

# The way forward for Dutch teachers

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Teachers in the Netherlands have decided to carry out a new two-day national strike on January 30–31, following national one-day strikes in February and November of 2019. These strikes are part of a protracted struggle for state funding to provide increased staff, better facilities, increased pay and reduced workloads.

The teachers' strikes in the Netherlands come amidst a historic resurgence of international class struggle against social inequality, austerity and imperialist war, increasingly defying the political grip of traditional parties and their appendages, the trade unions.

Since 2018, a wave of teachers' strikes has swept across five continents, ranging from the United States to India. In 2019, teachers in Poland organised their first national strike since the Stalinist regime restored capitalism more than 30 years ago.

Workers entering into struggle in the Netherlands are confronted with critical political issues. The decisive question is the international unification of the struggles of workers and youth and the adoption of a politically independent program and perspective based on socialism.

## For free public education

The Dutch ruling class has decimated education budgets over the past decade, siphoning off public funds to bail out the banks and corporations responsible for the 2008 financial crisis. The past decade has seen the largest ever transfer of public wealth from the bottom of society to the top.

The burn-out rate amongst educators is at an all-time high due to increasing class sizes and demands outside of the classroom. Children are frequently sent home due to chronic shortages of teachers, or are forced to do their homework at school. In Amsterdam, several schools had to cut the school week to four days due to “unfilled vacancies,” while growing numbers of teachers work on

temp contracts with little job security.

Education is a basic and universal democratic right. It is critical for teachers in the Netherlands to unite with their class brothers and sisters internationally to coordinate and unify efforts to provide free and universal education for all.

## For a socialist programme

Workers must reject the lie that “there is no money” for basic social needs. Capitalist governments and union bureaucrats use this false claim to beat workers into submission.

In the Netherlands, the richest 10 percent own 68 percent of the country's wealth. Worldwide, 2,153 billionaires have more wealth than the 4.6 billion people who make up 60 percent of the planet's population, as Oxfam reported in its latest survey of social inequality.

Tax evasion in the Netherlands plays a significant role in the widening gap: 10 percent of the profits multinationals divert worldwide to avoid paying taxes end up in the Netherlands, which serves as a tax haven.

The Netherlands illustrates the obscene growth of social inequality worldwide. According to Rabobank, disposable household income has stagnated since 1977. Many Dutch workers have actually seen a fall in their real income since the 2008 financial crisis, though the AEX stock market closed 2019 with record gains.

The only progressive way to address the acute social problems caused by this concentration of wealth is to expropriate the parasitic financial aristocracy and place its assets under democratic workers' control. This requires the revolutionary political mobilisation of the working class on an international scale.

## Break with the trade unions! Build action committees!

The way forward for Dutch teachers is to take their struggles into their own hands. Workers cannot fight for socialist policies by appealing to the government or limiting themselves to protest strikes orchestrated by the unions. The union bureaucracies work relentlessly to coerce workers into accepting social cuts.

The treachery of the teachers' union AOb reached a new low when it called off a national strike in early November 2019 after reaching a deal with Education Minister Arie Slob for a one-off funding supplement. But teachers rebelled, courageously striking on November 6.

In every country, the nationally-based trade unions have undergone a grotesque degeneration. When General Motors workers in America staged a month-long strike last year against plant closures, falling real wages and the expansion of temporary labour, they were betrayed by the United Auto Workers union, which is embroiled in a corruption scandal for taking massive bribes from the auto companies.

The way forward for Dutch teachers and associate workers in education is to build rank-and-file organizations—action committees—independent of the unions and their so-called “independent” third party affiliates. These action committees will mobilise the growing opposition of other sections of workers, including health care workers who also struck last November, to coordinate industrial and political action and imbue the developing movement of the international working class with socialist consciousness.

## Workers need their own party

The existing Dutch parties offer nothing to workers and will prove bitterly hostile to independent struggles by the working class. The social democratic Labour Party (PvdA) carried out most of the social cuts in recent decades and has overseen Dutch participation in many of the imperialist wars of the NATO alliance. As for the Green Left and the ex-Maoist Socialist Party (SP), they pursue the nationalist agenda of their affluent middle class social base, whose politics are indistinguishable from Greece's pro-austerity Syriza party.

Their cynicism and right-wing records disgust workers,

leading some to vote for the far right. Across Europe, the ruling elite is promoting the neo-fascists. The Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has become Germany's largest opposition party. In Poland and Hungary, far-right parties are in power, while they are rapidly rising in France, Italy and Spain. In the Netherlands, the far-right Forum for Democracy (FvD) gained 12 seats in the parliamentary Senate after the provincial elections in March 2019.

Workers who break with the unions, which are wedded to the political establishment, and take up an independent, international struggle against the capitalist system will face pressing political issues. The fight against social and political reaction demands one thing above all: the formation of a new, independent political leadership in the working class, a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

The ICFI bases itself on an unbroken record of struggle against national opportunism and for the independence of the working class from all bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties. It stands in the tradition of the Left Opposition and the Fourth International, which, led by Leon Trotsky, defended Marxism and socialist internationalism against the betrayals of Stalinism. Amid the growing strikes, it seeks to develop a socialist and internationalist movement of the working class to reorganise economic life on the basis of social need, not private profit.

We urge workers seeking a way to fight austerity, defend democratic rights and oppose militarism to read the *World Socialist Web Site*, contact the ICFI via the WSWS, and support the fight to build a section of the ICFI in the Netherlands.

*The authors also recommend:*

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