

“We stand with Minneapolis teachers who are walking out with their students to save lives and improve working conditions”

Educators across US send support to striking Minneapolis teachers

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The WSWS will continue to collect and publish statements of support for striking Minneapolis teachers. Contact the WSWS and tell us why you support Minneapolis teachers.

The strike of over 4,000 Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) teachers and support staff in Minnesota has entered its second week. MPS students showed their support for their teachers Tuesday by joining the picket lines. Educators and workers across the US expressed their support for the striking Minneapolis educators in statements given to the *World Socialist Web Site*. In their comments, educators and workers connected the present struggle of Minneapolis teachers against intolerable working conditions with the experiences of educators and school staff in districts across the US and internationally. Workers also emphasized the present and ongoing dangers of the pandemic and the drive to war.

A **teacher in Tennessee** said, “I stand with the teachers in Minneapolis and support their brave strike action! It is important to educators everywhere that you stand by your demands and refuse the attempts of the MFT [Minneapolis Federation of Teachers] to concede for less than you deserve! Educators throughout the world have been pushed to the breaking point by low wages and now they are being forced to risk their lives during a global pandemic. You must stay strong and set the example for the necessary action of the international working class against the cruel and inhumane policies of the ruling elites.”

Janet, a teacher in San Diego, California, read the recent statement on the WSWS on the Minneapolis teachers strike and said, “I wept when I read this article about the working conditions of teachers and their fight to get living wages. The Minneapolis teachers are so brave! We should all take heed; soon there will be no one left to teach our nation’s youth.” Janet also mentioned that the poor working conditions and lack of COVID safety measures have led to the mass exodus of teachers from the profession, herself included. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data shows that as of February 1, there are 567,000 fewer educators in public schools in the US than there were before the pandemic. This is more than double the government’s 10-year projection of 267,000 educators.

“Mental health issues like anxiety, insomnia and stress plague

teachers, and teachers’ relationships with spouses suffer dearly,” Janet added. “New teachers are coming in to take their places, but not enough of them, and I fear the social emotional problems students have these days may be an extra responsibility young teachers will have to contend with that they didn’t bargain for and weren’t trained to adequately deal with. The absolute lack of concern and of willingness to make the changes teachers are striking for is unfortunately commonplace, I fear, in school boards and administrations across the nation.” Expressing her concerns for the recent decision by her former district to lift mask mandates after the upcoming spring break she said, “If I hadn’t left the classroom already this year, I’d be afraid for my life.”

Alfonso, a teacher in a neighboring San Diego, California, school district, addressed the striking Minneapolis teachers saying, “Teachers in San Diego face the similar problems you do. Rents and mortgages are ridiculous, we’re asked to do more every year with less. Art courses have vanished, teacher assistants are gone, programs for reading are gone. Compounding that, there is the constant fear of COVID in packed classrooms, the fear of removing masks, and the constant attacks from the far right on our livelihoods.

“We support your strike full heartedly. My advice to you is take the fight into your hands. Rank and file teachers! My union has done everything to straitjacket us from defending our new teachers and ourselves.”

Alfonso concluded, “The US is spending billions to produce weapons built for death. There is more than enough money for high-quality public education. We should be demanding even more boldly: 12 students per class and eight psychologists per site would be a good start. We have to demand more.”

Clare, an educator in Alabama and member of the Alabama Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, also expressed her support. “We stand with the teachers in Minneapolis who are walking out WITH their students to save lives and improve working conditions. We stand with teachers and the working class all over the world.”

She continued, “With so many lives lost to this pandemic, THIS IS NOT THE TIME FOR WAR!! Did we not learn anything? Did not the time in solitude allow us to realize what is important? Our

lives, our families, and our values are most important and necessary! The ruling class wants us to forget that. HOW DARE THEY put us in the throgs of war when we are still not finished fighting the war against COVID. Money that should be poured into funding the elimination of this disease is now being ripped away to fund a cruel and unnecessary war.”

