

Mobilize the entire working class behind West Virginia teachers! Form rank-and-file committees to expand the struggle!

The WSWS Teacher Newsletter
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The eyes of workers across the United States are on West Virginia, as 30,000 teachers and school employees take their strike into its second week. Despite the governor's lying promises, the attorney general's threats of jail time, the legislature's empty theatrics, and the union leadership's bullying orders, the strikers are sending a message that is well received in workplaces, schools, and factories across the country: it is time for the working class to fight back.

Teachers and school employees have shown initiative in ensuring that their struggle is not defeated. They have organized to prevent their enemies from cajoling, threatening, dividing, or duping them back to work without their demands being met.

Their actions have provoked nervous articles in all the news publications of the corporate elite who are hoping that Governor Justice, the Democratic and Republican leadership in the legislature, and the trade unions can wrap up the strike with promises to provide "more details" of the PEIA commission and paltry pay raises.

Behind closed doors, the corporations and the two parties who control the government are preparing harsher measures, likely by testing the power of injunction, either against all teachers or against the most militant teachers in the mining counties in an effort to divide-and-conquer. The union bureaucracy is counting on such threats to force an end to the strike.

Teachers in Mingo, Boone, Marshall, Logan, and other mining counties are especially aware of the traditions of class struggle of the coal miners, who fought against the police, the courts, scabs, Baldwin-Felts goons, and the US military.

But this fight is a political one, and strikers must

know who their friends and enemies are. The Democrats, like always, are pretending to support teachers. However, the Democrats have run West Virginia for the better part of the last one hundred years, and still the state remains among the most impoverished and exploited in the country.

In more recent history, the Democrats controlled the legislature and the governorship for years and did nothing to fund PEIA. The Democrats had plenty of chances to raise taxes on the corporations, but they chose not to because they, too, are in the pockets of the coal barons, gas czars, and Wall Street lords. The poorly-named Governor Justice, after all, was a Democrat until last year.

Justice, the state's richest man, is worth \$1.8 billion. With his assets alone, teachers could keep PEIA solvent for 36 years without raising premiums. Both the West Virginia Education Association (WVEA) and the American Federation of Teachers-West Virginia (AFT-WV) endorsed the governor, as did the UMWA, whose president Cecil Roberts called Justice "one of the good coal operators."

The unions nationally are attempting to strangle the mood of militant struggle that is building across the country, especially among teachers. In Oklahoma, 8,000 teachers have signed a petition to call out all 41,000 teachers on strike, demanding an immediate \$10,000 raise. In Arizona, 49,000 teachers—50th in the nation in pay—are also considering walking out.

The Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers made a secret deal with the school board to put a strike scheduled for this week on hold until at least mid-March, despite readiness to walk out by 25,000 teachers. In Dallas, Pennsylvania the union pushed back a strike deadline

planned for Monday until April 13 without telling teachers why. In Minneapolis, hundreds of teachers of 3,500 total rallied in February as contract negotiations continue. Bus drivers in Valdosta, Georgia are also preparing to strike soon.

The WSWS Teacher Newsletter issues a warning to strikers: If teachers let the unions and the government take control of the strike and direct the workers' justified anger into pressuring the two parties, they will be isolated and defeated.

The alternative is to appeal to mass of workers who support your struggle because the issues you are fighting for are the same issues that confront them. A turn out will spark a wave of social opposition that the corporations, the government, and the unions will not be able to control, not just in the US but internationally.

The WSWS urges striking teachers and school employees to take the following measures:

- Formalize your impromptu meetings and rallies by electing rank-and-file strike committees comprised not of union bureaucrats but of the most militant workers in all the areas.

- Pledge not to return to work without a full vote of the membership on the complete, line-by-line details of whatever deal is made.

- Load delegations of strikers into school buses and send them out to the major workplaces—the coalmines, the factories, the warehouses, the natural gas extraction sites, the chemical plants, the healthcare workers, and the telecommunication centers, where hundreds of Frontier workers are planning to strike Saturday—to encourage workers to join your struggle.

- Expand your demands to appeal to broader sections of the working class. Teachers are not only fighting for wages and benefits, but against social inequality and poverty. The assets of the energy corporations should be expropriated and the proceeds spent to address the social crisis, including by providing treatment for the opioid epidemic, funding clinics so miners can receive free treatment for black lung, and starting a major public works program to improve the state's infrastructure.

- Appeal to teachers and workers around the country and around the world to join the struggle to defend the right to public education and all the rights of the working class.

Fundamentally, this strike is about who controls

society's wealth and resources: the ruling elite or the working class? To secure their demands and the rights of all workers, teachers cannot allow their struggle to be subordinated to the capitalist politicians and the profit system.

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 and take up this fight.



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