

Teachers' rebellion spreads on four continents

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Teachers across the world are leading a global wave of worker militancy as strikes and protests spread across North and South America, Europe, and Africa.

In the United States, protests sparked by the rebellion of West Virginia teachers continued this week as Arizona teachers demanding higher wages protest at the state capitol in Phoenix today and 41,000 Oklahoma teachers prepare for a statewide strike on April 2.

Teachers' anger boiled over Monday and Tuesday after Democratic and Republican state legislators in Oklahoma voted to pass a deal that increases school funding largely by hiking sales taxes on workers and poor people.

Oklahoma Teachers United (OTU), a Facebook page created by rank-and-file teachers with over 10,000 followers, posted, "Senate to vote this week on bill passed by house but teachers already saying no. TEACHERS HAVE HAD IT!!!!!! Legislators are so confused right now. I got 100 calls from the Dems and Reps asking, 'What in the world is wrong with you?'" The bipartisan deal promised to increase teachers' wages by \$6,000—far below the \$10,000 they have demanded.

Oklahoma teachers have little faith in the official trade union, which was roundly denounced by teachers for trying to postpone a strike until the end of April. An online poll published by Oklahoma Teachers United found that roughly half of teachers "believe the union will cave into pressures from the legislature and superintendents before teachers get fair wages."

Last night, OTU page administrators were invited to participate in a call hosted by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). OTU posted during the call: "AFT is in the middle of a town hall conference call explaining how teachers MUST take this deal." Employing the same tactics as those used by the AFT in West Virginia, the union is telling workers they have no support in the working class: "They are saying that parents, teachers, and students will not stay in this fight past a week." The comments from teachers are overwhelmingly hostile to the AFT scare tactics.

In Kentucky, a state with 42,000 teachers, "pension

awareness walk-ins" took place this week while teachers plan to rally today at the state capitol in Frankfort. Republican governor Matt Bevin has denounced teachers as "selfish" and "angry people who want to destroy what's good for this state." He pledged to gut pensions "whether they like it or not" as the state Senate approved a two-year budget plan to slash \$1.1 billion from the Teachers' Retirement System.

In Arizona, with 51,000 teachers, "sickouts" and demonstrations have taken place this week as the likelihood of a strike grows. Teachers are using social media and distributing leaflets to neighbors and parents independent of the teachers union explaining that the state has made \$371 million in cuts to education since 2008.

Teachers in New Dallas, Pennsylvania, the Quad Cities of Iowa-Illinois, and Denver, Colorado may be the next districts to strike. Teachers in Denver are demanding the first district strike authorization vote since the 1990s, according to the *Denver Post*. Sickouts and pickets have broken out in part due to anger over the ProComp pay-for-performance system, which has kept Colorado teachers wages among the lowest in the nation.

In the face of growing opposition, the Denver Classroom Teachers Association extended ongoing contract negotiations without any pledges from the school district. With typical cowardice, the union told teachers to place their faith in the passage of a November ballot initiative to fund public education—but the initiative is not even on the ballot yet!

Large numbers of teachers joined hundreds of thousands of young people during last Saturday's nationwide protests against mass shootings at public schools, and demands from protesters for increased funding for schools, textbooks and supplies, not the arming of school teachers, were omnipresent.

As nearly 150,000 teachers in several parts of the United States threaten strikes, opposition to attacks on public education is emerging worldwide.

Africa

In North Africa, simultaneous strikes are taking place in Tunisia and Algeria. The demands of teachers across the world are fundamentally the same: higher wages, secure retirements and pensions, and the defense of the right to public education.

After the Algerian teachers' union CNAPESTE shut down the month-long strike from January 30 to February 28, teachers at high schools, middle schools, and primary schools have announced they will relaunch the nationwide strike on April 9, threatening the country with what Reuters calls "the most important protest movement in Algeria since the troubles that were produced in 2011 after the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia through the Arab Spring."

Doctors and medical students are already striking against deteriorating public health conditions. High school students had also joined the February teachers' strike.

High school teachers in neighboring Tunisia, the birthplace of the Arab Spring, are joining their Algerian counterparts by holding a one-day general strike today. The strike is the second one-day strike the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) was forced to call in the last six weeks as a result of growing opposition among Tunisian teachers.

In Tunisia, teachers are demanding 15 percent bonuses and the reduction of the retirement age to 55. In Algeria, teachers are striking over teacher pay and the Algerian government's cuts to public education. Both the Tunisian and Algerian governments are threatening to fire strikers and dock their pay.

Latin America

Teachers' strikes also spread across Central and South America this week. In Argentina, teachers in Buenos Aires province plan to set up a permanent "white tent" encampment on April 5 and are demanding a 20 percent wage increase to make up for 15 percent inflation. A two-day nationwide strike rocked the South American country earlier this month. On March 22, teachers in neighboring Uruguay also held a 24-hour strike.

In Mexico, 16,000 teachers in the state of Chihuahua struck on March 21 demanding back pay, culminating in a large demonstration of thousands in the city of Chihuahua. In the impoverished southern states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Michoacán, ongoing teacher strikes have shut down schools with over one million students enrolled. The government is

promising to fire any teachers who strike for three days out of the month.

A two-day strike took place last week in Carabobo, Venezuela, where teachers struck for two days to demand large wage increases, prompting impromptu protests in the city of Valencia, two hours outside of Caracas. A strike of teachers in the Brazilian state of Amazonas began on Monday over wages and cuts to healthcare. The action coincides with an ongoing strike of Sao Paulo teachers against planned attacks on pensions.

Europe

In continental Europe, tens of thousands of French teachers participated in the March 22 general mobilization against the government's plans to privatize the French railroad system, SNCF. In Scotland, a national teachers strike is on the horizon after teachers overwhelmingly rejected a proposed three percent wage hike, demanding 10 percent raises instead. Across the whole of the United Kingdom, lecturers are continuing their month-long struggle after rejecting a sellout deal by the University and College Union (UCU), and teaching staff at 12 Further Education colleges in London and the Midlands are holding limited strikes this week to demand higher wages and to oppose casualization.

Teachers across the world confront the same enemies: governments that cut wages, pensions, and education funding to boost the profits of the banks and corporations, and servile trade unions that isolate strikes and force workers to place their trust in the same capitalist political parties responsible for the attack on public education. Teachers' greatest strength lies in linking with their coworkers, and the working class more broadly, across the world in a united fight to secure the social right to education with a good income and fully funded pensions for every teacher on earth.



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