MOBILIZE THE ENTIRE WORKING CLASS BEHIND STRIKING COLUMBUS TEACHERS!



BY WILL LEHMAN
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As a candidate for president of the United Auto Workers, I call on all workers in the UAW, along with all teachers and other sections of the working class, to mobilize in support of the 4,000 teachers, librarians, school nurses and other educators on strike in Columbus, Ohio.

The striking educators are taking a courageous and determined stand to fight for safe school buildings, improved wages and smaller class sizes. In their defense of public education, they are fighting for the interests of all workers, and they can't win this fight alone.

Students and teachers are being asked to go into schools with peeling lead paint and leaking roofs, and without proper heating and air conditioning systems. Overcrowded classrooms with 28 and sometimes 35 students mean that overworked teachers cannot teach. And, as schools reopen, teachers are facing the ongoing spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, now combined with the danger of monkeypox.

The Columbus school district is offering a measly 3 percent wage increase. With inflation running at 9 percent, this means a massive pay cut after years of stagnating wages.

The entire political establishment in Columbus and Ohio is determined to beat back the resistance of educators. In their meeting Monday, the Columbus School Board, run by Democrats, doubled down on their determination to break the strike, promising that "substitutes" and administrators will conduct remote-only classes.

While workers throughout the city support the striking teachers, the ruling class is trying to create an atmosphere of hostility. On Monday, striking teachers were attacked when someone fired a BB gun at their picket line.

High-quality public education is both a right and a necessity. For decades, however, both the Democrats and Republicans have left schools underfunded, forcing educators to work extraordinary hours out of sheer dedication and love of their students.

The claim that there is not enough money for education, health care and other basic social rights is a lie. Billions are allocated at the drop of a hat to finance the military and the instruments of death, but when it comes to paying our teachers and ensuring quality schools, there is supposedly no money to be found.

There is enormous support in the working class for a fightback. All over the country and across the world, workers are fighting to protect their living standards against raging price increases, intolerable working conditions and the continuing sacrifice of workers' lives and health in the ongoing pandemic.

But the biggest obstacle to mobilizing the immense strength of workers is the pro-corporate trade union apparatus.

The National Education Association (NEA), the parent union of the Columbus Education Association (CEA), has over 3 million members. It is the largest union in the country, with thousands of functionaries

at the national, state and local levels. What is the NEA doing to mobilize support for the striking teachers? In a word, nothing.

The NEA and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) have sabotaged every effort of teachers to defend public education. The 2018 upsurge of teachers that began in neighboring West Virginia and spread throughout the country was shut down by the unions with the promise that electing Democrats to Congress in 2018 would rectify the situation. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Following the outbreak of the pandemic, the NEA and the AFT told workers to vote for Biden, claiming he would "follow the science." Instead, more Americans have died under Biden than under his predecessor.

Biden and the Democrats speak for the corporate and financial oligarchy just as much as Trump and the Republicans.

Biden insisted from day one of his administration that schools must stay open so that workers could be forced back on the job. Despite the deaths of at least 3,000 educators and 1,750 children from COVID-19, the NEA and AFT insist that school buildings—almost all lacking COVID retrofitting HVAC systems—must remain open. This has nothing to do with "learning loss" and everything to do with keeping the profits flowing for the rich.

I am running for president of the United Auto Workers to spearhead a rank-and-file rebellion against the pro-corporate UAW apparatus. I am fighting for workers to form rank-and-file committees in every workplace to fight for what workers need and not what the corporate executives, politicians and union bureaucrats say is affordable.

But no fight of any section of the working class can be won without the support of all workers.

I urge Columbus educators to form rank-and-file organizations to coordinate and direct your struggle. Don't let your strike be sabotaged by the NEA trade union apparatus! Turn out to all sections of the working class—including autoworkers, health care workers, steel workers, service workers—to back you in this fight.

Such an appeal will win mass support. Massive levels of social inequality, along with the consequences of two and a half years of a global pandemic, have produced an enormous wellspring of social anger in the working class.

It is this social force that must be mobilized to defend public education, ensure the rights of all workers, and reorganize society on the basis of social need, not the wealth of the few.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

Get involved with the rank-and-file campaign in the UAW elections.

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved