

Pennsylvania educators support call to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees

Pennsylvania Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
10 May 2021

The Pennsylvania Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee supports the call for the formation of an International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). The pandemic has demonstrated the ever-greater need for workers to organize in every industry and to connect their struggles across the globe.

In supporting this call, we offer our full support to all striking workers around the world and encourage them to join this movement.

In the United States, several major struggles have erupted in the past two months. In Worcester, Massachusetts, 700 nurses are on strike demanding more staff to safely care for patients. In multiple states 1,300 workers for Allegheny Technologies Inc. and 1,100 Alabama coal miners at Warrior Met are striking against layoffs and cuts to benefits. In New River Valley, Virginia, 3,000 Volvo workers are fighting against a contract that would increase health care costs and retain the hated tier system.

These expanding strikes are affecting students and educators as well. In New York City, thousands of graduate school workers at Columbia University and New York University are on strike demanding wages that reflect the cost of living and a reduction in police presence on campus.

Internationally, 300 workers for British coffee maker Jacob Douwe Egbert are being threatened with termination if they refuse to accept major cuts in pay and benefits. In Istanbul, 2,000 electricity workers have gone on a wildcat strike in defiance of a ban on strikes in the electricity sector. And in Seoul, Korea, 1,900 Renault Samsung Motors workers have been locked out by the company.

In the most explosive expression of this rise in the class struggle, hundreds of thousands of people in Colombia have taken to the streets to protest the government's failure to contain the pandemic. Nearly 77,000 people have died of COVID-19, and hundreds of thousands have lost their jobs with almost no financial support from the state. As the working class protests these policies, the government has turned to police repression while the unions seek to reach a miserable agreement with the government to end the protests as quickly as possible.

We strongly condemn the violence of the Colombian regime, which has resulted in at least 37 deaths and 379 disappearances, as well as the support for it by the Biden administration which has only called for "moderation" in the violence.

Educators empathize with these struggles and understand the necessity of joining our struggles. We have faced the consequences of austerity for years. Benefits have been cut, funding for smaller class sizes and additional staff has been slashed, and jobs have been eliminated. Just last month, Mitchell High School in Colorado Springs eliminated over 100 teacher and staff positions.

We also understand that a common thread through all these struggles is their betrayal by the trade unions. Throughout the pandemic, the teachers unions in the US, above all, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA), have consistently bowed to the demands of the bosses and the government, and the same is happening in every country.

Nurses, steel workers and coal miners are all being isolated by their unions, which have done everything to

shut down their strikes and force through contracts that would accept cuts to benefits. Volvo workers have been sent back on the job by the United Auto Workers (UAW) without being shown the contract. Leaked details show that it would cut health benefits and retain the tier system, which is designed to divide workers and cut wages.

We fully support the newly-formed Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which is fighting to win the leadership of the strike and oppose this union-backed sellout contract.

The UAW has also worked to suppress the strikes of graduate student workers in New York City. Despite being part of the same UAW local, New York University grad students did not begin their strike until almost a month after Columbia University grad students began their strike, and the UAW has done everything possible to sell out both strikes.

All of these experiences demonstrate that workers need new forms of organization. The unions are no longer labor organizations that fight for workers' rights but are more concerned with protecting the pay of their bureaucrats and their multimillion- and billion-dollar investment funds.

In response, we call on all workers to join us in building the IWA-RFC, free from the political deathtraps of the procapitalist parties and the trade union bureaucracies. Only through an international and politically independent mass mobilization of the working class can we fight together against austerity, war, and police violence and for the expansion of our rights and living standards.



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