

Mobilize the working class to fight the bipartisan attack on public education!

For a socialist policy to fully fund public schools!

**The WSWWS Teacher Newsletter
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Michigan teachers today join with educators across the US and internationally in the fight to defend the right to high quality public education and oppose the corporate and financial aristocracy's drive to turn the clock backwards and make education a class-based system.

This attack is well advanced in US Education Secretary's Betsy DeVos's home state. Average teacher's salaries have declined 12 percent over the last decade, while for-profit charter schools proliferate. Public schools are underfunded on average by \$2,000 per student. Unsurprisingly, the percentage of young people in the state studying to become educators has dropped by a stunning 66 percent. The teacher shortage, magnified by the profit-driven testing industry, is creating a systemic breakdown in districts across Michigan.

This crisis, however, cannot be laid solely at the feet of the billionaire privatizer DeVos, the Trump administration and the Republicans. On the contrary, school privatization has been the policy of the Democrats no less than the Republicans. Both parties have joined together to starve public education—from Bush's No Child Left Behind to Obama's Race to the Top.

Under the Obama administration, the banks were bailed out but there were no bailouts for education and other vital services. Indeed, Obama oversaw drastic cuts to Title I and Special Education, the destruction of hundreds of thousands of teacher jobs and a vast expansion of charter schools. These attacks were part of the greatest transfer of wealth from the working class to the rich and a terrible growth of social inequality.

As elsewhere, tens of millions were funneled to tax cuts for General Motors and billionaires like Dan Gilbert and the Ilitches at the expense of the School Aid Fund and foundation grants. Emergency managers (mostly

Democrats themselves) were introduced under Democrat Jennifer Granholm while fraudulent "failing schools" policies have been used to penalize schools, lay off teachers and shutter districts.

Governor Gretchen Whitmer's policies continue to subordinate the needs of teachers and students to the agenda of big business. Her education budget calls for a paltry \$180 per pupil hike for school districts at the bottom of the funding scale and \$120 per pupil at those receiving higher grants. This is less than the proposal of arch-reactionary former governor Snyder!

In a clear sign of her priorities, Whitmer has demanded that Benton Harbor close its only high school in return for modest assistance on the district's debt. Otherwise, she says, the entire district will be hived off to charter schools. While the Democratic governor claims to oppose for-profit charters, Whitmer named former charter school executive Doug Ross as a senior adviser on "educational attainment" last February.

Under these conditions, the Michigan Education Association (MEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Michigan claim that Whitmer is calling for a "historic reinvestment in public education." This is a self-serving lie. The unions seek to trade their support to Whitmer's attacks for a continued "seat at the table" and lucrative dues stream. Any honest observer would have to conclude that the unions' repeated mantras about "Remember in November" and voting for Democrats have done nothing but aid and abet the ongoing decimation of public education.

The MEA has now signaled support to a ruthless new round of school closures by endorsing Whitmer's ultimatum to close Benton Harbor High School. This is a stab-in-the-back to a deeply impoverished district. With

only a barebones \$7,871 foundation grant, Benton Harbor educators have struggled mightily to offer a lifeline to students. The collusion of Whitmer and the union threatens to disperse students to some 10 different districts.

Opposed to any fight against the Wall Street banks and the corporate giants that have bled the state dry, the MEA supports Whitmer's deeply regressive 45 cents per gallon gas tax, which make Michigan's the highest fuel tax in the nation, costing hard-pressed workers an estimated \$562 each year.

At the same time, General Motors and Ford—which are shutting plants and laying off tens of thousands of workers—receive huge state subsidies and have not paid federal taxes in a decade. These companies have taken the record profit they have gotten by cutting the wages and jobs of workers and funneled it to their richest investors and executives through stock buybacks and dividend payments.

The fact is that the well-heeled union hierarchy—epitomized by NEA President Lily Garcia and AFT President Randi Weingarten who bring home salaries in the range of \$500,000 a year—has no intention of fighting social inequality. On the contrary, the AFT and NEA have spent the last several years trying to snuff out the rebellion of teachers, from the 2015-16 sickouts by Detroit teachers protesting unsafe schools and low wages, to the strikes from West Virginia to California during the past year and a half. In every case, the unions signed deals that ignored teachers' demands for improved wages and school funding.

But opposition throughout the US and internationally continues to grow. Over the past six months, teachers organized in "Red Pen" groups joined the Yellow Vests in Paris decrying the same lack of supplies and dilapidated conditions we face in Michigan. 300,000 Polish teachers conducted a 17-day national strike in April. Teachers in Morocco have launched repeated hunger strikes over poverty pay. Argentina, Costa Rico, Mexico, the Netherlands, Algeria, and many more countries have erupted in mass teacher strikes during the last year.

Teachers have powerful allies—not in union offices or legislative rotundas—but from workers around the world. In three months, the contracts for 155,000 GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers are expiring and autoworkers are determined to recoup years of falling pay, two-tier wage systems and the spread of low-paid temporary part-time labor. They are not only fighting the auto bosses but the

United Auto Workers (UAW), which has taken millions in bribes from the corporations in exchange for signing pro-company contracts.

The *World Socialist Web Site Teacher Newsletter* calls on educators to form rank-and-file committees to bring together educators, students, parents, autoworkers and other workers to prepare a general strike. Workers must fight for what they need, not what the powers-that-be claim is affordable.

There are plenty of resources to vastly improve the wages and conditions of workers and guarantee the best education to all children. But under capitalism, trillions are squandered on bank bailouts, corporate tax cuts, endless wars, attacks on immigrants and for more yachts and private jets for the ultra-rich.

If society's priorities are to be changed, workers must launch a political counter-offensive against both Trump and the Republicans and the Democrats, and fight to take political power in our own hands. The capitalist system must be replaced with socialism, a system based on raising the material and cultural level of the vast majority of the population, not the further enrichment of the wealthy few.

A radical redistribution of wealth is needed to fully fund public education. Taxes on the super-rich must be sharply increased while taxes are sharply lowered on working-class and middle-class families. The giant banks and corporations must be transformed into public utilities, collectively owned and democratically controlled by the working people whose collective labor produces society's wealth.

We urge educators to contact the *WSWS Teacher Newsletter*, subscribe to and share our email newsletter, and build the necessary leadership to take forward this fight.



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