

For a statewide strike in Washington to defend public education!

## **Build rank-and-file committees to unify educators, parents and students**

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As the new school year starts, teachers in Washington are joining the fight for living wages and the right to quality public education. Teachers in Longview have been on strike since Thursday and teachers in over 200 districts across the state are still without contracts.

Teachers in Washington face the same conditions as their counterparts throughout the country: large class sizes, stagnant pay, lack of support staff or services for special education. Since the 2008 financial crisis, state, federal and local governments have sought to balance their budgets through savage cuts to public education and other vital social programs even as politicians from both big-business parties handed over billions in tax cuts to corporations like Boeing and Amazon.

Far from opposing these attacks, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA) have colluded with the corporate-backed “school reform” agenda promoted by Democrats and Republicans.

Last February, teachers in West Virginia revolted in a 9-day strike in defiance of the unions and strikebreaking threats by billionaire governor Jim Justice and the state legislature. They were soon followed by statewide strikes in Oklahoma and Arizona. These struggles had overwhelming support from the public but in each state they ran into a conspiracy between the unions and the Democratic Party to isolate and demobilize teachers. In the end, the unions pushed through deals that did nothing to address the chronic underfunding of education and decades-long deterioration of educators’ living standards and working conditions.

Arizona teachers were ordered back to work by the Arizona Educators United with none of their demands

met. West Virginia teachers have started this school year with no sign of the pension “fix” the union promised. In Oklahoma, a full 20 percent of districts have shifted to a four-day school week to cut costs.

The chief concern of the unions was to prevent the statewide struggles from coalescing into a common fight across the country against the Democratic and Republican parties and the powerful corporate and financial interests they defend. The “walk-outs should be transformed into walk-ins to the voting booth in November,” said AFT President Randi Weingarten, a leading member of the Democratic National Committee who makes nearly \$500,000 in each year.

But the election of Democrats in November will do nothing to improve education. While handing over trillions to Wall Street and the Pentagon, the Obama administration oversaw a vast expansion of for-profit charter schools, the closure of thousands of schools and the layoff of hundreds of thousands of teachers and other school employees. Governor Jay Inslee oversaw the erosion of public education in Washington while giving Boeing the largest tax cut in US history.

In the present struggle, the unions in Washington are working to keep teachers confined to their own school districts and block a statewide strike. The Washington Education Association has already agreed to contracts for 40 different locals, separating them from the 200 locals still negotiating.

Seattle teachers should vote for a strike action. But experience has shown that the unions are not working-class organizations but tools of big business and the government, which will only betray educators. In 2015, the Seattle Education Association (SEA) sold out the weeklong walkout. Earlier this year, the Teamsters

similarly betrayed the strike by 400 Seattle school bus drivers against transportation giant First Student.

Washington educators must take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands. The Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site Teacher Newsletter* call on educators to:

**Elect rank-and-file workplace and neighborhood committees.** Teachers, school workers, parents and students must form rank-and-file committees in every school and community to mobilize the widest support for statewide strike action. These committees should outline their own demands, including a 30 percent across-the-board pay increase and full funding for the health care and pension benefits of all school workers, an immediate reduction in class sizes and the restoration of all budget cuts.

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, office and Amazon and UPS workers—to unite in a common fight for decent living standards and to vastly 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. At the same time, educators should reach out to their brothers and sisters in Canada, Mexico and throughout the world who are engaged in the same struggle against the global banks and corporations.

**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. Workers must reject the lie that there is no money for decent living standards and high-quality education.

The issue is not the lack of resources but who controls the wealth that the working class collectively

produces. Jeff Bezos, the richest man in the world, lives in Seattle and pays no state income tax. Since October 2017, his wealth has increased by over \$70 billion, far more than the entire \$45 billion 2018 education budget for the entire state. Trillions more are squandered on war, including the \$708 billion National Defense Authorization Act approved by the Democrats and Republicans.

If society's priorities are to change, the working class—the vast majority of the population—must build a powerful political movement to take political and economic power in its own hands and carry out socialist policies.

**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 create by nationalizing the banks and giant corporations and transforming them into publicly owned and democratically controlled enterprises.

The political lessons of the bipartisan attack on education, and the teacher strikes so far, must be assimilated by teachers in Washington. 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 Washington 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:

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