

Demand a statewide vote before any return to work!

Reject the sellout of West Virginia teachers' strike!

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28 February 2018

Teachers reported late Wednesday that the strike by West Virginia teachers will continue into Thursday, in defiance of a back-to-work order delivered by the unions and Governor Jim Justice on Tuesday. Teachers have rejected with contempt the lie that this backroom deal meets the needs of teachers, school employees and other state workers.

The attempt by the West Virginia Education Association (WVEA) and American Federation of Teachers-West Virginia (AFT-WV) to shut down the strike—right at the point when it is winning support from workers and young people throughout the state and nationally—exposes the basic purpose of these organizations: to suppress the uprising of teachers and get them back to work.

School employees have not united in all 55 counties and waged this battle only to capitulate before the worthless promises of a billionaire governor. Teachers know that even if the proposal for a wholly inadequate 5 percent raise passed the state legislature—which is far from certain—teachers and other public employees will still be condemned to poverty pay, crushing medical costs and deteriorating teaching conditions.

WVEA President Dale Lee and AFT-WV President Christine Campbell claim that they answer to the democratic will of the membership. But they unilaterally ordered an end the strike without the slightest input from rank-and-file teachers and school employees. Through this action, they have made clear that they have no right to speak for teachers.

The continuation of the strike raises the urgent need for the formation of rank-and-file committees to take conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the AFT-WV and the WVEA. Meetings controlled by rank-and-

file teachers themselves should be organized in every county in the state to discuss a strategy to mobilize broader support among teachers and the entire working class.

The demand must be raised: No return to work without a state-wide vote of all teachers!

Teachers, you have powerful allies! It is to the mass of the working class that it is necessary to turn: To teachers and school employees in Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, Florida, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Arizona and other cities and states that are preparing to fight. To graduate students at the University of Illinois who began a strike on Monday. To 40,000 lecturers in England striking for improved pensions and to oppose plans to privatize the public university system. To the 9,300 public school teachers in Nova Scotia, Canada who are threatening to walk out in defiance of the province's anti-strike laws.

The teachers' union in Pittsburgh announced yesterday that they will not call a strike despite overwhelming support for strike action. A specific appeal should be directed to Pittsburgh teachers to take action over the heads of the union and unite with West Virginia teachers.

All sections of the working class—state employees, coal miners, hospital workers, factory workers and students and young people—face the same issues. Any threats of injunctions, fines or arrests should be answered with collective action by the working class throughout the state, based on the principle that “An injury to one, is an injury to all!” Plans for a general strike should be discussed at workers' meetings.

The events of the past week have proven that teachers are locked in a political battle against the state and both

big business parties, with which the unions are collaborating behind their backs.

Announcing the deal, Justice, the billionaire Democrat turned Republican, praised the “wonderful union reps” and rewarded them with positions on a task force on the PEIA. While this might pad the already bloated salaries of the union execs, it will do nothing for public employees who have heard the same tired, promises for decades.

The unions claim the election of more Democrats will help teachers. But the Democrats have controlled the governor’s mansion for 32 of the last 40 years, and every one of them who were endorsed by the unions have starved public services of needed funds, just like the Republicans. On a national level, the Obama administration spearheaded the attack on teachers and public education with his pro-corporate “school reform” agenda and “Race to the Top” scheme that scapegoated teachers and sharply expanded charter schools and other for-profit education businesses.

Now, two billionaires—Trump and his education secretary Betsy DeVos—want to slash billions from education and deprive millions more of health care. Whether it is a Democrat or Republican in the White House, they all want to rob the working class to fund Wall Street bailouts, corporate tax cuts, and endless wars.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) calls for rank-and-file committees of teachers to demand:

An immediate 50 percent across-the-board wage increase for all teachers and public employees.

- Abolition of all co-pays, deductibles and premiums, and the implementation of a fully state-paid health care and pension system. Not phony task forces but guaranteed health care!

- A massive increase in state funding to hire more educators, build modern, well-equipped schools, and employ specialists to address the educational challenges associated with poverty, ill health, and the opioid crisis.

To meet these basic rights, the SEP calls for:

- The confiscation of the personal fortunes of the eight billionaires who control the same amount of wealth as half the world’s population, or 3.5 billion people.

- Sharply increase taxes on the coal, gas, chemical, biotech and timber industries and demand restitution

for the lost revenue from decades of bipartisan tax cuts and the huge corporate tax breaks just passed by the Trump administration.

- Seize and transform into publicly owned utilities the energy giants and the giant drug companies that have poisoned the state by pouring tens of millions of opioid pills into small towns.

- Redirect the massive \$700 billion a year the Democrats and Republicans just authorized to wage war and plunder all over the world.

This struggle raises a fundamental question: Who has the right to determine how society’s resources are spent? To secure its rights, the working class must take power in its own hands, and break the dictatorial control of the corporations and banks over society. The SEP is building a mass political movement of the working class, independent of the two capitalist parties, to fight for socialism and the reorganization of economic life on the basis of human need, not corporate profit.

The WSWs *Teacher Newsletter* will do everything possible to assist in the formation of rank-and-file committees, establish lines of communication to unite teachers and public-sector workers with their brothers and sisters throughout the US and internationally, and to take forward this struggle. We urge teachers to contact us, subscribe to our newsletter and take up this fight.



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