

# Support the struggle of Detroit teachers! Unite the working class in a fight back!

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*Niles Niemuth is the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for vice president in the 2016 US elections. For more information on the SEP campaign, visit [sep2016.com](http://sep2016.com). You can also follow Niles and SEP presidential candidate Jerry White on Facebook.*

*This statement was delivered by Niles and distributed to teachers by campaign supporters Tuesday afternoon outside a mass membership meeting called by the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT). At the meeting DFT President Ivy Bailey and Randi Weingarten, head of the American Federation of Teachers, announced a deal to pay out salaries and instructed teachers to return to work today.*

As the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for vice president of the United States, I declare my solidarity with the more than 1,500 Detroit Public School teachers now engaged in sick-outs that have closed 94 of the city's 97 schools for a second day in a row.

The protest follows the provocative announcement by DPS Emergency Manager Steven Rhodes that there is no money to pay teachers' salaries over the summer months—salaries they have already earned.

The attack on teachers is just one part of an assault on every section of the working class in this city and throughout the state of Michigan: the 2013 bankruptcy that cut the pensions of retired city employees, the major concessions forced on autoworkers by the UAW and the Big Three in contract talks last year, and the continued shutoff of utilities, depriving residents access to the basic necessities of life.

In Flint, just an hour's drive northwest of Detroit, the entire water supply was poisoned by lead, damaging the lives of thousands of residents and killing at least a dozen people.

This general assault must be met by a unified political response of the entire working class. The attack on

wages, benefits and living standards cannot be resisted in isolation, one section of the working class at a time. Working people must come together regardless of their race, ethnicity, or any other artificial division.

Rhodes says that they can't afford to pay the wages of Detroit teachers. That is as blatant a lie as has ever been told.

Detroit, despite being the poorest large city in the country, is home to some of the wealthiest individuals and most profitable corporations in the world. The top five companies based in metro Detroit—General Motors, Ford, Dow Chemical, Delphi and Ally Financial—made combined profits last year of \$28 billion. These profits by themselves could pay the current salary of every Detroit Public Schools employee for the next 40 years.

The ten richest individuals in the state of Michigan have a combined net worth of more than \$34 billion. Real estate mogul and home mortgage salesman Dan Gilbert controls \$3.8 billion, an amount that could cover the entire budgeted expenditures of Detroit Public Schools for five years.

The United States is the wealthiest country in the history of the world. The main question is not whether there is enough money, but who decides how production is controlled and how wealth is distributed.

Workers must stand up and demand what is rightfully ours. It is we who create all of the wealth in society, not the capitalist parasites who funnel it away into tax-free bank accounts.

The Socialist Equality Party's candidate for president, Jerry White, and I call on workers to take up the following demands:

- The repudiation of all debts. Teachers and other workers should not be forced to pay for the crisis caused by the financial and political elite.
- A massive infusion of funds into the public school

system, the city's infrastructure and housing. Schools are in a shameful state of decay, lacking heat and infested with rodents and mold. Roads are crumbling and the neighborhoods are left to rot. Billions of dollars must be spent on a massive public works program to upgrade the school system and infrastructure throughout the city.

- Utilities, including heat, gas, electricity and clean water are social rights that must be guaranteed to all. We call for an immediate end to all water and utility shutoffs, this crime against humanity must be stopped.

- The expropriation of the vast financial resources of the largest corporations, to be placed under public control for democratic allocation decided by the people.

These demands, and others, should be the subject of a unified and broad-based discussion by workers throughout the city and state in order to formulate a plan of action for a general strike and mass demonstrations.

Workers are fighting not only against one or another corporation, but the entire capitalist economic and political system.

The state and the two big business parties, the Democrats and Republicans, represent the corporations and the rich. The Obama administration backed the bankruptcy of Detroit, supported the assault on autoworkers and has proclaimed Detroit "ground zero" in the attack on public education. In the 2016 elections, none of the candidates of either the Democratic or Republican parties represents the interests of the working class.

As for the trade unions, including the Detroit Federation of Teachers and its parent-group, the American Federation of Teachers, they are tied to the hip of the Democratic Party. They are now desperately trying to find some way to curtail and suppress the eruption of anger among teachers.

The time of retreat and compromise must come to an end! We are not interested in what they say they can give, we will tell them what we want. What we can get or not get will be decided in the course of struggle.

There are two sides in this class struggle. The corporations, banks and the political parties they control are on one side. On the other side are the millions of working people and youth all over the world who have been forced to live through the hell they have created.

Detroit is a battlefield. The ruling class has declared war on the entire working population and will stop at nothing to claw back the wages, benefits and living standards won over the course of the last century. What is being done in Detroit will be done throughout the country. It is time for teachers and every other section of the working class to stop pleading and start fighting back.



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