

Oppose the \$900 million cuts in retroactive pay to New York City educators!

New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
9 October 2020

On Thursday, the administration of Democratic New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced the rescinding of over \$900 million in back wages owed to New York City educators. The payment, for work already performed, had been negotiated with the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) in 2014. In some cases, this amounts to thousands of dollars in stolen wages for individual educators.

The city's announcement said, "The city is dealing with an unprecedented pandemic which has left the City in a State of Emergency since March of this year. The resulting budgetary impact on the City of New York, particularly without forthcoming Federal or State assistance, is both debilitating and not yet fully known. In light of these circumstances, the Department of Education is unable to make a lump sum payment to active and retired UFT employees as had been scheduled for this month pursuant to the May 1, 2014 Memorandum of Agreement."

The De Blasio administration is seeking to pit workers against each other, claiming the payment is necessary to avoid the layoffs of 22,000 city workers. Despite immediate calls on social media from educators for strike action, with many declaring "enough is enough," UFT President Michael Mulgrew informed over 75,000 teachers that the union would merely seek arbitration.

The stop-payment comes during a week in which the city and state have been forced to re-close hundreds of schools because of rising COVID-19 infection rates, with the chaotic reopening and closing of schools becoming a complete disaster for educators, parents and students. The New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee issued the following statement condemning the outright wage theft carried out by de Blasio and the DOE, with the support of the UFT.

New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee categorically condemns the withholding of \$900 million in retroactive pay owed to teachers from over ten years ago, which is being carried out under threat of layoffs. This constitutes a brazen act of blackmail and wage theft. It is an escalation of the unrelenting class war against teachers and all New York City workers, which has deepened significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This latest attack on education workers demonstrates unequivocally the reactionary character of the self-described "progressive" Bill de Blasio and the whole Democratic Party establishment he represents. The Democrats have waged a decades-long war against public education with the same zealotry as their Republican counterparts. They are now using the pandemic as a pretext to push through even more brutal austerity measures.

The NYC Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee also draws the attention of teachers and all education workers to the treacherous role being played by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). The UFT covered up the homicidal policies carried out by the mayor in the spring, working with the city to conceal COVID-19 cases in schools. It has collaborated with the administration behind the backs of rank-and-file teachers to impose its reckless school reopening policy.

No matter the outcome of the arbitration proceedings scheduled for today, the UFT paved the way for the massive act of looting that de Blasio is attempting to carry out. The inclusion of wage deferrals in collective bargaining agreements is a practice that corresponds to the interests of the ruling class.

Through such contract agreements, workers are forced to relinquish their share of the social wealth earned through their labor to the capitalists, who are

then empowered to distribute these embargoed wages, or not, at their pleasure. By negotiating such agreements, the UFT acts not on behalf of education workers but their class enemies on Wall Street, who are represented by Democrats and Republicans alike.

After years of sowing illusions in the Democratic Party and suppressing every upsurge of rank-and-file opposition to the reactionary policies demanded by the ruling elite, including the deadly back-to-school campaign, Michael Mulgrew and the UFT are now attempting to lay another trap for teachers by channeling their anger into the dead end of arbitration hearings. It is not for the capitalist courts to decide as to whether or not teachers are made whole, but rather educators themselves!

The UFT continues to suppress the growing demands from rank-and-file teachers for a strike to end in-person learning, repeatedly echoing the cynical lie that municipal workers must choose between wage cuts and layoffs while the financial oligarchy continues to accumulate massive amounts of wealth.

We call on all education workers to draw critical political conclusions from this experience. It is no longer a question of reforming the bankrupt UFT or replacing its discredited leadership. The union is on the other side of the barricades.

Our rights as educators to our hard-earned salaries, as well as our right to life amid the COVID-19 pandemic, cannot be entrusted to the unions or the capitalist parties they support. The working class must fight independently. Education workers must build new organizations to wage a genuine struggle in defense of their lives and interests.

We urge all New York City education workers to join us in building the NYC Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee. In coordination with the national Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, we fight to unite all education workers, nationally and internationally, based on our common interests and commitment to carry out a genuine struggle.

Our next national meeting is today, October 10, at 3pm EDT. Every educator who rejects the cut to retroactive pay and the unsafe reopening of schools should attend, and contact us today. We also urge educators to attend the meeting of Socialist Equality Party candidates for president and vice-president Joseph Kishore and Norissa Santa Cruz this Sunday at

7pm EDT.



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