

The experience of teachers in Los Angeles, California

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To speak out at this unprecedented moment about the defense of public education. To do so we must name the moment as a crisis; the pandemic has brought to light all the inequalities that we know exist. Right now, we are in talks to find out how to reopen our schools safely. Buildings may remain closed but classes stay active. We can all agree that distance education in the spring generated a crisis in teaching.

The conversations that we are having now about our schools should give us pause. Educators have been asked to risk our lives and the lives of students that are going back to the classrooms and their families.

So, let's consider why this is happening. Families need to go back to work, but to ask for or demand education should not be the same as asking for childcare. This really highlights the lack of infrastructure to support working families. The United States has consistently and systematically de-funded the public education system for decades, meaning that they are starving us of resources that are vital for students who are also hungry. And now the economy of the United States is looking to public education to support an economic system that does not support education itself nor its educators.

Teachers are not earning enough to pay rent and buying a house is impossible. In the communities where the UTLA works, many teachers have a second job or find room-mates because they can't afford the rent. We are being asked to go back to the classrooms to help

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maintain an economic system that does not support the communities in which we work. So at what point should we stop and do something? We also have to ask ourselves what we are fighting for?

If we speak of eliminating systemic racism in the educational system, then why are we going back to school? This is an education system which is oppressive to African-American people, people of colour, people who are different. Instead of maintaining this and supporting an educational system that does not support people of colour and an economic system that does not support the families of the students, this is the time when we have to stand up. We have to stop. Educators need to stand alongside our communities of colour, with working class families, and demand more for education. We have to demand that our politicians act because people's lives are at risk. An inclusive education system that represents us all is what is at stake.

How long are we going to fight for what is right? It is about all of us, at the national level and at the

international level. We must generate actions now, both nationally and internationally, to send a clear message to the privatizers - to the millionaires and corporations - that as workers we are united across the various sectors and we say enough is enough. To fight together, on all fronts, asking all sectors of labour to hold national and international meetings and demand that our schools be safe and that they give us funding for schools. Governments must provide more funding to schools than they are now.

We cannot leave this to local taxes. We must demand more and not less. We must continue to be visible in our communities. We must be in the streets to let our voices be heard and to demand justice because this is the moment to create a new world. We cannot go back to how it was before. We need to create a new world and new possibilities and when we do that, we will give our students what they deserve. That is justice and it is up to each one of us to make this come true.