

Educators' Vision

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Sept 2018

Hotel Strikers' Call for Justice Rings Out in Chicago

By Schuyler Stallcup, Elizabeth Lalasz, and Tyler Barton

September 11, 2018

Editors' Note: As the school year began for us, a strike wave of 6,000 plus workers, represented by UNITE HERE Local 1, at 26 hotels in Chicago erupted. SEE stands in solidarity with workers striking and standing up to bosses everywhere. With this in mind, below is a reprint of an article on their struggle. To learn more about how you can support their strike: <https://www.facebook.com/ChicagoHotelStrikeSolidarity/>

Contribute to their strike fund: <https://www.gofundme.com/chicagohotelstrike-solidarity-fund>

Chicago hotel workers are on strike at more than 25 hotels [editors' note, it's now 26 hotels], and the 6,000-strong members of UNITE HERE Local 1 show no signs of backing down.

Since September 7, Chicago's downtown has been filled with picket lines seemingly every other block. The raucous chanting reverberating down the skyscraper canyons and the "On Strike" signs appealing for solidarity were strong reminders of the 2012 Chicago teachers strike, with its massive demonstrations that turned downtown streets into rivers of red.

The strike comes at a particularly crucial moment for Chicago hotels with the International Manufacturing Technology Show — said to be the largest in its 91-year history — coming into town September 10-15. Ten of thousands of people who come to Chicago for the show will struggle to find hotels that don't have hours-long delays and inadequate service.

One of the central demands of the strike is for year-round health care for workers with less than five years of seniority who are laid off during the slowdown in business in the winter months.

These workers typically get pink slips in October and are rehired when business picks up again. They lose their health care during these months and struggle to obtain essentials like insulin, high blood pressure medicine and pain medications — which for many are needed because of injuries caused by the repetitive, strenuous nature of hospitality work.

However, even senior workers who have year-round employment and health care are out on the picket line, fighting for their co-workers. "I reach out for other people at the bottom, because I was at the bottom, and somebody had to reach for me," said Larry Lewis, a housekeeper of 18 years and a shop steward at the downtown Palmer House Hotel.

After 11 years of working as a room attendant at the Palmer House, Tina Graham, also a Local 1 shop steward, knows the toll it takes on workers' health. "I had a rotator cuff surgery due to repetitive work," Graham said. "The hotel didn't pay for that, so I'm still stuck with that bill today. That was six or seven years ago."

In addition to improvements in health care, workers also want raises and a lighter workload. "They try to phase people out of the second and third shifts, because the hotel is so greedy," said Larry Lewis. "They have one or two people doing an eight-person job."

Hilton Worldwide Holdings, which owns three of hotels where workers are on strike, reported earnings of \$840 million last quarter alone. Workers want to know why Hilton can afford exorbitant salaries for executives and managers, but says it can't afford better wages and basic health care for all workers year-round.

"They've given themselves a raise how many times?" Graham said. "And all that money they're making is from my blood, sweat and tears, and from all of my co-workers. They talk down to you, disrespect you in every way they think they can."

THIS IS another key issue for strikers: the culture of consistent disrespect from corporate higher-ups across all the hotels. But the indignities they suffer extend beyond arrogance and exploitation. Workers say they have routinely report racism and sexual harassment from guests, but are offered little to no protection by hotel management.

"This hotel is probably the most racist hotel I've ever worked at, the Palmer House," said Lewis. "When you go and explain these things — how people are treated — these managers, they don't care. They don't look at you, they look at the money."

Fortunately, workers can look to their union to protect them and fight back. For example, as a shop steward, Graham recently helped organize to win a city ordinance, known as "Hands Off, Pants On," which seeks to protect hotel workers from sexual assault and harassment by requiring hotels to provide panic buttons to all housekeepers.

In Chicago, 58 percent of hotel workers surveyed say they have been sexually harassed by a guest, and 49 percent of housekeepers say a guest exposed themselves, flashed them or answered the door naked.

"The best thing about it was that we won that for all hotel workers in Chicago, not just those in the union," said Graham.

