

Political issues in the teachers' lockout in Denmark

Christoph Dreier
25 April 2013

The lockout of tens of thousands of Danish teachers by the state marks a new stage in the class struggle in Europe. It makes clear that the ruthless assault on the basic rights and past social gains of the working class is not limited to Greece and other heavily indebted countries.

In a Scandinavian country whose education system and social policies were for decades seen as models of progressive reform, the state has locked out 90,000 school teachers for almost a month. Teachers responsible for educating all pupils aged 6 to 16 have lost a month's pay. Most working parents of the almost 900,000 children affected have had either to take time off from work or pay for private day care.

With the lockout, the Social Democratic Party government is seeking to force teachers to agree to a drastic extension of work hours without any increase in pay. This would not only make teachers' work loads intolerable, it would also seriously affect the quality of teaching. The attack on teachers is the prelude to the imposition of similar measures throughout the public service sector.

The lockout violates existing contract bargaining practice as well as legal statutes. The government has resorted to one of the most aggressive forms of class struggle. Major lockouts have previously been imposed only under conditions of a massive escalation of class conflict centered on fundamental issues.

These were periods when the ruling class was prepared to forego production for months in order to starve workers into submission. Today, the financial elite is intent on reversing all of the rights won by the working class over decades of struggle and is resorting to similar methods to do so.

The Danish government has deliberately singled out public education to demonstrate that it is willing to

carry out massive attacks in the most critical social areas with willful disregard for the interests and views of the general population. The diktats of the finance markets are to rule supreme.

The role of Social Democratic governments in carrying out such attacks was pioneered by the "Third Way" of British Labour Party Prime Minister Tony Blair and German Social Democratic Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. The latter's Agenda 2010 attacked social benefits, especially for the unemployed and retirees, and promoted a massive expansion of the low-wage sector in Germany.

More recently, in Greece, Spain and Portugal, devastating social cuts were initially imposed by Social Democratic governments.

As in these countries, Denmark's Social Democratic prime minister, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, is working closely with the trade unions to carry out her offensive. The Danish Union of Teachers (DLF) is doing all it can to prevent a serious mobilization against the actions of the government. Instead, it has responded with token protests and so-called "flash mobs," which are completely ineffective and obscure the seriousness of the situation.

Other unions, which under Danish law are entitled to call sympathy strikes, are blocking any broader mobilization against the government and deliberately isolating the teachers.

The entire petty-bourgeois pseudo-left in Denmark is lined up behind the government and the unions in the attack on the teachers. The government coalition consists of the Social Democrats, the Social Liberals and the Socialist People's Party. The latter has six ministers in the cabinet.

This Socialist People's Party plays a role similar to that of the Greek Coalition of the Radical Left

(SYRIZA). It emerged in the 1950s from Stalinist and radical organizations. In the 1990s, it adapted itself to the positions of the European Parliament's Green Party group, to which it currently belongs.

The Danish government also receives support from the Red-Green Unity List (EL), an electoral alliance founded in 1989 consisting of the Left Socialists (VS), the Stalinist Danish Communist Party (DKP), the Maoist Communist Workers Party (KAP) and the Socialist Workers Party (SAP), which is the Danish section of the Pabloite United Secretariat.

These pseudo-left forces have ensured the survival of Thorning-Schmidt's minority government on a number of occasions, with EL deputies voting for austerity budgets in 2012 and 2013 that were the prelude to the current assault on the teachers.

True to form, the EL has continued its support for the government during the lockout of the teachers. EL spokesman Per Clausen initially called on teachers to seek negotiations with the finance minister, and when the minister refused to negotiate with the teachers' union, he called on the members of the governing parties to pressure the minister. What was important, according to an EL statement, was that "real negotiations" be held "in which compromises are made not only by the teachers but also by local employers."

This is nothing but backhanded support for the state attack on the teachers and public education.

The anti-working class role of the EL confirms the analysis of the *World Socialist Web Site* that it and similar organizations—such as SYRIZA in Greece, the Left Party in Germany, the New Anti-capitalist Party in France, the Socialist Workers Party in Britain, and the International Socialist Organization in the US—cannot be regarded in any way as "left" currents, but are rather bourgeois parties of an essentially right-wing character. They are allied to the trade union bureaucracy and speak on behalf of wealthy layers of the middle class that are hostile to the interests of workers.

As social conflicts intensify, these pseudo-left tendencies are moving ever closer to the state apparatus and providing support both for its attacks on the working class and its imperialist foreign policies, including the neo-colonial wars in Libya and Syria. Workers who seek to defend their basic rights confront not only the government and big business, but also the unions and these pseudo-left groups.

The actions of the Danish and other European governments do not express the strength of the ruling elite, but rather its weakness and bankruptcy. It has nothing to offer the broad masses of people, especially the youth, other than social decline and political reaction. In fear of a mass movement of the working class, it prepares ever more brutal methods of repression.

The critical issue in the coming struggles of the working class is the preparation of a revolutionary leadership to arm these struggles with a socialist and internationalist program.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact