

School authorities seek injunction to halt Detroit teacher protests

Jerry White**21 January 2016**

Detroit Public Schools (DPS) officials have gone to court seeking an injunction against nearly two dozen teachers, who they charge with engaging in, organizing and/or inducing others to engage in an “illegal” strike. The district is seeking relief in the Michigan Court of Claims, which will set a date to review the charges.

The legal action was filed as hundreds of teachers took part in a “sick out” protest Wednesday, the largest in a series of such protests since April 2015. Educators are fighting the decimation of the school system by a state-appointed emergency manager, decaying school buildings and overcrowded classrooms. They are also fighting to recoup lost wages and benefits accepted by the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT).

Eighty-eight school buildings were closed as a result of the protests, which were timed to coincide with President Obama’s visit to Detroit. The coordinated action took place despite repeated threats by Republican lawmakers to fine or even remove teaching licenses from protesting teachers. Rank-and-file teachers took action in defiance of both the DFT and the state and national American Federation of Teachers, which have publicly opposed the sick outs.

The decision to crack down on the teachers has been made at the highest political level. Obama administration officials have been in close contact with AFT union officials to quell the protests before they trigger a far broader movement of social opposition. Republican Governor Rick Snyder and the DPS Emergency Manager, Democrat Darnell Earley, have now decided to act.

The legal action names 22 individual teachers and four so-called advocacy groups, including DPS Teachers Fight Back, Detroit Strikes to Win, By Any Means Necessary and the Detroit Federation of Teachers. The defendants also include Ivy Bailey, the

interim president of the DFT, and former DFT President Steve Conn.

Citing various Facebook postings, comments during newspaper interviews, rallies, meetings and conference calls as supposed evidence, the complaint charges teachers with the crime of “acting in concert to induce change in working and financial conditions of DPS teachers.” Under Michigan reactionary laws, strikes by public employees, including schoolteachers, are illegal.

The complaint charges that the “strikes and threatened strikes have had and will have an adverse impact on DPS, approximately 31,000 DPS students, members of the DPS community and the public at large...” This is because, among other things, the teachers’ actions are allegedly “depriving students of the right to attend school,” “adversely impacting their academic progress,” “depriving students of breakfasts and lunches provided at school,” “causing a waste of tax payers money,” “harm to DPS’s financial credibility,” and finally, causing a loss of enrollment.

Such charges are entirely hypocritical coming from an emergency manager and other school authorities who have done irreparable harm to students by slashing school budgets, laying off thousands of teachers and support staff, deliberately allowing the schools to decay and funneling millions of dollars to for-profit charter school operations, including those run by principles who now face embezzlement charges. The complaint does not attempt to explain how teachers are harming students by fighting this and opposing intolerable conditions in the schools, including roach and rodent infestation, the lack of heat, collapsing ceiling tiles and the lack of textbooks and supplies.

After a complaint has been filed, the Michigan Employment Relations Commission has 60 days to hear it. According to the *Detroit Free Press*, “If a majority

of the commission concludes that individual teachers violated the state's law prohibiting strikes, it can impose fines on the teacher equal to one day's pay, plus \$5,000 for each full or partial day of school missed."

This anti-democratic attack on the teachers must be opposed by every section of the working class.



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