

Reject the sellout deal that robs Medicaid from school children

## West Virginia teachers have the right to vote on any return to work!

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*The WSWS Teacher Newsletter is holding an emergency call-in meeting for teachers today, Tuesday, at 7:00 pm Eastern. To participate, click [here](#) or call (872) 240-3212 and use access code 368-891-261.*

West Virginia teachers have the right to vote on any return to work, with adequate time to study the deal announced by Governor Jim Justice and the unions on Tuesday morning.

The speed with which the unions are shutting down the strike exposes the real character of the agreement, which finances inadequate pay raises with deep cuts to social programs and does nothing to address the long-term underfunding of the Public Employees Insurance Agency (PEIA). If the deal was truly a great victory, why not give teachers time to study and vote on it?

The union leaders learned their lesson from the last effort to shut down the strike, when a one-day “cooling off” period gave teachers time to mobilize and organize opposition. Teachers report that they have already received robocalls telling them that the strike is over and to return to work.

The WSWS Teacher Newsletter calls on teachers to reject the rotten agreement concluded behind closed doors. According to Justice, a bipartisan legislative committee has agreed to give teachers and school employees a one-time 5 percent wage increase. Where will this money come from? Not from taxing the energy companies and the rich, but from cutting programs essential for workers and the poor.

The billionaire governor said he and his staff “made additional cuts” to extend the pay raise to all public employees. This was detailed by Senate Finance Chairman Craig Blair, who said the Republican-controlled state Senate agreed to the raise in exchange

for “very deep” cuts to the budget, including \$20 million from general services and Medicaid. “There’s going to be some pain,” Blair said.

Teachers and school employees waged this historic battle to fight for the right to health care, not to take it away from low-income and poor people in the state, including tens of thousands of their own students. A third of the state’s population—554,000 men, women and children—depend on Medicaid. Moreover, such cuts will only worsen the immense social problems teachers deal with every day, from the lack of vision and dental care to the opioid crisis.

The unions and the state legislature have dropped the strikers’ major demand: to fully fund the PEIA and end the crushing out-of-pocket health care costs, which will eat up any meager pay increase. A worthless “task force” has been set up to investigate financing of the insurance agency, but the ruling class is adamant that it not be funded through increasing taxes on the giant energy, chemical and pharmaceutical companies that control the state.

WVEA President Dale Lee, AFT-VW President Christine Campbell, and UMW President Cecil Roberts stood with state Democrats in the capitol building Tuesday morning to hail the governor and present this rotten deal as a great victory. Once again, they are telling teachers to place their faith in politicians from both parties and their imaginary budget projections.

From the very beginning, this struggle was started by rank-and-file teachers and school employees, not the unions, which have accepted decades of concessions. The national leaders of the teachers’ unions—AFT President Randi Weingarten, who made \$492,563 last year, and NEA President Lily Garcia, who made

\$348,732—flew to West Virginia, not to expand the struggle, but to kill it. They are terrified that the teachers’ revolt was spreading to Kentucky, Oklahoma and other states.

Asked by a reporter yesterday whether the unions would be organizing strikes in the 49 others states in the country, NEA President Garcia responded with an emphatic “No!” In doing so, she was merely operating under the principle spelled out earlier this month by AFSCME lawyer David Frederick before the US Supreme Court, when he said, “union security is the tradeoff for no strikes.”

But expanding this struggle is exactly what must be done. Rank-and-file teachers who organized independently of the unions in their schools and communities to launch this strike, and then overturned the first sellout deal, should organize rank-and-file meetings again. No return to work must be allowed until all workers have time to examine the details of this sellout deal and vote on it.

Teachers, school employees and other public workers should elect rank-and-file committees in every school, workplace and community, to seize back the momentum and fight for the broadest mobilization of the working class to defend the right to quality health care for all public employees and every man, woman and child in West Virginia.

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