Not all guests are tolerating the mistreatment of hospitality workers. At the Drake Hotel, also run by Hilton, a large group of guests in town for a conference arrived to find workers picketing the entrance of the hotel. The guests informed management that they would not be staying, put their bags on the sidewalk and joined the picket line.

At Hotel Allegro, there were two large weddings held over the weekend while strikers picketed were loudly picketing outside. At one point, according to strikers, one of the brides came out and addressed them. She told strikers that their struggle for fair treatment at work and a decent wage was justified, that they were right to strike, and that they should stay out until they win.

This is what we mean by solidarity.

Support for hotel workers has come from the Chicago labor community as well. Strike leaders say that unionized painters, electricians, caterers, sanitation workers and UPS drivers represented by the Teamsters have all refused to cross the picket line.

Members of the National Association of Letter Carriers, Chicago Teachers Union and National Nurses United have come to walk the picket lines with strikers, while individual supporters have brought food, drinks and messages of solidarity.

Lewis reports there is a network of stewards across the hotels that communicates regularly, at times shifting strikers to other picket lines to maintain morale and strength, and build support among all strikers. Few hotel workers are crossing the picket lines. According to Tina Graham, fewer than 10 of the 600 union members at the Palmer House crossed this weekend.

Management at all the hotels used scabs from the first day of the strike. On the first day, Graham said, the Palmer House "brought in 200 scabs, but 80 of them left because they couldn't handle the work. The next day, they brought in clients from a drug rehabilitation program and paid them \$15 an hour to do our work."

The companies have so far refused to come to the bargaining table. They are playing hardball. However, striking workers are optimistic that they sent a strong statement to management this weekend.

"They're getting the message," said Bobby McDowell, an employee of 22 years at the Drake. "It's hitting home. We've heard several guests complain about the service, wondering how this could be a five-star hotel. The temp workers they brought in can't do our job. We're trained and experienced. We know about hospitality."

He pointed out the contradiction between how he and his co-workers are actually treated compared to the companies' buddy-buddy talk:

They say they want us to be team players, that we're a Drake family. But if we're a family, why are you treating us like outsiders? You want to work us like dogs. Treat us equal, and give us equal rights and equal pay. You aren't worried about how you're going to support your family. You're not living paycheck to paycheck.

Workers at four other hotels were initially hesitant to picket last Friday, but they have gained confidence from the strike and plan on going out. Tina Graham said the strikers' belief in themselves and their union is building every day, especially for those who have never been on strike before, as she was in 2011.

Solidarity will be essential for hotel workers to stay strong and win their fight, especially if the walkout continues through the coming week and beyond.

Just as with the "red state" strikes by educators last spring, and for nurses involved in struggles in New England, local and national support was essential for rebuilding workers' confidence and a sense in the wide labor movement that "an injury to one is an injury to all."

Until the companies come to the table prepared to meet the strikers' demands, workers plan to be out, day and night, claiming the dignity and compensation they deserve. Larry Lewis wants the message to be clear:

"We want to make sure they understand — you can't push us around no more. A change is gonna come. We are just looking for respect. What's wrong with that?"

(<https://socialistworker.org/2018/09/11/hotel-strikers-call-for-justice-rings-out-in-chicago>)

Clinic Defense Works: How to Build an Abortion Rights Movement

Sept 2018

Contract Negotiations End: Next Contract Campaign Begins Now

Throughout the roughly ten-year history of Social Equity Educators (SEE), our goal has been to help make the Seattle Education Association (SEA) a model of social justice and social movement unionism for educator locals in our state and all over the U.S. Our disagreements with the leadership of the SEA, over the years and most recently during the last round of negotiations, have always been with this overriding goal in mind. Debate and disagreements are the lifeblood of a healthy rank-and-file led union.

We feel strongly that the SEA must prioritize developing a more democratic and transparent contract negotiations process for the upcoming negotiations and that this process should start now. It should include electing the negotiating team, democratically voting on the negotiations model, whether it be interest based, positional, and/or community based, and opening negotiations so that any SEA member can attend and observe both the sessions with the district officials and any SEA caucus meetings.

