

Build rank-and-file committees! Prepare a nationwide strike to defend public education!

North Carolina and the next stage of the teachers' revolt

The WSWS Teacher Newsletter

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Thousands of teachers and their supporters are marching in Raleigh, North Carolina today to demand decent wages and benefits and increased school funding. The protest, along with one by South Carolina teachers on Saturday, is part of a nationwide revolt by educators against the bipartisan war on public education and school workers.

Over the past several months, hundreds of thousands of teachers and support staff have engaged in statewide walkouts in West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona, and other strikes and protests in Kentucky, Colorado, New Jersey and many other states, plus the US territory of Puerto Rico.

This is part of an international struggle. Last week, 270,000 teachers carried out a nationwide strike in the South American country of Colombia to demand improved pay and health benefits. On Tuesday, 2,100 school bus drivers walked out in Montreal and across the Canadian province of Quebec because they earn less than \$15,000 a year.

Now teachers in North Carolina—which ranks 39th in the country in teacher pay and per-pupil funding—are demanding the restoration of a decade of funding cuts, pay raises for all school workers, the hiring of new nurses and social workers, and a plan to repair crumbling schools and reduce class sizes. Democratic Governor Roy Cooper has proposed to allocate less than \$100 million to increase teachers' salaries this year, promising only that their pay might reach parity with the national average over the next four years.

There is enormous support for a united struggle that will link up teachers with all sections of the working

class. Serving as a block against such a fight are, first of all, the trade unions, including the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA). While claiming to represent teachers, the unions are, in fact, working consciously to prevent a united movement and shut down any strikes that erupt as quickly as possible.

The strikes in West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona were initiated by rank-and-file teachers, not the unions, which are allied to the Democrats and defend the capitalist system. In each case, the unions worked to reassert control, strangle the fight and sign deals that ignored teachers' main demands.

Repeating the same line of the unions in other states, the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE) claims teachers' demands can be won by limiting action to a one-day "lobbying" campaign of the state legislature and electing "pro-education" Democratic politicians in November. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Both parties represent the corporate and financial elite that rules this country, not the working class. While the rhetoric of the Democrats may differ from the right-wing rants of Republicans like state Rep. Mark Brody, the Democrats have waged a decades-long attack on public education too.

Obama and his education secretary, Arne Duncan, expanded for-profit charter schools and scapegoated teachers for educational problems caused by poverty and underfunding. Last week, Colorado's Democratic governor and state House imposed sweeping cuts to teacher and public employee pensions, including

raising the retirement age by six years for future teachers, freezing cost-of-living raises and increasing worker contributions for their retirement benefits.

In every state, politicians from both corporate-controlled parties claim there is no money for raises, new textbooks or other essential needs. At the same time, the giant banks and corporations are sitting on a \$2.2 trillion cash hoard—nearly four times what the federal and all state governments spend on public education each year. After the windfall from Trump's tax cuts, Charlotte-based Bank of America saw its first quarter profit rise by 30 percent, to \$6.92 billion.

Instead of using these vast resources to meet society's needs, the corporations have spent at least \$158 billion in stock buybacks in the first three months of 2018 and are expected to spend a record \$1.2 trillion by the end of the year. The money squandered so far this year on stock buybacks, which benefit only the richest shareholders and executives, is enough to give a \$49,000 bonus to all 3.2 million full-time teachers in the US, or increase per-pupil spending by more than \$3,000 for each of the country's 50.7 million public school students.

The lessons of the strikes so far this year must be learned and made the basis for a new organizational and political way forward. The Socialist Equality Party and the WSWS *Teacher Newsletter* call on teachers to:

- Elect rank-and-file workplace committees.**

Teachers and school workers must form rank-and-file committees in every school and community to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the unions. Instead of making fruitless appeals to corporate-controlled politicians, these committees should appeal to every section of the working class—public employees, manufacturing, warehouse, health care, technology and office workers—to unite in a common fight for decent living standards and to expand public services.

- Prepare a nationwide strike to defend and vastly improve public education.** The banks and giant corporations like Bank of America and Amazon operate on a national and international scale, shifting operations to whatever locale offers them the lowest taxes and cheapest labor. Teachers cannot fight on a state-by-state basis, but must unite their forces and build support for a nationwide strike to fight the assault on public education.

- Break with both big business parties and build a**

powerful political movement of the working class against the dictatorship of the banks and big business. The Socialist Equality Party is fighting to build a political movement of the working class whose aim is the establishment of a workers' government and the reorganization of society to meet human needs, not corporate profit.

· For a sharp increase in taxes on the corporations and the rich , and the expropriation of the ill-gotten gains of the financial oligarchy. Immediate measures must be taken to promote social equality and a radical redistribution of wealth, including a progressive income tax that places the burden of taxation on the rich and corporate profits, while lowering taxes for the vast majority of the population. At the same time, workers must take hold over the wealth that they collectively create by nationalizing the banks and giant corporations and transforming them into publicly owned and democratically controlled enterprises.

Nothing the working class has ever achieved was won without a determined struggle against its class enemies and their political representatives. In the 1920s and 1930s, the textile workers of North and South Carolina waged heroic struggles in Gastonia and other mill towns against sweatshop exploitation and to end the scourge of child labor. Now Trump is overturning prohibitions on child labor established in the 1930s and the ruling class foresees a dystopian future where working class children are condemned to hard labor while only the sons and daughters of the well-to-do have quality education.

Workers in the United States and around the world are returning to the road of class struggle. To take this forward, a new leadership and perspective is needed. The Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site Teacher Newsletter* urge teachers in North Carolina to contact us to help form rank-and-file committees and mobilize the broadest support in the working class for this fight.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact