

Answer strike-breaking injunction: Mobilize Detroit workers in defense of the teachers

The editorial board
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The back-to-work order handed down Friday afternoon against striking Detroit teachers by Circuit Court Judge Susan Borman is a naked act of blackmail and repression carried out on the orders of the political and corporate establishment in Detroit and Michigan.

The judge, under mounting pressure from the media to trigger the provisions of a state law barring strikes by public employees, ordered the teachers to return to work as of Monday, September 11. Some 7,000 members of the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT) struck the school district on August 28 to fight its demands for severe wage cuts and other concessions. Under the anti-strike law, they can be fined a day's pay for every day they remain on strike.

The response of DFT President Janna Garrison was to call a mass meeting of teachers for Sunday while continuing closed-door negotiations with the school district. Following the judge's ruling on Friday, Garrison would not say whether the union would urge the teachers to comply with the strike-breaking order. Instead she spoke of "progress" in the talks and said she was confident an agreement could be reached before Monday that the teachers could "live with."

However, Judge Borman in her remarks on Friday openly sided with the school district, saying its budget constraints meant it would "have to cut teachers' pay."

There is absolutely no legal, fiscal or moral foundation for this bald and patently biased assertion. What investigation did the judge conduct of the allocation of public funds by School Superintendent William Coleman and his cronies? What accounting was made of the millions that are consumed by Coleman (whose annual salary is \$225,000) and dozens of other overpaid bureaucrats? What inquiries were

made into the financial dealings of a school officialdom that is notoriously corrupt? Where is the estimate of the impact on the public schools of the systematic draining of resources to finance charter schools?

The cry of "no money" for teachers' salaries and benefits is a grotesque travesty in a city blighted by plant closures and poverty, where billions are spent to expand gambling casinos, build luxury riverside condos, subsidize sports stadiums and fatten the bank accounts of a narrow, grasping financial elite.

Just the annual bonuses given to a few hundred corporate CEOs in the Detroit area would pay for the yearly salaries of Detroit public school teachers, not to mention the supplies teachers purchase out of their own pockets.

The "no money" refrain is part of an anti-teacher, anti-working class propaganda blitz, alongside the equally hypocritical charge that the teachers are causing "irreparable harm" to the schools by refusing to accept yet another round of wage cuts—charges that are made by Democratic politicians and corporate-owned media that have for years supported the systematic downgrading of the public schools.

Teachers should reject the judge's blackmail order and stand firm in their demands for a decent pay raise and an end to concessions. As has been clear from day one of the strike, they have overwhelming public support. From the standpoint of the attitude of Detroit's largely working class population, it is the school board and the city and state politicians who are isolated, not the teachers.

But the teachers must be warned: the biggest obstacle they face to waging the type of struggle that can defeat the attacks of Superintendent Coleman, Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, Governor Jennifer Granholm and the corporate interests they represent is the leadership of

the DFT and the rest of the trade union bureaucracy.

It is clear that Garrison and the DFT leadership are preparing to betray the strike. They are desperately seeking to come up with a rotten agreement that will accept major concessions, and present it to the teachers at Sunday's meeting as the only alternative to massive fines and other sanctions.

Despite the broad and deep public support for the teachers, neither the DFT nor any other section of the trade union officialdom has made any attempt to actively mobilize workers, students, parents and other professionals in support of the teachers. They have instead deliberately kept the strike isolated.

The hostility of the AFL-CIO, United Auto Workers, Teamsters, AFSCME and other union leaderships to the teachers' struggle was revealed at Friday's mass teachers' rally in front of the school district offices. While some 5,000 teachers marched to demonstrate their solidarity and determination, even as Judge Borman held court and prepared to issue her strike-breaking order, not a single leading official of the other area unions so much as made a token appearance—nor did the DFT make an appeal for other unions to turn out and demonstrate support.

All of these unions, including the city workers' unions, have collaborated in the imposition of concessions on their own members. The last thing their leaders want is a successful struggle by the teachers that shows the potential for beating back the attacks by the politicians and corporate bosses—an outcome that would further discredit them and encourage their own rank-and-file to revolt against their treacherous policies.

The stark reality is that the unions, including the DFT, are campaigning for the very Democratic politicians, such as Governor Granholm, who are backing the attacks by the school board on teachers, students and the public school system.

The gang-up of the parties, politicians and institutions of the financial aristocracy against the teachers underscores the most critical issue posed by the strike: the teachers and the working class as a whole face a political struggle against the ruling elite and both of its parties—Democratic and well as Republican.

To defend their wages and working conditions, and defeat the assault on public education, the teachers must advance a new political strategy, on the basis of

which they can mobilize the strength of the working population as a whole. What is required is a break from the two-party system and the development of a mass, independent political movement of the working class—one that advances a socialist program whose priorities are geared to social need, not corporate profit.

The first step is for teachers to take the running of the strike out of the hands of the union leadership, and campaign for the active participation of the broadest sections of workers and young people in the fight to defend public education. This includes mass picketing, sympathy strikes and solidarity rallies embracing the widest sections of workers.

Political demands should be raised, including the firing of Coleman and the present school board and the formation of citizen's committees to oversee the running of the schools on a democratic basis. There must be a reallocation of tax revenues and financial resources to dramatically improve the schools and meet other vital social needs.

These are the policies fought for by the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site*.



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