

“I think the working class should be in control”

West Virginia student demonstration supports call to expand teachers strike

Our reporters
3 March 2018

Support for the West Virginia teachers strike and sentiment for its expansion continues to grow among students and workers. Teachers and public school employees have been on strike for seven days, defying return-to-work orders by the teachers unions on Tuesday night.

More than 1,500 students and teachers attended a demonstration and march outside the state capitol building organized by high school students. Juliana, one of the students who organized the event, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that she and her friends started planning the march on Wednesday. “We made a Facebook event that afternoon, and next thing we knew there were hundreds of people sharing it.”

The event was livestreamed on the *World Socialist Web Site* Facebook page as part of ongoing on-the-spot coverage on the teachers’ struggle.

Several students addressed the rally. One said, “This isn’t just about teachers, or just about state employees. It’s about our futures. We need to see the bigger picture.

“A lot of the time, our teachers buy our school supplies for us. Some students who go to my school cannot afford textbooks. And at the beginning of the year the teachers will go out of their own pocket, they will sacrifice what little money they get for the students, because they care about us. We have outdated science books, with information that has been proven wrong, but we’re still using them.”

Zac Corrigan, a member of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, the student and youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party, also spoke. He called for an expansion of the strike and the mobilization of the entire working class behind school

employees.

“Your demands are the demands of the entire working class,” Corrigan said. “Workers everywhere are tired of being told there is no money for our basic social rights, no money for education, no money for decent jobs. Meanwhile trillions are made available for Wall Street bailouts, corporate tax cuts and endless war.”

Corrigan warned that the unions, media and Democratic and Republican politicians were seeking to shut down the strike. “It is time to reach out to workers throughout the state,” he said, “to coal miners, to natural gas workers, to factory and warehouse workers, to service and health care workers, to high school and college students.” Corrigan added to applause: “It is time to rally the broadest support behind this strike. If the governor and his henchmen threaten injunctions, fines and dismissals, the response of the working class should be: General Strike!”

Corrigan said the teachers’ fight was a “political struggle to determine which class should rule” and “how the wealth created by the working class should be distributed.”

The Democrats, Republicans and unions all boycotted the rally even though it was held on the steps of the state capitol. They are working to shut down the strike and view with fear workers’ sentiment for broadening the fight.

After the march, thousands of teachers, students and supporters once again flooded the capitol building and rallied inside. WSWs reporters distributed hundreds of leaflets of the statement, “Mobilize the entire working class behind West Virginia teachers! Form rank-and-file committees to expand the struggle!”

Zack Sapp is a 24-year-old custodian at a school in Logan County, a southern coalmining region of West Virginia. His father is a retired coal miner. He told the WSWS: “I think we have to stand up for what we deserve. I come in early and leave late almost every day.

“There’s no evening shift at our school, so we have to clean the building while the kids are there, which makes it really difficult. On top of that, I have to drive one hour to get to work and one hour to get back home. And I only take home about \$650 every two weeks. It’s not enough for what we do and the time we put in.”

“I heard that Frontier [telecommunications] workers may be going on strike on Monday. And out of state, I heard that teachers in Pennsylvania are planning to go on strike. A lot of people say that we inspired them, and I’m happy about that. People have to stand up for what’s right. I feel that the politicians don’t care for us.”

Zack continued: “I think the working class should be in control. We’ve all worked too hard to not get what we deserve. I don’t think the billionaires should control us. I feel that our senators are bought out. They don’t want to do anything for us because they’re getting paid.”

Sylvia, who has taught in Kendall County since 1999, attended the march on Friday with her son, who is in high school.

“When the union said they were closing the strike, I felt disheartened. I felt like no one had been listening to what we had been saying for such a long period of time. Yes, the raise is nice, but without the insurance, without the benefits, it all goes hand in hand. That was the main point.

“I have a master’s degree. My husband is a welder. I have three children, all teenagers. Everybody has a lot of doctors’ appointments. It’s \$40 for each co-pay right now. Plus, with the rising costs, it takes more and more out of the paychecks. That’s less and less that goes toward the family for the things that kids need growing up.

Sylvia explained how she and her co-workers had independently organized to continue the strike. “We never met back at school. It was just through social media, and texting and calling. We said, ‘No, this is not right.’ We’re going to be back up there tomorrow! Everybody on the first day wore black, and we said

we’re back in black! Because nobody listened to us, and it took a few minutes for it to sink in that, wait a second, this is our representation, and maybe they have a few things wrong.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact