#) in some classrooms based on their current contract. Teachers [argue](#) that the large class sizes make it difficult to meet the needs of their students.

They also want an increase in school nurses, librarians and [counselors](#).

These issues get at the heart of student learning. Students need adequate supplies, individual teacher attention and access to mental health services, such as counsellors, if they are expected to thrive in the classroom.

But the ability for public schools to provide for all of these instructional and social support needs has become increasingly difficult as states have continued to [underfund](#) their public education systems.

3. The Los Angeles Strike is Part of a Much Greater Teacher Protest Movement

The Los Angeles teachers strike suggests that the wave of teacher protests is not over.

As long as public schools remain underfunded, the nation can expect to see more teacher strikes in other school districts and states in the near future.

Teacher strikes and work stoppages have been preceded by a nationwide teacher shortage that continues to grow across many states, which do not have enough certified math, special education, science, and in increasing cases, elementary teachers – to meet the needs of their students. In California [80 percent of districts](#) reported a teacher shortage in the 2017 to 2018 school year. Teacher shortages are most often [blamed](#) on low teacher pay, one of the commonalities across teacher strikes.

These shortages are arguably exacerbated by an increase in the [“teacher pay penalty,”](#) the term used to describe disparities in teacher salary compared to professions requiring comparable levels of education.

At the same time teachers find themselves increasingly undervalued, most states are still funding their public education systems at levels [below](#) that of the 2008 recession. This includes California, which is ranked [41st](#) nationwide in per pupil spending when adjusted for cost of living.

As long as public schools remain underfunded, the nation can expect to see more teacher strikes in other school districts and states in the near future.

As in America, so in Australia, teacher unions are great supporters of more funding for public education. DOGS are waiting for the Coalition Government to register that the growing support for Labor in the upcoming Federal Election is charged by the [Fair Funding](#) movement. This is powered by a community of parents, teachers, principals, school support staff and citizens, working together to speak up and demand fair funding of public schools.

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