

# UK education workers send messages of solidarity to striking West Virginia teachers

**Our reporters**  
**5 March 2018**

The following are messages of support from education workers in the UK to the striking West Virginia teachers.

Tom, a teacher, writes:

I wholeheartedly support the struggle by the West Virginia teachers. Their principled stand is an inspiration for workers internationally. In the UK, teachers have been under attack for decades and losing struggles on pensions and performance-related pay.

The teacher unions in Britain have not lifted a finger to fight against attacks to pay and conditions. A few token one-day strikes and regional actions have left teachers demoralised with many looking to leave the profession.

The character of our unions is clear from the absence of any message of solidarity with the teachers of West Virginia. Teachers and all workers must draw these lessons and mobilise independently of the union bureaucracy. Your struggle is a direct example of what needs to be done to make any change to the situation that faces teachers, workers and youth internationally.

Tania, a Special Educational Needs teacher, writes:

I have been teaching for over 20 years. I stand in full solidarity with your courageous stand in defence of wages, conditions and the rights of children for a fully funded educational system. In the UK, we face crippling budgetary cuts and increased class sizes. The government aims to privatise every school in the UK over the next four years, along the lines of charter schools in the US.

Teachers have shown their willingness to fight, returning “yes” votes to strike ballots from 2010 onwards. But this determined stand has been strangled by the trade unions, especially the National Education Union, which is staffed by leading members of various pseudo-left groups.

Millions participated in strike action in 2011, linked with other public sector workers. But the trade union bureaucrats systematically isolated this and every dispute since.

West Virginia shows that the ability of the bureaucracy to impose defeats is being challenged. Your struggle is the same as ours. Victory will come if you organise independently, form independent rank-and-file committees and turn to the broadest sections of the working class who have all had enough! I will inform my colleagues here in the UK of your brave stand and mobilise support for your determined battle.

Robert, a lecturer, writes:

The UK lecturers’ strike and the West Virginia teachers’ strike, are part of the same broader struggle. Since 2009, UK lecturers have seen their pay fall by 16 percent in real terms. The amount spent by UK universities on staff has fallen by around 10 percent.

It will only get worse. The number of PhDs awarded each year far exceeds the number of job openings, leading to the creation of a workforce exploited through temporary, fractionalized, and part-time contracts, heavy teaching loads and job insecurity. This reduces the number of permanent posts.

For the minority of graduates who manage to find permanent academic employment, the demands of the job have increased massively. Nearly all academics I know work longer than their contracted hours and there are huge demands in terms of research, teaching and administration. Most academics are never away from the job!

In terms of real hourly pay, academics often joke that they may as well be working in McDonald’s. Not only are they under pressure to churn out publications with machine-like regularity, they must also demonstrate the “impact” of their research by partnering with external organizations and routinely apply for grants where the

average success rate is around 9 percent.

Lecturers face growing class sizes and rising expectations from students paying over £9,000 a year in tuition fees. The “student as consumer” model, far from producing critical, independent thinkers, means UK universities risk becoming factories, mass producing young minds socialized into patterns of conformity.

The average student now takes on around £60,000 of debt to go to university. Interest on student loans is now above 6 percent, and student debt is being sold to private companies. Students pay more for less—with an ever-larger proportion of teaching carried out by Ph.D. students and adjuncts. A quarter of UK students now report mental health difficulties. When they complete their degree, they enter a job market that is more competitive than ever.

Student loans are also available to fund master’s degrees. From August 2018 it will be possible to get student loans to fund PhDs. Potentially, a student could accrue eight years’ worth of debt. The total amount owed would be equivalent to taking out a mortgage on a house.

The crisis of UK higher education, like secondary education in West Virginia, is the inevitable result of capitalism left unchecked. The present woes of the UK university system go back to the 2008 financial crisis. With the bailout of the banks having served to transfer public wealth into the hands of the super-rich, government subsidies for UK higher education fell from 40 percent to 12 percent of university income.

Course costs were transferred from the state onto students with massive tuition fees as well as maintenance loans needed to support living costs. International students pay anywhere between £16,000 and £37,000 a year in tuition fees. The ruling class is now coming for lecturers’ pensions, proposing measures that will leave the average lecturer £10,000 a year worse off in retirement.

Striking West Virginia teachers understand that they cannot trust the unions or big business politicians to act in their interests. They are organizing resistance independently. This will inspire others, including UK lecturers. It is essential that workers recognize what is common in their struggles and support one another. Because capitalism is global, the only meaningful form of resistance must also be global.

shown real guts and determination by rejecting the trade unions’ stitch-up agreement. The offer of an unguaranteed one-time 5 percent rise is a further wage cut. But together with empty promises of further “task forces” by the governor, it was enough for your unions to tell you to go back to the classrooms.

I have read of the rich history of militant class struggles in West Virginia and you are continuing this proud tradition. I will urge my colleagues to link their struggle with your own. Our collective success or failure depends on forging a united, independent working class offensive.

Sarah, a teacher, writes:

I am in solidarity with the teachers of West Virginia state and their decision to defy the unions’ sell-out of their contracts and pensions. As a teacher in the UK I see the same insipid, treacherous forces at work to divide sections of the working classes and pit them against each other, assigning blame rather than assigning direct accountability for the crisis that education around the world finds itself in. The finger should be pointing at capitalism. The only solution to this crisis is the unification of struggle for education worldwide under socialism.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**

Simon, a lecturer, writes:

I extend my heartfelt wishes for success in the struggle waged by West Virginian teachers. You have