We feel all the above principles should be standard practice for all unions, especially a social justice and social movement unionism local like ours. With this in mind, the first issue to come before the SEA Representative Assembly is elections for all future negotiating teams.

Elect Future Negotiating Teams

Jeff Morgen, teacher at Ingraham High School, is proposing a change to the SEA by-laws that will be raised at the September 17th Representative Assembly to ensure elections for any future contract negotiating teams. It's important to note that despite what the SEA leadership has said before, there's no current by-law language that gives the SEA President the power to appoint the negotiating team.

While SEE 100% supports the goal of electing the negotiating team, the SEE steering committee is against this by-law proposal as it is currently written. SEE members haven't had a meeting to collectively discuss the specific language we'd support due to this proposal being submitted after our last meeting. We look forward to future discussions about what the final by-law language should be.

Here's the current language in the SEA by-laws regarding the "bargaining support team":

3.41d.4 shall include one member of each SEA department who is elected to be a member of the bargaining support team.

Here's Jeff Morgen's proposed changes (bolded and underlined):

Whereas there is significant sentiment in our union community that transparency and democracy could be more apparent . . .

3.41d.4 shall include **at least** one member **but not more than five members** of each SEA department who is elected to be a member of the bargaining support team **and that all members of the bargaining team be elected, and**

that candidates for the bargaining team submit their candidature at least seven months before bargaining begins with elections for bargaining team members taking place six months before bargaining begins.

Teaching for Black Lives: Town Hall Event

Monday, September 24, 2018, 7:30PM

Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute (International District)

104 17th Ave S

Seattle, WA 98144

Doors at 6:30PM. FREE for youth 22 and under.

Local educators and activists feel that Black students' minds and bodies are under attack. That's why they created Teaching for Black Lives, a handbook for creating the sweeping reform of our education system and equitable teaching strategies for Black students. The editors of this collection join us on Town Hall's stage to read excerpts and call us to action to dismantle stereotypes and the school-to-prison pipeline. They call for educators everywhere to engage Black students in self-reflection and develop a curriculum that emphasizes community activism and social transformation. Sit in for these critical discussions of the ways we can improve the environment of education for Black students and communities in our nation and fight marginalization in our classrooms.

Dyan Watson is a member of the Rethinking Schools executive board, as well as the social studies coordinator for the secondary program in teacher education at Lewis & Clark.

Jesse Hagopian teaches ethnic studies at Seattle's Garfield High School where he is also co-adviser to the Black Student Union.

Nikkita Oliver is a Creative Justice educator, writer, and attorney. She is the 2015 recipient of the Seattle Office of Civil Rights Artist Human Rights Leader Award.

Wayne Au is a former public high school social studies and language arts teacher, as well as a professor in the School of Educational Studies at the University of Washington, Bothell campus.

These editors will be joined by several student speakers for a collaborative conversation.

Upcoming Social Equity Educator meeting

All Seattle Education Association (SEA) members are welcome!

When: Saturday September 29 from 10am-noon

Where: Greenwood Library (8016 Greenwood Ave. N., Seattle, WA 98103)

(<https://www.spl.org/hours-and-locations/greenwood-branch>)

What: We'll be discussing our next steps for continuing the process of democratizing the SEA and the ongoing struggle to fully fund our schools!

For more information:

**facebook.com/
socialequityeducators/
socialequityeducators.org
or text: 206.550.1609**



SOCIAL EQUITY EDUCATORS

Educators' Vision

Published By the Social Equity Educators (SEE)

SEE steering committee

Tracy Castro-Gill, Lauren Stark, Donte Felder, Jesse Hagopian, Ian Golash, Justin Vinson, and Darrin Hoop

Educators' Vision is a monthly newsletter of the Social Equity Educators socialequityeducators.org info@seattlesee.org

Mission

Social Equity Educators is a rank and file caucus of Seattle Education Association educators that focuses on democratic, anti-racist, and anti-oppression policies and practices in our classrooms, schools, and communities. SEE engages in local, national, and international social movements for liberation and radical change by building alliances and addressing the roots of institutional racism and other forms of injustice.

