



Speak Out Now

Revolutionary Workers Group

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Teachers on the March – The Strikes Spread

The successful West Virginia Teachers Strike in March has inspired walkouts and demonstrations by school teachers and staff in other states, and strikes in Oklahoma and Arizona. Education workers are demanding increased funding for school programs their students need as well as pay raises.

Oklahoma

The Oklahoma government has cut the education budget by 16% over the last 10 years. The cuts mean that in-state funding per student has declined 28% since 2008. The cuts were largely driven by a 25% income tax cut that mostly benefitted the wealthiest 6% of Oklahoma's citizens, as well as its oil and natural gas industry.

These cuts resulted in four-day school weeks in 20% of the state's school districts, where many textbooks are so old they are held together by duct tape. Since 2008 the average number of students in each classroom has increased by 43%. Oklahoma ranks 49th in the country for teachers' salaries, without a raise in 10 years. No wonder 18% of Oklahoma teachers have quit to work in other states.

Oklahoma teachers demanded an increase in education spending by \$1.1 billion per year for the next three years, including a \$10,000 raise for teachers. In response, the governor proposed only a \$6,000 raise. This would come from a small increase in taxes on fossil fuels, and an increase in cigarette taxes. Both the governor and the legislature refused to increase the budget for resources and staff in schools. They refused any measure that would mean reversing the huge tax breaks for the wealthy.

On Monday, April 3, more than 30,000 Oklahoma education workers walked off the job. Thousands of teachers rallied at the state capitol for two weeks. By the end of the demonstrations, the leading teachers' union officials – some of whom had opposed the strike from the start – issued a call to end the strike and accept the governor's offer. Many rank and file teachers disagreed, but on Monday April 17 most of the striking teachers returned to work.

The kind of grass roots organization of teachers that existed in other states wasn't as developed in Oklahoma. Many Oklahoma school districts saw few or even no meetings of classroom teachers to set goals, build teams of strike leaders, and vote on the issues of the strike. The absence of these structures made it hard to maintain morale and unity, and ultimately enabled the union officials to call an end to the strike.

In contrast, West Virginia classroom teachers built



grass roots organization over several months with tactics which included coordinated strike votes in every school district, along with preparatory demonstrations showing parent and community support. As a result, every West Virginia school district shut down for the duration of the two-week strike. This gave the strikers a huge morale boost and intimidated the politicians. West Virginia Union leaders tried to get the teachers to return to work in exchange for empty promises from the state's governor, but the grassroots network counteracted this decision.

Arizona

Arizona's government has cut the education budget by 36% over the last decade, giving tax cuts to the wealthy and corporations. Starting in March, Arizona teachers began demonstrating and petitioning, demanding the state government raise salaries and reverse the cuts to education.

The governor offered to raise Arizona teachers' salaries by 9% but said that this increase would be bankrolled with cuts to educational programs such as special needs classes. On April 26, more than 50,000 teachers and education support staff walked out.

On the first day, the strike shut down over 1,000 public schools. Many families joined striking teachers in rallies

around the state. More than 70,000 strikers and supporters marched on the state capitol in Phoenix despite the 95-degree heat. The strike remained solid into its second week, and efforts by school districts to re-open closed schools fizzled out.

Two days into the strike, the Arizona government promised to raise teachers' pay 20% over two years along with some increases in funds for school programs. Some teachers thought now they could end the strike, but a majority of teachers made it clear they weren't going back to work until the state legislature and the governor signed the promised increases into law, which they did on May 3.

These strikes show that many rank-and-file teachers and staff have begun to fight back, not just for pay, but to defend young peoples' education. Most teachers' union officials aim to channel this energy into the Democratic Party's 2018 election campaigns. But the Democrats have also frequently passed budgets cutting education. For example, in Democrat-dominated California, money for schools is 11% lower than it was in 2008.

Only a real movement and strikes can force concessions from the government. The spread of public school teachers and staff struggles are a signal that all workers can organize to turn things around.

France: Railroad Workers Lead the Way

Tens of thousands of workers demonstrated across France on May Day protesting the policies of the government and their rightwing president, former investment banker Emanuel Macron. Since Macron's election a year ago, his government has attacked the rights of workers, retirees, immigrants, and students, trying to cut jobs, reduce social services and end protections that workers won years ago. Meanwhile Macron has given big tax cuts and gifts to the 1%.

In February the government announced plans to reduce railroad workers' rights, privatize the railroads and introduce competition in rail transport. The railroad workers have been one of the most militant sections of the

working class, organizing ongoing strikes six times between 1999 and 2016 against government attacks. The railroad workers have a strong democratic tradition, holding meetings of all railroad workers on the job to organize their fights and vote to continue their strikes. The government is attacking them first because it fears their fight could encourage others to fight too.

There has been a response to Macron's attacks. In April, the major unions called for railroad workers to begin a series of rolling strikes, two out of every five days scheduled through June. The strikes have disrupted rail traffic throughout the country and from abroad. There have also been strikes by Air France pilots, supermarket and healthcare workers. There are strikes scheduled for public service workers, teachers and retirees in the coming months. On March 22, public service workers and railway workers organized demonstrations of over 300,000 people all over France. On April 19, there were national demonstrations of tens of thousands as well.

