

# Detroit teachers defy injunction, but Democrats prepare new trap for strike

A WSWWS reporting team  
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At a mass meeting held Sunday afternoon in Cobo Hall in downtown Detroit, striking teachers indicated their determination to defy a strikebreaking injunction handed down Friday by Wayne County Circuit Judge Susan Borman.

Some 9,500 Detroit teachers and support staff, members of the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT), have been on strike since August 28 against demands by the Detroit school board for major concessions, including wage cuts and increased out of pocket health care expenses.

According to the order handed down by Judge Borman the DFT was forced to call the meeting Sunday and read the injunction. Under its terms teachers face fines of up to one day's pay for each day the strike continues if they do not return to their classrooms Monday, September 11.

Thousands of striking DFT members packed into Cobo Hall determined to continue the fight. Many carrying hand made signs opposing concessions and denouncing the Detroit school board.

However, the leadership of the DFT presented no policy to carry forward the strike or prepare teachers for the possible danger of fines or arrests. Nor did the leadership permit any discussion from the floor. Microphones set up before the meeting, were taken down by DFT staff prior to the brief remarks by Garrison, who read out the court injunction, then abruptly declared the meeting adjourned.

Meanwhile, Michigan Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm has issued a statement urging Detroit teachers to return to work under terms of the old agreement while negotiations continue.

For teachers to accept such an arrangement would be a grave mistake. Granholm's proposal is a trap aimed at winding up the strike and defusing the militancy of

teachers. If agreed to by the DFT, it would place the school board in a vastly strengthened position in which to impose its concessions contract.

Granholm's attempt to present herself as a neutral arbiter between teachers and the school administration is fraudulent. She is leader of the Democratic Party/corporate establishment that has been systematically dismantling public education in the state. Her close political ally, Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, has openly declared his support for the board's position and his opposition to the teachers.

The basis of the court injunction, that teachers have no choice to accept concessions because the district has no money, is a travesty. There seems to be an endless supply of money to hire high paid administrators, hand out tax breaks to the corporations and fund stadiums and gambling casinos in the city. It is only when it comes to basic needs of working people for things like education that no funds are available.

The DFT leadership is unable and unwilling to mobilize the broad public support that exists for the teachers because it remains tied to the Democratic Party. The strike represents an embarrassment for the trade union bureaucracy because it directly challenges these phony "friends of labor." It comes at a particularly sensitive time, in the midst of what the labor bureaucracy considers far more crucial, their campaign to re-elect Granholm and other Democrats. Indeed while the United Auto Workers, Teamsters and other major unions in Detroit, with vast resources at their disposal, are spending millions of dollars to campaign for the Democrats, the very politicians who are responsible for the attacks on education, not an hour or a penny has been devoted to backing the teachers.

While the DFT leadership appeared on Sunday to signal tacit endorsement for the continuation of the

strike, there can be no doubt that it is intensifying its efforts behind the scenes to engineer a betrayal. If the DFT leadership is prepared to go along with defiance of the court injunction, it is only because it feels it has no choice at this point, given the overwhelming sentiment among teachers in favor of continuing the walkout.

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party distributed thousands of copies of a statement reproduced from the *World Socialist Web Site* to teachers before the meeting. The leaflet called on teachers to defy the court injunction and fight for a new political strategy. It insisted on the need for teachers to take the conduct of the strike out of the hands of the DFT leadership and begin the mobilization of broad working class support behind the teachers' struggle.

The WSWS interviewed a number of Detroit teachers who attended the meeting on Sunday. There was overwhelming opposition to the injunction handed down by Judge Borman and sentiment for continuing the walkout.

Nadirah Muahmmad teaches at Henderson Middle School. She told the WSWS, "This strike is about public education and the welfare of the citizens of Detroit. Our pay is low compared to that in Birmingham and Troy (cities in the Detroit suburbs) and we have already bent over backwards to compromise. The Board of Education however does not support us and we have to stand up for what is right."

"There is money available. [School superintendent] Coleman makes \$250,000 and his wife another \$200,000 and they're not qualified to do their jobs. Yes, we want more money and better classrooms. We already compromised when we gave up \$70 million last year. We are very united and we are going to defeat it this, this time."

Kevin Ashford works with emotionally impaired children at Longfellow Middle School. "Our pay has been frozen for five years and we cooperated with that. We accepted necessary freezes. Last year they took more money from us, five days' pay; we didn't like it but we worked through it. My pay class has lost up to 25 percent together with a dramatic loss of benefits.

"It's not just about pay; that's bad enough. But these things directly affect our students and community. We sat by silently in deteriorating buildings with inadequate equipment. The current proposal will also take away preparation time for teachers and seriously impact our ability to service our students.

"But the fact is that this strike is about even bigger issues. This country is headed in a dangerous direction. The government is repealing affirmative action; it is destroying union jobs and is exporting jobs at an exponential rate. This action may have started about pay, but it is now national; it's about the fact that the middle class is being eradicated. We are not just going to sit back passively and allow the situation to deteriorate further.

"When times were good, you could fill up your SUV with gas and not think about how things might be eroding. Now people are waking up. It can't just be about Detroit, this must be done on the international level and that's where the labor movement is missing the boat. I think it has to do with greed on the part of the leadership."

A teacher with 17 years experience told the WSWS, "They say it's about children, but it's all about the money. I have never seen a board member or the superintendent step into my school in 17 years.

"The parents understand what we go through. I believe that Coleman, the CEO of the school district, was also the district's former chief financial officer. So, if finances are out of control, it is his fault. They have a top-heavy administration. Its administrative ranks are swollen."

"If we refuse to go back, it will be interesting to see if they hold us in contempt. The union officials don't have to tell us to stay on strike—we are staying out anyway. Whatever we do we are going to do it as a complete unit: Its all for one, one for all.

"The back to work order lessens our bargaining power. Coleman now feels he does not have to bargain in good faith. Things are getting out of control against the average person."



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