Points of Unity

- ♦ Organizing and bargaining for equity from the bottom up
- ♦ Anti-racist, anti-oppression pedagogy and practices
- ♦ Supporting social movements through community alliances
- ♦ Full and equitable funding for public education
- ♦ Opposing corporate education reform

The Shocking Attack On Teacher Pay

By Megan Day

September 12, 2018

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2018/09/teachers-pay-wages-austerity-tax-cuts>

According to a new survey conducted by Airbnb, 10 percent of the company's hosts in the United States are teachers. That's pretty remarkable given that less than 2 percent of the country are K-12 educators. So what's driving teachers to rent out their homes and spare bedrooms? It's obvious: low pay.

A new analysis from the Economic Policy Institute finds that public school teachers are paid on average nearly 20 percent less than workers in professions that require similar education and training. The researchers also found that in 1994 the pay gap was roughly 2 percent — meaning the “wage penalty” that public school teachers face for electing to educate our nation's children has risen by 18 percentage points in just a couple of decades.

It's not just the comparison to other professions that's dismal. The report finds that, adjusted for inflation, teacher pay has actually decreased since the mid-90s. Meanwhile costs of living have skyrocketed, and each dollar buys less than it did twenty years ago. Many teachers are desperate for ways to make up the difference.

Politicians beholden to corporate interests, who prefer spending public money on tax breaks for industry rather than teacher pay, like to point to teachers' relatively decent benefits compared to other workers. But EPI found that a slight advantage in non-wage benefits was nowhere near enough to compensate for the huge teacher wage penalty. Even with decent benefits — which are themselves under attack, as we saw West Virginia, where teachers went on strike over both low pay and deteriorating health benefits— public school teachers are lagging behind other workers.

Which isn't to say other workers have it easy. All wages have stagnated since the 1970s, as out-of-pocket medical costs, college tuition, childcare expenditures, housing prices, personal debt payments and other living costs go through the roof. Hardly anyone is faring better than they did in decades past. But the upshot here is that teachers are faring even worse, by a long shot, compared to their professional counterparts. In an age of punishing austerity, they're being punished the hardest.

Low teacher pay is not a natural side-effect of a shaky economy, a times-are-tough inevitability. It's a political choice. For one thing, the process predates our economic woes: deteriorating compensation for public educators began with the neoliberal austerity and privatization movements of the late twentieth century, and has picked up steam with the billionaire-backed charter-ization movement in the twenty-first. Nor can low teacher pay simply be blamed on the “loss of government revenue available for education spending due to the recession and slow recovery,” observe the EPI report's authors. “Rather, it is the result of revenue declines states brought on themselves by cutting tax rates.” And in a host of state governments that favor the private over the public sector — and the 1 percent over the rest — that meant giving money to corporations and the rich instead of to teachers and schools.

Teacher wage suppression has gone along with a larger effort to defund and privatize public education, driven by corporate elites like the Walton family, the Koch brothers, Bill & Melinda Gates, the DeVos and Mercer families, and

others. The result has been less money in public education overall, which adds an additional financial strain on teachers who deeply care for their students and wish to see them succeed. The Department of Education found that 94 percent of teachers spend money on classroom supplies for their students.

As a result of dwindling wages and rising living costs, public school teachers are five times more likely to work a second job than the average American full-time worker. Airbnb is just one of the many ways that public educators seek to plug holes in their family finances. In Arizona, where the teacher wage penalty is nearly twice as high as the national average — teachers there make 34 percent less than their professional counterparts — it's not uncommon for public school teachers to work three jobs and get as little as four hours of sleep a night.

Airbnb was proud of the high-teacher-usage statistic, using it to “promote the narrative that [hosts] are truly everyday people” NYU business professor Arun Sundararajan told The Atlantic. “Highlighting the number of workers who are teachers can be a particularly effective way of advancing that narrative,” which the company hopes will normalize the practice of hosting and provide a public relations boon amid controversies surrounding the company's demonstrated tendency to drive up housing costs (including, of course, for teachers).