The government also announced a major reform of the French educational system to limit access to higher education. Currently, French students who pass a high school exit exam have the right to go to the university. The new system will make

that process more difficult, especially for working class students. High school and university students organized protest demonstrations. There have been mass meetings and occupations in dozens of universities. The government sent riot police on several campuses to throw the students out, injuring several students. These police actions were shocking for the French population.

Macron and his government are really hated by the workers since they act in the same arrogant way as the bosses. The anger against the government and the bosses is there and so is the desire to fight together in what people are calling a "convergence" of struggles. But up until now the union officials and the major left parties have organized separate actions for each group, as well as short strikes and demonstrations with all the dates announced in advance. The main goal of the union officials is to force the government to negotiate with them to modify the agreement. This means that the decisions and the organization of the fight is not in the workers' hands. With this strategy it is very likely the workers will be defeated.

Some railroad workers and some students have gone to each other's meetings or gone to speak with other workers. They have marched together in demonstrations. But up until now they have not found a way to organize the fight themselves as a common struggle that goes beyond monthly days of protest and limited isolated strikes. But the fight is not over. Hopefully the activists in rail and in other workplaces can organize with the activist students, and other sections of the population under attack. The workers produce all the goods and provide all the services of society. If they use their power, they can certainly make Macron back down.



Young People Challenge the Violence of Society

Future history books may recall 2018 as the year of the students' uprising against violence. We have for many years endured mass murders in the U.S. by gunfire especially, but also bombings and vehicles used as weapons. But with the massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on February 14, something changed. Young people said, "Enough is Enough!" Starting with Parkland students, they organized and demonstrated in the millions across the country. Students walked out of 3,000 schools on March 14 and demonstrated coast to coast on March 24 – with the largest demonstration taking place in Washington, D.C. On April 20, the anniversary of the 1999 Columbine High School mass murder, they continued with a new round of nationwide school walkouts.

Young people today are saying that gun violence is threatening their lives every school day and they won't tolerate that. In the process, many of them – particularly

in working class communities of color – are connecting the mass shootings to the violence they face on the streets. They are connecting school violence to the Black Lives Matter revolt against police violence. Memories of the uprisings in Ferguson in 2014 and Baltimore in 2015 – led by young people – are still fresh.

Time will tell, of course, where this movement will go. But for now it has focused a laser beam on the violence of this society. Just as in the 1960s, many young people today believe they can change the world. And they are right. Young people in the '60s played leading roles in the struggles against racism and the war in Vietnam. Many soon identified other evils, including sexism and homophobia, and began to organize around those issues.

Violence permeates this society, not just in the culture of mass media, but in our daily lives. And it is more than the violence in the streets. It's the 18 suicides every day of veterans of the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and older veterans from earlier wars. It's personal abuse of partners, family members, and others by people suffering from unemployment, low wages, and gender, racial, and other discrimination. It's the violence of poverty itself that sends kids to bed hungry or without a home. Inadequate health care, food deserts, and lead in schools' drinking water, as well as police violence, affect the working poor, the unemployed, and the victims of discrimination. These are all assaults on our bodies and minds. And so are local pollution and global climate change. More and more young people are beginning to realize that this society is not keeping us safe in many, many ways.

It's not just a problem in the U.S. Climate change is affecting people, animals, and the environment everywhere, and it will get worse until we stop it. Wars waged by the U.S. government and its allies kill and maim innocent people around the world. The U.S. military has about 800 bases outside the U.S. That's more than any nation or empire in history. Russia, Britain, and France combined have only about 30 bases today. And the threat of nuclear war may be greater today than ever since the U.S. nuclear attack on Japan in 1945.

The system itself – capitalism – is violent. It is built on the assumption that rich people have the right to force poor people to work for them under terrible conditions and let the bosses profit off of that suffering. If conditions have improved at all, it is because workers have organized and fought back. The legitimacy of violence by the bosses against workers and the poor has been used to justify many other forms of violence.

Some of the young people now organizing against school violence are seeing the connections among different forms of violence, just as young people in the Civil Rights Movement made the connection between racism and other issues in the 1960s. Whether you think mass shootings are the result of weak gun control or untreated mental illness, can you imagine the problem of violence being resolved within a society that values profit over life itself? The more young people and others continue to struggle and connect the problem of mass shootings to other forms of violence, the clearer it becomes that we need to change this entire society that is based on violence and exploitation.



Stoneman Douglas student Emma Gonzalez speaking in D.C.

Colin Kaepernick: His Silence Will not be Bought

Ever since San Francisco 49ers quarterback, Colin Kaepernick, became a free agent in 2017, he hasn't been signed by any NFL team. For months Kaepernick and his lawyer, along with many NFL players and sports journalists, have claimed that Kaepernick has been blacklisted for his protest against police brutality by kneeling during the national anthem. The NFL owners and managers denied this and claimed that he just wasn't good enough.

