

# The political issues facing West Virginia teachers

By the WSWWS Teacher Newsletter  
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*This statement will be distributed to West Virginia teachers participating in a rally in Charleston on Saturday.*

Thousands of West Virginia teachers, school employees, state workers and supporters are protesting today to demand the right to a decent standard of living and high quality public education.

Teachers have defied threats and voted overwhelmingly for statewide strike action. This has generated widespread support among students and parents who know that the teachers' fight is their own fight.

The aims of teachers are placing them in direct conflict with both the Republican and Democratic parties, as well as with the West Virginia Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers—West Virginia. The unions are preparing to ignore the strike mandate from the membership and quickly shut down any struggle if Governor Justice and the state legislature show some signs of "movement."

Educators don't need a pathetic wage increase of one, two or three percent, or a temporary delay in crushing co-pays and deductibles, which would more than wipe out any raises. Nor do they need the same old promises of new committees and commissions to find alternative sources of revenue, including by implementing regressive taxes on already struggling working-class families.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) calls for teachers to demand:

- An immediate 50 percent across-the-board wage increase for all teachers and public employees.
- Abolition of all co-pays, deductibles and premiums, and the implementation of a fully state-paid health care and pension system.
- A massive increase in state funding to hire more

educators, build modern, well-equipped schools, and employ specialists to address the educational challenges associated with poverty, ill health, and the opioid crisis.

The governor and both the Democrats and Republicans in the state legislature will of course howl that there is no money for these essential requirements. This only reflects the class interests these politicians serve.

The SEP has some suggestions on where the resources can come from:

- Confiscate the personal fortunes of the eight billionaires who control the same amount of wealth as half the world's population, or 3.5 billion people.
- Sharply increase taxes on the coal, gas, chemical, biotech and timber industries and demand restitution for the lost revenue from decades of bipartisan tax cuts and the huge corporate tax breaks just passed by the Trump administration.
- Seize and transform into publicly owned utilities the energy giants and the giant drug companies that have poisoned the state by pouring tens of millions of opioid pills into small towns.
- Redirect the massive \$700 billion a year the Democrats and Republicans just authorized to wage war and plunder all over the world.

## **Democrats and Republicans are parties of big business**

A successful fight requires an understanding of who is on the side of teachers and who is arrayed against them.

Opposed to the teachers is the entire political establishment. While squandering trillions on tax cuts and war, the Trump administration is proposing to cut billions more from public education, while promoting school vouchers and other privatization schemes to

deliberately starve and kill off public schools.

Whatever their occasional empty rhetoric, the Democrats are just as hostile to teachers as the Republicans. In Washington, Democrats have collaborated with Republicans in cutting social programs and increasing military spending, while focusing their criticism of Trump on the claim that he is insufficiently aggressive against Russia. The Obama administration spent eight years carrying out the greatest attack on teachers' jobs and wages ever, along with the promotion of for-profit charter schools.

In 1990, West Virginia teachers had to defy Democratic Governor Gaston Caperton during the 11-day strike, and the Democrats, no less than the Republicans, have resolved nothing in the ensuing three decades.

### **Form rank-and-file committees to organize a fight**

For their part, the trade unions accept the corporate-controlled capitalist framework and are opposed to any actions that would imperil their relations with big business politicians. Their greatest worry is that the growing anger of teachers will erupt outside their control.

The unions are not working-class organizations, but instruments of the state and the companies. The actions of the teachers' unions in suppressing opposition to the decades-long assault on public education is fundamentally no different than the machinations of the United Auto Workers, which is currently embroiled in a massive corruption scandal involving direct payments from the auto companies.

Rank-and-file teachers must take the conduct of this battle out of the hands of the WVEA and AFT-WV. The SEP urges teachers, school employees, state workers, parents and students to elect rank-and-file committees at every school, workplace and community to prepare for a statewide strike. Meetings and demonstrations should be called, and appeals issued to school employees and public-sector workers throughout the US, including in Pittsburgh where teachers have voted overwhelmingly for strike action.

### **A socialist program to defend public education**

Teachers, you have powerful allies: the working class of West Virginia, the United States and the entire world! Your opposition is part of an international growth of working-class struggle against social inequality. This growing anger must be organized and

politically mobilized, and directed against the source of inequality and war: the capitalist system.

If history teaches anything, it is that every single right, including abolishing child labor and giving working-class children access to free public schools, was won through collective struggle of the working class.

Any serious struggle will immediately face threats of fines, firings and even arrests from both big business parties. That is why educators, along with state workers, must build up the broadest possible support in West Virginia and more widely.

This struggle raises a fundamental question: Who has the right to determine how society's resources are spent? To secure its rights, the working class must take power in its own hands, and no longer allow all social, economic and political decisions to be dictated by the corporations and banks. The SEP is building a mass political movement of the working class, independent of the two capitalist parties, to fight for socialism and the reorganization of economic life on the basis of human need, not corporate profit.

The *WSWS Teacher Newsletter* will do everything possible to assist in the formation of rank-and-file committees, establish lines of communication to unite teachers and public-sector workers with their brothers and sisters throughout the US and internationally, and to take forward this struggle. We urge teachers to contact us, subscribe to our newsletter and take up this fight.

To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>