

Portland teachers enter second week of strike as Democratic politicians refuse to secure more funding for schools

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Around 3,700 Portland, Oregon, teachers, school psychologists and other certified staff have entered their second week on strike. The walkout, which began last Wednesday, is the first strike in the history of Portland Public Schools (PPS), the largest district in the state with 45,000 students.

PPS staff and educators, who are members of the Portland Association of Teachers (PAT), are demanding pay increases that keep up with the rate of inflation, smaller class sizes, increased instructional planning time and the necessary school staff, such as counselors and nurses, to keep up with the mounting social crisis.

The Portland teachers strike is taking place as school workers launch strikes across the West Coast. It is also taking place as the union bureaucracy is seeking to shut down the strike by 4,000 Mack Trucks workers after ending the walkouts by Kaiser Permanente healthcare workers, actors and Detroit Three autoworkers.

The strike is also occurring alongside massive global protests against the ongoing genocide of Palestinians by the Israeli government. The Biden administration and the Democratic Party have declared their full support for the ongoing massacre, exposing the barbarism of capitalist politics to tens of millions.

The negotiations between the PAT union and the school district have made little progress since they began. On Wednesday afternoon, PPS shared its new bargaining proposal. None of the necessary cost-of-living increases, or any other of the teachers' necessary demands, have been seriously addressed. The only negotiations "breakthrough," as declared by PAT President Angela Bonilla on Wednesday, was the presence of PPS board members during the negotiations

on Tuesday night. On Thursday, PPS Superintendent Guadalupe Guerrero commented that teacher planning time was the only topic being seriously discussed in negotiations between PAT and PPS.

Additionally, Friday saw PAT officials lower their cost-of-living adjustment proposal. As the strike began, PAT offered an adjustment of 8.5 percent, 7 percent and 6 percent for each year of the contract. This proposal was reduced on Friday to an 8.5 percent increase for the first year, then increases of 5.5 percent and 5 percent in subsequent years.

In a demonstration of solidarity with striking educators, construction workers walked off the job at Benson Polytechnic High School. One anonymous construction worker told the press on Thursday, "When we saw teachers picketing out front, many people picked up their stuff and left for the day. We're trying to build solidarity there." Workers across industries are striving for joint strike action, in spite of their union leaderships.

PAT officials made their demands known at the start of the strike, including a cost-of-living adjustment that does not meet the rate of inflation. PPS has insisted that there is no money for pay increases or new staffing hires since the expiration of the last contract in June.

The Democratic Party, which has dominated Portland politics for decades, has aggressively opposing demands by striking education workers for additional school funding. Democratic Governor Tina Kotek called on teachers to continue to work during negotiations before the strike began and has now helped the district secure a state financial mediator.

At the same time, Democratic politicians are refusing to allocate additional funding to PPS or any other

district. Portland Democratic State Senator Elizabeth Steiner expressed her “frustration” that educators would consider asking for more money and declared, “I’m not swooping in” to provide the needed funds. Senator Lew Frederick, a Portland Democrat, insisted, “I have to say, not that I know of,” in response to questions asking if any more sources of money existed for education. The chair of the Senate Education Committee, Michael Dembrow, insisted that “We can’t give money just to PPS, and we’re talking here about additional ongoing funding, not just a one-time appropriation.”

This will not stop PAT executives from continuing to hand over workers’ dues money to fund the election campaigns of the Democrats, despite the majority in the Democratic-controlled state legislature asserting they’ve done all that they can for educators.

PPS has stated that it would need \$200 million to meet the PAT bargaining committee’s demands. While claiming “there is no money” to meet these demands, the Biden administration is spending a record-breaking \$1.1 trillion on the military and is requesting an additional \$105 billion to fund the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and the Israeli government genocidal campaign against the Palestinian people. The total funds which PPS claims are needed is the equivalent of a mere 20 M1 Abrams tanks.

Three Oregon billionaires, Travis Boersma, Timothy Boyle and Phil Knight, possess a combined sum of \$50.2 billion. At the same time, Oregon’s child poverty rate was nearly 18 percent from 2014-18, according to the Oregon Center for Public Policy. This obscene inequality cries out for the reallocation of resources to the working class and youth.

The strike taking place at PPS is one expression of the education crisis taking place across the US and internationally. The PAT bureaucracy’s appeals to Democratic legislators, commitment to stalling for time, isolating the strike within a single district, and holding secretive closed-door meetings with PPS is a strategy to lose the strike, not win it.

Portland education workers must form rank-and-file committees, controlled democratically by the workers themselves, to wrest control of the strike from the PAT bureaucracy and transfer decision making and power to

rank-and-file educators. The democratically organized rank-and-file committee will be capable of reaching out to educators and other sections of the working class, across Oregon and the US to unify their struggles against austerity, social inequality and war.

The WSWS will do everything possible to provide assistance in forming rank-and-file committees. Fill out the form below to share your thoughts on the strike and to build a rank-and-file committee at your site today.



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