Kaepernick began his protest in 2016, and it continued throughout that season until 49ers management refused to resign him for the following season. At the time of the protest, Kaepernick made a powerful statement, explaining his decision to kneel. He said:

I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color... This is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder... This is not something I am going to run by anybody, I am not looking for approval. I have to stand up for people that are oppressed. If they take football away, my endorsements from me, I know that I stood up for what is right.

But on April 12, 2018, the truth of the blacklist was exposed when a scheduled workout with the Seattle Seahawks was canceled because Kaepernick was unwilling to promise that he would stop his protest during the next season. Retaliation from the NFL owners has not been limited to Kaepernick. On April 9, 2018, free agent, and

former 49ers safety, Eric Reid, was scheduled for a workout with the Cincinnati Bengals. He was asked by the team's owner, Mike Brown, whether he would promise to stop protesting if he was on the team. And when Reid would not make that commitment, the meeting was soon canceled with no offer being made.

Reid was Kaepernick's teammate and one of the first to kneel in protest alongside Kaepernick, continuing when Kaepernick was off the team. He has been outspoken supporter of Kaepernick and an open critic of police brutality and the NFL owners for trying to suppress this protest. In an op-ed in the New York Times (September 25, 2017), he wrote:

I am aware that my involvement in this movement means that my career may face the same outcome as Colin's. But to quote the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "A time comes when silence is betrayal." And I choose not to betray those who are being oppressed...I refuse to be one of those people who watches injustices yet does nothing. I want to be a man my children and children's children can be proud of, someone who faced adversity and tried to make a positive impact on the world, a person who, 50 years from now, is remembered for standing for what was right, even though it was not the popular or easy choice.

All of the owners of the 32 NFL teams are either billionaires or multi-millionaires. They have claimed that these protests are hurting their business and that fans don't like it. But this isn't true. Some fans have chosen to wrap

themselves in the flag, opposing Kaepernick and other athletes. But many have supported the protests, which have spread to other athletes in the NFL and other professional sports, along with college, high school and youth sports. Even many bands at sporting events and national anthem singers themselves have joined the protest.



Colin Kaepernick and Eric Reid take a knee in 2016

The NFL owners, along with President Trump and Vice President Pence, are not actually worried about the billions of dollars in the NFL. Instead, they want to do everything in their power to discourage athletes from using their enormous public platforms as a way to oppose this brutal system and support those who are willing to stand up against it. Reid and Kaepernick and all the others are an important reminder to all of us that we don't just have to bow our heads and accept this system.

Palestine: Gaza in the Crosshairs

Since March 30, Palestinians living in the Gaza strip have staged demonstrations against their treatment at the hands of Israel. Gaza is home to nearly two million people, living in a region smaller than Los Angeles. Along with

the West Bank, Gaza has been occupied militarily by Israel since 1967. Gaza is home to hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees expelled from their land that is now Israel, which was founded in 1948. Life within the territory is an open-air prison camp that is completely shut off from the rest of the world, where many live on the brink of starvation, without clean water, electricity or medical care.

The protesters have marched to the wall surrounding Gaza, insisting on conducting nonviolent protests and demanding an end to the blockade of Gaza, as well as the right of return for refugees. Men, women and children have gathered in protest, wearing costumes, dancing, and even reading books to show that their intentions are only to protest. They have been met week after week by snipers who have shot and killed 34 people, and wounded 4,279

others. Nevertheless, tens of thousands have marched every week into the shooting range of Israeli snipers.

The Palestinians in Gaza are absolutely right to protest against their imprisonment under military occupation and to demand the only possible justice – the right to return to the lands they were expelled from. Israel is supported by the United States, which provides nearly \$3 billion in military aid every year in return for being an ally in U.S. domination of the Middle East. We have a responsibility in the U.S. to support the Palestinians in their struggle, and in fact we face the same forces – the rich whose government we live under and their system of exploitation and war. The protests in Gaza are an attempt to wake up the world to the situation in Palestine, and to a great degree, we are the ones whose attention they are trying to get.



Where We Stand

The world we live in today is increasingly ruled by prejudice and fear, under a system of widespread violence and war, where exploitation and oppression are the rule, with the many dominated by the few. The name of this system is capitalism.

The Force For Change Exists Today

Everywhere, working people's labor makes society run. Working people have the power to bring this system to a halt and bring about the changes needed. Like slavery, feudalism and other systems that enriched the minority at the expense of the majority, capitalism's removal is long overdue. The time for socialism has come.

We Stand For Socialism

- A world based on peaceful collaboration and international cooperation of working class people - not the exploiters who rule today.
- The common ownership and sharing of the world's resources and productive capacity.
- An egalitarian and democratic government, organized and controlled from the bottom up.

- Protection of the world's ecological systems, putting science to work to sustain life, not destroy it.
- A society where human relations are based on respect, equality and dignity of all peoples, not racism, sexism or homophobia.

Who We Are

We believe the international working class is the social force that can transform society and create a new world. But to do so, revolutionary organizations must be built in the working class. For this reason our group aims its activity primarily at workplaces, where struggles have the most potential to transform the world. Our newsletters are a tool to begin this work. What a handful of people decide today can determine our future. Join us to work for a better future - one that is both necessary and possible.

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