But expecting public school teachers to take on a side-hustle that lines the pockets of a massive corporation — indeed, expecting them to concede their privacy and monetize their own homes to make ends meet — is not, of course, a solution to decades of disinvestment in public education. We don't need life hacks to help teachers survive. Public education is fundamental to any functioning democratic society, and teaching is one of its most valuable and indispensable professions. We need to pay teachers enough to live comfortably without taking on other work, period.

Only one force is capable of reshuffling our priorities and easing the burden of educators, and it isn't Airbnb. It's teachers themselves. And when they unite around demands for change — especially alongside other school workers whose fates are intertwined with theirs — the socially vital nature of the work they perform becomes an enormous asset. In West Virginia, Oklahoma, Arizona, Colorado, North Carolina, Kentucky, Washington, and elsewhere, the 2018 teachers' strike wave has withheld or threatened to withhold labor that is essential to the functioning of society. And in so doing they've accomplished more than they ever could by simply voting for appealing candidates or leaving voicemails for legislators.

The strike wave isn't over. In late August public school teachers in Los Angeles voted nearly unanimously to authorize a strike, and this week they voted to allocate their \$3 million union-managed strike fund to making it as impactful as possible. One of their demands is a 6.5 percent pay increase. It's still less than the nearly 15 percent wage penalty in California, but it's a start. And if anyone actually has the motivation and the power to close the gap, it's thousands of public-school teachers standing in solidarity against austerity.

Build a Statewide Movement to Fund Public Education

By Matthew Maley, Substitute Teacher

(Editor's Note: SEE encourages SEA members to write for Educators' Vision. We believe it's important for there to be space for rank-and-filers to offer their opinions about the future direction of the SEA especially as it relates to the next steps for the struggle for racial equity and fully funded public schools. In addition to what Matthew Maley writes below, SEE wants to highlight that at least three different nearby districts agreed to salary increases between 5%-10% higher than us while going tens of millions into deficit:

- Edmonds won an average raise increase of 20% while going \$39 million into the red by 2022.
- Everett won an average raise increase of 15.5% with district officials saying layoffs could happen as early as next year.
- Tacoma teachers, after an initial district offer of 3%, struck and won an average 14.4% raise with office professionals earning 19% and the district going \$38 million into the red by next year.

Each of these locals and districts know well that it's the responsibility of the state legislature to fix the problem the state created and come up with new money by the next legislative session, but it didn't stop their unions from fighting for significantly higher pay increases than ours. We would do well to learn from these locals.)

It is increasingly clear that educators' unions have a new fighting spirit since the uprising of teachers in West Virginia last spring, even now, our sisters and brothers in Battle Ground Education Association just recently voted to stay out on strike despite an injunction! The 2018 school year kicked off with a wave of strike authorizations from LA to Seattle. Many of these votes were quite strong, United Teachers of Los Angeles voted by 98% to authorize a strike, for example. In Washington, educators across the state have been fighting for and winning long sought after raises, upwards of 34%! A dozen school districts have struck or are still striking, and Seattle came close. Tacoma struck and won 15% for teachers and 19% for classified staff despite threats of layoffs and legal action from the school district. Here in Seattle, a 10.5% raise over a one-year contract is a huge step up from even our previous contract, which took a week and a half long strike to settle and represented a 9% raise over three years! This indicates a willingness to fight on the part of a strong section of union rank and filers but ultimately, without a mass movement of school workers and the community, what we are able to win depends on the approach of the leadership.

In 2015, the SEA struck and won not just a modest raise, but was able to conduct excellent work by using the contract as an arena to struggle for racial justice. On the picket line for over a week and half, we kept the strong support of the community by fighting for equitable access to recess across the district and for educator led teams at every building to identify and find solutions for institutional inequity. Yet this year, the union leadership and district were both hasty to settle, even after a strong strike authorization vote indicated a willingness to fight on the part of the rank-and-file. The SEA membership would have moved mountains to support our bargaining team, but this confidence in our own power was not shared by the leadership. Our bargaining team won everything that appeared to be on the table, the limiting factor, in reality, was how low our sights had been set by the leadership, according to what they thought possible.

