

The struggle of teachers cannot be isolated! For a united movement of the entire working class!

Jerry White
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Teachers in Arizona are converging on the state capitol today to demand higher wages and increased school funding. Educators and public employees in Oklahoma are preparing a strike April 2 after state legislators refused to meet their pay and funding demands in a state that has carried out one of the deepest cuts in per-pupil spending in the nation.

The movement of teachers, which erupted with the nine-day walkout in West Virginia last month, has also spread to Kentucky, Colorado, New Jersey and other states, plus the US territory of Puerto Rico.

The experience of the last two months has raised vital political and strategic issues, which must be discussed and debated to take this struggle forward.

It is first of all necessary for teachers to clearly understand the role and function of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), which are working not to organize a struggle, but to suppress and isolate opposition wherever it emerges.

In all the struggles that have developed, the role of these organizations is the same. In West Virginia, a series of one-day wildcat strikes forced the unions to call a limited statewide walkout in late February and then extend it. The unions then suddenly announced that they had reached a deal with the state's billionaire governor and ordered teachers back to work on March 1. Rank-and-file teachers defied their efforts at blackmail, however, and voted to continue their fight.

Lacking the independent organization necessary to sustain the fight, however, teachers were later sent back to work with essentially the same deal, which ignored their main demand to end soaring health care costs. To add insult to injury, the meager 5 percent raise will not

be paid for by increasing taxes on the state's mining and gas industries, but by cutting other essential services.

In Jersey City, facing an upsurge of anger inspired by West Virginia teachers, the unions called a half-day strike, then immediately sent teachers back to work without any resolution to their essential demands.

The AFT and NEA are now trying to sabotage the struggles in Oklahoma, Arizona and other states. They are seeking to corral and co-opt campaigns that have developed outside of the unions, reviving the same threats that statewide strikes will result in punishing fines and the loss of public support.

The Socialist Equality Party calls on teachers and school employees to form rank-and-file committees in every city and state to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the strikebreakers and corporate stooges in the AFT and NEA. These committees should coordinate the struggles of teachers, using social media and other means, and reach out to every section of the working class, which faces the same basic issue.

Workers in every industry must be mobilized to support the developing movement among teachers. This requires the formation of independent, rank-and-file factory committees in all plants and workplaces. All the pro-capitalist organizations—the United Auto Workers, the United Steelworkers, the Teamsters, the SEIU, etc.—play the same role in suppressing class struggle as do the teachers unions.

Instead of one-day strikes or limited protests, which the unions seek to turn into lobby campaigns to bought-and-paid-for governors and state legislators, preparation should be made now for an unlimited, nationwide general strike that will combine the fight for a vast

expansion of funding for public education with the demands for the eradication of poverty, hunger, homelessness and other social ills afflicting tens of millions of working-class children.

A particular appeal should be made to student youth. The protests over school violence this past week expressed a deep anger among young people, and many demanded increased funding for schools and other social programs. While the Democrats and media are seeking to prevent the struggles of youth from connecting to those of the working class, by limiting opposition to calls for gun control and electing Democrats, millions of young people are determined to fight for a future free from poverty, inequality and war.

Teachers are engaged in a political fight against both the Democrats and Republicans. The unions promote the lie that the Democrats are friends of teachers. The eight years of the Obama administration, however, saw the destruction of the jobs of hundreds of thousands of teachers and educators, the closure of thousands of public schools and a sharp expansion of for-profit charter businesses. In New Jersey, the Democratic-controlled board of education obtained an injunction to threaten striking teachers in Jersey City with fines and possible jail terms.

The main opposition of the Democrats to Trump is not over savage budget cutting, corporate tax cuts or mass deportations, but over the president's alleged softness on Russia.

Teachers must formulate demands not based on what the ruling class and its political representatives say they can afford, but what teachers and the entire working class need. This includes the right to a good-paying and secure job, health care and a pension. Trillions of dollars must be invested to rebuild the country's social infrastructure, repair and build new schools, and hire millions of trained teachers, specialists, school aides and other support staff. Vast resources also must be poured into programs to eradicate poverty and address the opioid epidemic.

The corporate-controlled politicians will all say there is no money. This only shows what class interests they represent. Three billionaires in the US have more wealth than the bottom half of the population, 150 million people. The Democrats and Republicans just passed a federal budget that squanders \$700 billion on the military to continue imperialist wars.

The struggle by teachers in the US is part of a growing international battle. As teachers were striking in West Virginia and receiving messages of international solidarity from teachers in Ghana and Australia, tens of thousands of their counterparts were walking out in Argentina. Since then there have been a series of teacher and public employee strikes in the UK, Jamaica, Niger, Kenya, France, Holland, Slovenia, Brazil, India, Sri Lanka and many other countries.

Workers in every country face the same problems and the same enemies—the globally organized banks and giant corporations that want to loot society's resources and reduce the working class to the status of ignorant slaves.

A stand by teachers will win enormous support and become a pole of attraction for billions of workers everywhere who want to fight against inequality, against capitalism, and for society based on human needs, not private profit.

The Socialist Equality Party is fighting to unite every battle—against budget cutting, the privatization of public services, police violence, the attack on democratic rights and the threat of war—into a single, unified struggle of the working class to fight for political power and socialism.



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