

Form rank-and-file committees to expand the strike!

## The way forward for West Virginia teachers

The Socialist Equality Party  
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The strike by West Virginia teachers and public school employees is at a crossroads. Democratic and Republican politicians, fronting for corporate interests, are presenting teachers with a “choice” between two unacceptable alternatives.

Over the weekend, the State Senate, presided over by Republican Mitch Carmichael, passed a bill reducing the five percent proposed pay increase backed by Republican Governor Justice and passed by the House of Delegates to four percent. Speaking as a representative of DuPont, Dow, Patriot Coal and other energy, chemical and pharmaceutical giants, Carmichael has thrown down the gauntlet to teachers and is preparing to forcefully suppress the strike to set an example to the entire working class.

This has exposed the bankruptcy of the West Virginia Education Association (WVEA), the American Federation of Teachers-West Virginia (AFT-WV) and the West Virginia School Service Personnel Association (WVSSPA). The unions have told workers to place their faith in backroom maneuvers with the state Democrats and Republicans, who are all bought and paid for by big business.

The response to Carmichael by Justice, the Democrats and the trade union leaders is: “Not four percent, but five percent!” As if this makes a significant difference! With the ploy of “fighting” for an extra one percent on wages—while ignoring the teachers’ main demands on health care costs—the unions and their Democratic allies are seeking to retake the initiative from the rank-and-file and channel the struggle behind futile protests to the Republican leadership in the state Senate.

This is a strategy to contain, isolate, dissipate and end the strike on the basis of a sellout deal. Moreover, Justice, while working with the unions, has threatened

to “go to DEFCON 15”—that is, all-out war against the teachers—if they don’t submit.

Last week, teachers took a courageous stand. By overwhelmingly rejecting the deal brought back by Justice and the unions, they expressed their determination to fight not only for their own interests, but for the interests of the entire working class. The question now is: What way forward?

**Mobilize the entire working class! Form rank-and-file committees to take control of the strike!**

There is enormous popular support for the striking teachers and public school employees. Workers all over world see in the demands of the teachers their own demands, and in this lies the potential for immensely strengthening the strike. Working-class support is not limited to West Virginia. Teachers and public school workers in Oklahoma, Pittsburgh, New Jersey, Minneapolis, Arizona and other cities and states have been inspired to press for strike action.

Frontier telecommunication workers walked off the job on Sunday morning in opposition to job cuts. Workers from Britain to Ghana have expressed their support for the West Virginia teachers.

This support must be mobilized and organized. To the threats of court injunctions and firings, the working class should respond with preparations for a statewide general strike.

No confidence can be placed in the WVEA, AFT-WV and WVSSPA! At every turn, the strike has been waged in opposition to the efforts of the unions to contain and end it. Facing mass anger and a spreading wave of local

strikes, the unions called a two-day walkout. Then they hailed a rotten agreement as a great victory and ordered the teachers to return to work. When the agreement was overwhelmingly rejected and teachers organized to continue the strike, the union officials are again seeking some way of pushing through a sellout.

The Socialist Equality Party urges striking teachers and school employees to go from impromptu meetings and rallies to the election of rank-and-file strike committees, independent of the unions, comprised of the workers themselves. These committees should issue urgent appeals to the entire working class—in the US and internationally—and organize delegations of strikers and student youth to go out to the all the major workplaces to encourage workers to join the struggle.

These committees will create the framework for advancing the demands to meet the needs of teachers and the entire working class. Every worker has the right to a good-paying job, health care, public education, and a secure retirement. Urgent measures must be taken to provide treatment for the opioid epidemic, address the growth of black lung disease, and rebuild the state's infrastructure.

## **A political struggle against the capitalist system**

The politicians, Democrats and Republicans, will of course declare that there is “no money” for such elemental rights. This only demonstrates the class interests that they represent, and that teachers are engaged in a struggle against the entire political establishment.

Those who say the strike is not political and demand that “politics” be kept out of the struggle are doing the bidding of the corporations and the government. In the name of “no politics,” they are promoting the politics of the ruling class.

Arrayed against the teachers are the Democratic and Republican politicians, who are opposed to any measures that encroach on the profit interests of the corporations that run the state. Behind Justice, Carmichael, Ojeda and company stand the big-business politicians in Washington, who all agree on the need to force the working class to pay for an endless infusion of

wealth into the corporate and financial elite.

The strike raises the most basic political question of all: Whose interests will determine social and economic policy? Those of the corporate and financial elite that controls both big-business parties, or those of the workers who produce all of society's wealth but are everywhere exploited and oppressed?

Three billionaires in the US control more wealth than the bottom half of the population. More than \$700 billion is spent every year on the US military. Trillions have been handed out to the banks to fuel stock market bubbles and increase the fortunes of the rich. The ruling class has just implemented a \$1.5 trillion tax cut for the corporations and the wealthy. And they claim there is no money!

The resources exist, but they are monopolized by the rich. The vast wealth created by the labor of generations of workers must be taken out of the hands of the privileged few and put at the disposal of the people as a whole. The SEP calls for a radical redistribution of wealth, including a massive tax on the rich. The giant banks and corporations must be transformed into publicly owned and democratically controlled utilities, operated on the basis of social need, not private profit.

This means the fight to replace capitalism—a system in which the vast majority labor for the profit and wealth of the few—with socialism, a society based on equality and the material and spiritual liberation of mankind from war, oppression and want.



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