

Teachers speak out at Indianapolis rally to defend public education

Our reporters
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On Saturday, over a thousand teachers from across Indiana rallied in the state Capitol to oppose the growing attacks on public education. The rally, sponsored by the Indiana State Teachers Association (ISTA), was officially billed as the “Indiana Red for Ed Rally” and described as an event to “demand lawmakers provide more resources for our kids and increased pay for teachers.”

Held inside the Indiana Statehouse, ISTA created a party like atmosphere. Continuous loud music blared, reducing the possibility of discussion amongst teachers. Union leaders gave demagogic speeches urging teachers to pressure the Republican legislature of Indiana to fund public schools.

The words “strike” and “walkout” were not mentioned by any of the union officials during their speeches and the union is urgently attempting to avoid a walkout like those that have hit West Virginia and other states.

Nonetheless teachers chanted “strike!” multiple times during the rally. In comments to reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* teachers spoke about their conditions and the struggle to defend public education.

Lisa, a first-grade teacher from Washington Township for 15 years, said, “I love teaching students and being there to witness the growth that occurs among our children and to witness when they tap into their own strength and intelligence as we try to nurture that along.”

“I’m here because I support public education. The growth of charter schools and privatization is weakening the public school system. It’s an attack against democracy. Public education is the one way that ensures everyone has access to upward mobility, and now that ladder is being shaken.”

“As a whole, teacher pay is not increasing, it’s

stagnating. Meanwhile, everything else is rising in prices. [With] the growth of the charter schools, private schools and school vouchers, less and less is going into the public school systems and everyone is suffering as a result.”

“If you look at the Indiana budget, public schools receive 2 percent of the budget while charter schools receive 9 and 10 percent. There’s not equity in the funds. There was a growing sentiment years ago, with movies for example like ‘Waiting for Superman,’ on how to basically make money out of public schools, and they’ve found a way.”

Another Indiana teacher pointed to the vast sums of money being pulled out of education to fund corporate-backed projects. “Our state is not funding education. My kids don’t get pencils. I teach chemistry and the kids can’t get the chemicals they need to make the reactions. It makes for a very boring class because we’re underfunded.”

“When Lucas Oil Stadium was being built in Indianapolis, there was a front-page article in the *Indianapolis Star* that said the stadium had \$600 million in public funds going to it. When you flipped the page over, an article said the IPS [Indiana Public School] system froze teachers’ salaries. So, we know where the money is going.”

A group of teachers from West-Del High School in Gaston, Indiana, spoke on the multiple hardships facing teachers.

One teacher said, “We have not had an appreciable raise in over a decade. My student textbooks are over a decade old. I can’t even tell you the number of programs that have been cut in our school because the state has reduced our funding and never replaced it.”

Another teacher said, “I spend \$800 to \$1,000 a year just on supplies for my classroom that I can’t get from

the school.”

Another said, “We work near Ball State University, which is the number one teacher school in the state. I was literally told by my school superintendent two years ago, ‘If you don’t like it, you can leave. We can hire someone else.’ Because they can hire someone straight out of college for a lot cheaper than hire one of us.

“And they quit paying us to get our teachers master’s degrees. It’s so damn expensive now that I’ll never pay it off. A lot of teachers now are having to work second and third jobs just to pay the bills.”

Lesley, an Indiana public school teacher for 25 years, attended the rally to support her fellow teachers, especially newer teachers who are bearing the brunt of the attacks on public education.

“At the time I started, teaching was considered a noble profession. I love teaching and I would do it all over again. But teachers today don’t have the chance to go up the pay scale. The reason I’m here today is to support the younger teachers because I’ve seen so many teachers come into teaching and say they can’t live off the salary.

“I did my taxes yesterday. I made less last year than I did the year before. The cost of everything is going up. When I look at a young family, let’s say they start out at \$37,000 and they’re paying \$10,000 for health insurance, who can afford that? Especially if you’re the main breadwinner.

“Some of these teachers I know have been working for years and are not making more than \$40,000 a year. When you think about how much their education costs and monthly student loan bills, some of them are going without insurance because they can’t afford it while some of them can’t pay their student loans.”

Catherine, a teacher from Fort Wayne, Indiana, attended the rally with Samantha and Laura, two teachers from south-central Indiana. Catherine told the WSWS, “When they decided years ago to create a business model for the schools that is when I saw the problems begin. Kids are not a business. There is so much money spent on testing and no money for guidance counselors and other things we need to have in place.

“They got rid of the STEP model for raises and there’s been essentially no raises since then. There is no incentive to go back to school for a master’s degree

at this point because you are not going to be compensated for it.

“People would rather go work at Target as a manager because they know that they can make more money that way without a degree than become a teacher. There are even teachers who think about leaving to work at Target because they think they can make more money there.”

Samantha said, “I went back to school for my master’s and now they are making me pay \$12,000 to go back again to get a new master’s because my first degree did not meet the requirement they need for the four classes I’m paid \$300 to teach. It’s insane. And all administrators at our school in the Fort Wayne area got a \$10,000 raise this year. Our superintendent makes as much in salary as the governor, \$117,000.

“We are not paid enough to be able to do our jobs. You can’t expect us to go through all of that schooling to then be treated like babysitters, and we are, even though there are babysitters who make more money than we do.”

Michelle, a teacher from South Bend, spoke on the role of both Democratic and Republican parties in gutting public education. In South Bend, she said, “The Democrats are in charge unlike the majority of the rest of Indiana, which is Republican.

“They [Democrats and Republicans] only want to come together when it involves shaking you down. When it comes to helping you, the two parties never seem to agree on anything, and that prevents us from getting any answers to our problems.”



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