Part of the problem was the so-called “interest based” method of bargaining. This was developed out of the Harvard business school and designed to find the common “interests” of two groups with diametrically opposed interests: those of SEA educators fighting for fair pay and decent schools, and those of the district, looking to cut costs to continue corporatizing education at every turn. This is not a method that can defend our interests! It led to bargaining being inwardly focused on what is acceptable to the school district rather than using bargaining to clarify our demands, and then organize our members and the wider community into a powerful campaign to win those demands.

Just days after the strike authorization passed with over 90% support, we had a tentative collective bargaining agreement that touted a 10.5% raise but few other gains related to the demands of smaller bargaining units.

Substitutes, led by members of Socialist Alternative, built a campaign for Healthcare that gained media coverage and strong rank-and-file support, yet were unable to make real progress on securing health benefits. Counselors demanding student-to-counselor ratios of 250:1, the professional standard, only won a reduction from 400:1 to 375:1. Nurse staffing ratios are often below the abysmal level of one nurse per thousand students! Instead of this naive approach, that led to us taking the first good offer on the table, we need a fighting strategy that is willing to use the strength of our members, our students and their families to win, as we saw across the country this past spring.

This one year of long overdue funding has raised the expectations of educators in WA, leading to nearly a dozen strikes to begin this school year, many in rural and suburban areas, including those represented by the Washington Education Association (WEA) in the Tukwila, Evergreen, Washougal, Battle Ground, Longview, Centralia, Tumwater, Stanwood-Camano, and Rainier school districts. In some district's educators were even able to settle without striking. For example, the North River and North Beach School Districts were able to bargain average raises north of 30%! Next year, however, all of Washington's districts will need to stand united in strike action aimed at the state legislature in order to win adequate funding on a permanent basis.

Seattle Public Schools agree the state legislature is the source of the problem, unfortunately their only solution is layoffs. SEA leadership is focused on passing local levies, which in reality, is only part of the fix. The ultimate goal is drastically changing the way education is funded in WA. This requires developing a clear set of demands that can unite all educators in WA, for permanent funding solutions that do not rely on robbing Peter to pay Paul, but rather taxing Jeff, Bill and Paul, along with the dozen other billionaires in this state.

While an income tax--currently illegal in WA state--and other progressive funding sources will be necessary in the long term, we must start with demands that cut across ideological and geographical divides. In West Virginia striking educators called for a tax on the fossil fuel industry, the source of their billionaire governor's wealth, to fund public education. By linking their movement up with other state employees to strike at the state legislature, they were able win a 5% raise for ALL state employees! Washington State's regressive tax structure has let Jeff Bezos amass the largest fortune in the world all while the state legislature has been in contempt of court for years over the underfunding of public education. We know where the money is!

Social Equity Educators fought for a 15% raise knowing that one way to win permanent funding is to trigger a crisis that can't be solved with layoffs and cutbacks. In response, throughout, the leadership of SEA projected an image of horror if we ask for too much. In this doom and gloom scenario, they warned that an unelected emergency manager will come in and cut our contract to ribbons to balance the budget. The common refrain is that based on our projected revenue over the next two years--plus 15% over the first year due to one-time funding and minus 4% over the second year due to the regionalization of property taxes--a 10.5% raise is the most that the district can afford.

With the contract we approved the district is already in the hole to the tune of \$77M in 2 years, yet somehow if we had won too much, like a 15% raise or better staffing ratios, it would trigger a funding crisis, yet the deficit would only rise by one third. As the district and union leadership threatens layoffs and program cuts next year, what we need is a fighting strategy that rejects this false premise. As a result of a demoralizing strategy, just a little over one quarter of the approximately 6000 strong SEA membership voted for this contract. It will take the strongest movement of as many educators as possible involved in the fight for funding at the state legislature. That should have begun with the strongest possible contract for all bargaining units within the SEA, large and small, which is why Social Equity Educators called for a no vote. We cannot afford to take what is acceptable to corporate politicians in Olympia as the starting point, we must start with what we need!