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# Speak Out Now

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## The Fight for Education in Oakland - A Beginning

On March 3, Oakland teachers ratified a contract with the Oakland School District. Their union leaders claimed that the contract was a victory for students and teachers, with significant gains in class size, teachers' wages, school closures and staffing levels for support staff. But when the details of the contract were made public, this was not the case. The vast majority of teachers understood that this contract falls far short of what Oakland students need and deserve. But the majority also felt they had taken the strike as far as they could for now.

The teachers were demanding a 12% raise because Oakland teachers have one of the lowest salaries in the Bay Area. Oakland has a high teacher turnover because most teachers can't afford to live in Oakland. This contributes to destabilizing the learning environments in Oakland schools.

The strike demanded reduction in class sizes and an increase in support services. Many classes are so large that some students don't even have a chair to sit on! There are so few nurses, counselors, social workers and speech pathologists that many students don't have access to these services, no matter how much effort the staff puts forward. In addition, the School Board announced plans to lay off support staff and to close 24 schools. The strike was also a fight to stop these lay offs and closures.

Teachers did an incredible job, especially considering that for most it was their first strike and they only had a short time to prepare. They organized picket lines at all 87 schools. They held rallies and picketed the School Board meetings and charter school privatizers' offices. The strike had widespread support from families, only 3% of the students attended school during the strike. Some students and parents picketed and helped to organize Solidarity schools for students while their parents or guardians went to work. Some parents opened their homes to students during the day. Many non-teaching school staff joined the picket lines. And people brought food, made banners and gave donations to support the strike.

But a strike of seven days, and community support and good will were not enough to win what was needed, when faced with the powerful forces opposing quality public education.

The Oakland School Board is not solely responsible for the defunding of Oakland schools. Behind school boards in many cities are state and federal politicians, who serve the charter school corporations that are privatizing education by replacing public schools with charter schools. Oakland currently has 44 charter schools that receive public funds but are only accountable to their own boards of directors. Some charter school corporations provide campaign funding for school board members, as well as training for school administrators to defend their school takeover plans.

In the 2016 Oakland School Board election, James Harris and Jumoke Hinton-Hodge together received hundreds of thousands of dollars from a pro-charter group set up by GO Public Schools. In the 2018 elections two more GO Public Schools supported candidates - Aimee Eng (current School Board President) and Gary Yee also won.

This is what we're up against, especially those who live in the poorest working class neighborhoods. The lives of the youngest members of society are only of value if they serve to increase the wealth of the 1%. The drive for profits also puts more pressures on workers at our jobs. They keep our wages down, making it impossible for us to keep up with the cost of living, especially when it comes to rent and housing costs.

We cannot allow the politicians, the Oakland School Board and the privatizers to sacrifice the future of Oakland's young people for their own greed. The strike is over but the fight will continue.

We cannot allow the 1% to continue to attack us either. It means we all have the need and interest to fight back, and to fight back together.

***An injury to one is an injury to all.***