

Tacoma teachers strike as walkouts spread across Washington

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Teachers in Tacoma, Washington, joined striking teachers throughout the state as the Tacoma Education Association (TEA) failed to reach a deal with school district officials in advance of the 5:00 p.m. strike deadline Wednesday. Teachers in 10 other districts across western Washington were on strike Wednesday while school authorities escalated their campaign of threats and intimidation against striking teachers in at least three districts.

The Tacoma walkout comes in the wake of an overwhelming 97.3 percent strike vote by teachers Tuesday night. School officials in Tacoma, the third largest city in the state and the second-largest in western Washington, have refused to budge on their insulting 3.1 percent pay offer to city teachers, who face one of the highest costs of living in the state coupled with a high poverty rate among students.

An elementary school psychologist from Tacoma, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “I don’t understand why the unions aren’t pushing for the unification of educators. They did a similar thing in West Virginia I think. Teachers wanted to go out and stay on strike, but the union tried to make them go back to work.”

She continued, “When I moved to Washington, I had this starry-eyed idea that it’s a liberal state, thinking it’s so progressive. But they have one of the most regressive tax systems in our country. We’re all one or two paychecks away from disaster.”

Educators across Washington have demanded double-digit raises after the state legislature allocated an additional \$2 billion for teacher salaries as a result of a state supreme court ruling that the state had failed to fulfill its constitutional responsibility to provide adequate public K-12 education. This abrogation of responsibility and continued refusal to adequately fund education—during a largely Democratic-controlled state

administration—resulted in an unprecedented move by the court to hold the state in contempt, prompting an additional \$8.3 billion dollars in funding over the past two years.

Schools were closed for the first day of the school year Wednesday in Centralia, Puyallup and Tukwila school districts in the South Puget Sound region as teachers struck over pay and conditions. On Tuesday, teachers in the districts of Stanwood-Camano on the border with Canada, Evergreen near the border with Oregon, and Tumwater south of Olympia, the state capital, went on strike.

They joined teachers in Battle Ground and Washougal, who continued their strikes from last week, and Longview, who have been on strike since August 23. Meanwhile, teachers in Puyallup and Tukwila face the threat of individual legal action following authorization by their school boards. Similar measures are reportedly under consideration in Centralia.

The growing militancy of teachers in Washington contrasts starkly with the efforts of the National Education Association, through its state affiliate, the Washington Education Association (WEA) and its local affiliates, to isolate and shut down the walkouts and prevent them from escalating into a statewide strike.

Teachers returned to work on Wednesday in Vancouver, near Portland, Oregon, following a vote of members on a union-backed contract. In the largest city of Seattle, meanwhile, teachers were ordered to report to work on the first day of school Wednesday without a vote or even seeing a contract.

The Seattle Education Association announced a one-year “tentative agreement” to avert a strike last Friday evening, to be voted on at a meeting this coming Saturday. While few details have been released, the deal will ostensibly increase teacher pay by 10.5

percent, while leaving substitute teachers without healthcare and achieving few of the teachers' demands for greater funding. This increase will not even come close to allowing teachers to live in the city, which has experienced the fastest growth in housing costs over recent years.

Tom, a substitute teacher in Seattle, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "As a certificated sub, I provide a necessary service for the district, and feel like I should be provided with healthcare as other employees are. Why didn't the union fight to do away with the nonsensical restrictions on healthcare that are currently in place? Further, why did they accept 10.5%, rather than the 15% that union members demand?"

Teachers must draw the necessary lessons from the NEA's efforts to suppress, isolate and end the struggles of teachers in Washington and elsewhere in 2018. The only way for teachers in Tacoma, Seattle and throughout the state to fight for substantial wage and funding improvements is to build new organizations of struggle independent of the union apparatus.

This means electing rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by educators themselves, in every school and community to unify the struggles of teachers across districts in Washington, and organize a statewide teachers' strike. To strengthen their fight these committees must reach out to United Parcel Service workers, postal workers, Amazon workers, and all sections of the working class throughout Washington, the US and internationally.

The fight to defend and vastly improve public education is above all a political struggle, which pits the working class against both big business parties and the capitalist profit system they defend.

The *WSWS Teacher Newsletter* urges educators, parents, and their supporters to contact us to develop this fight.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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