Anthony, an educator and a parent of a public elementary school student in Ohio, wrote: “I completely support the Minneapolis teachers’ strike. Together, teachers and support staff can begin to build the kind of safe, enriching institutions that our students and school workers deserve. For decades, resources have been stripped from our schools while military budgets and corporate handouts abound. Meanwhile, the burden resting squarely on the back of school workers has not lessened. Indeed, while essential resources are increasingly hard to come by, those entrusted with the education of our children are forced to worker harder, more creatively, just to make do with less.”

“COVID-19 did not cause this problem; the pandemic has merely exacerbated a preexisting capitalist disease that has forced our students and community members back into school despite wave after wave of infection that sweeps through places where people are crowded together, like in schools, for extended periods. Teachers, staff, and students have been forced to weather this storm with the knowledge that the powers-that-be simply don’t care how many of us contract COVID-19 or even die. In the United States, we are quickly approaching the million-deaths mark, and as the new subvariant spreads worldwide, we, too, will suffer. It has become all too clear that schools are more about impounding children so that their parents can labor under similarly deteriorating work conditions, generating corporate profits while watching their own compensation and safety diminish. These are not the schools we want; these are not the schools we need.

“I encourage the Minneapolis/St. Paul teachers and other support staff to stay the course, to reach out to surrounding districts and cities so that their efforts might spread. I encourage these brave educators to reject the false promises of the teachers’ unions, the DSA, and the Democratic Party. These insidious entities have made their priorities known, and we have nothing to gain by allowing them a foothold in our protests, walkouts, and strikes. They want nothing more than to profit by channeling our outrage for their own capitalist purpose. The sooner we dump them, the better. I am heartened by what is happening in Minnesota, and I offer my complete support.”

Commenting on MFT leader Greta Callahan’s statement that “all we want is competitive pay” and “the only number we are hard on is \$35,000 for ESPs,” **Alex**, a retired teacher from Cleveland, Ohio, said, “For what they are expected to do, Minneapolis teachers and ESPs (Educational Support Professionals) ought to be paid double that figure! This is especially given the impending economic conditions soon to be reaped on them by yet another discretionary, for-profit war.

“Yet having already substantially reduced its initial, first-year demand for a 20% raise, it is clear that Callahan’s MFT will lead no such struggle for public education. The MFT says it will be ‘flexible.’ True! It has no backbone to struggle for teachers, students or to defend public education. That is not in the MFT’s or

AFT’s class interest.

“Low wages are an insult. Yet accumulated responsibilities laid blithely on educators over years suggest something more. This pattern points to a deliberate intent to break the public education system so it can be privatized. These conditions negate the very possibility of maintaining an effective education system. Here, understaffing makes a measure of sense if in a heinous way. And the results are seen in the readiness of numerous teachers to leave a profession they love. The effective licensure of pandemic conditions only deepens this crisis.

“Minneapolis educators are not unique. The refusal of the MFT to defend their dues-payers is characteristic of all teacher unions. Nor are these conditions limited to educators. Healthcare workers, transportation workers, Amazon workers, steelworkers, mining workers, petroleum workers, agricultural workers, garment workers—the entire working class is made to endure an undemocratic system of non-voluntary union misrepresentation in their own name.

“It is essential that the proper lesson be deduced from this. There is no way forward for Minneapolis teachers—or any other sector of the working class—with the trade unions. It is essential that workers break from their unions and form independent rank-and-file committees to take up the class struggle which the older ‘unions’ have refused to lead for decades. Is it time? Yes! Time and past time!

“When demands for essential pay increases, manageable teacher-pupil ratios, increased staffing, and protection from global pandemic cause teacher conflict with the Democratic Party and its union bosses, you know that the party and unions alike have abandoned all commitment to public education.”

Other sections of workers also expressed their support for the striking teachers. An **autoworker** at Stellantis’ Belvidere, Illinois, assembly plant denounced the claims that there is “no money” to fund public education and provide educators a living wage. While the Democratic and Republican Parties have tactical disagreements on certain issues, he said, “what they do agree on is to pour a whole lot more money into the military industrial complex and shame teachers instead of paying them what they are worth. Yeah, it’s disgusting.”

“The big business parties,” he continued, “don’t care about educating the public. They just want to teach them enough to subjugate them so corporate America can exploit and take advantage of them. A truly educated public would be an informed public, which would make it harder for the government and corporate America to take advantage of you.”



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