HANDS OFF THE QUAKERTOWN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS!



BY WILL LEHMAN
Mack Trucks worker and rank-and-file candidate for UAW president

I unequivocally condemn the vicious assault carried out by the Quakertown, Pennsylvania police and school authorities against high school students who courageously walked out to oppose the immigration Gestapo and the nationwide raids terrorizing immigrant families. What took place was an attack on youth exercising their democratic rights, which every worker must oppose.

Quakertown High School is only a half hour from the Mack-Volvo plant where I work and where I am standing as a candidate for president of the United Auto Workers.

On February 20, several dozen high school students peacefully left school and marched in the cold rain to protest ICE raids. Video shows Police Chief Scott McElree seizing students and placing at least one girl in a chokehold, while another officer threw a student into a planter. Five youth and one adult were reportedly arrested. This was, plain and simple, police brutality against children. In response, more than 4,000 people have already signed petitions demanding the police chief resign.

This is not an isolated episode. Across the country, young people have been suspended, criminalized and intimidated for protesting ICE deportations, including the disappearance of their own classmates. Children cannot learn while living in terror.

The Quakertown students are carrying on their city's rich tradition of resistance. Just over a mile from their school, freedom seekers once passed through this town on the Underground Railroad. Local abolitionists, including Quaker families, opened their homes as safe houses and defied the Fugitive Slave Act, which armed slavecatchers with the "legal" authority to seize human beings even in free states. Then, as now, the law was invoked to justify the pursuit of working-class people whose only "crime" was seeking freedom and a better life. The slavecatchers of that era and the thugs of ICE today serve the same reactionary purposes.

Why are the authorities so afraid of high school students? They understand that young people can and are inspiring workers to stand up and use our social and economic strength to oppose dictatorship and stop Trump's war against the working class. This is exactly what must be done.

All charges against the Quakertown students and their supporters must be dropped immediately and students returned to their classrooms without any disciplinary action. Those responsible for the violation of Constitutional rights, from the police to the Trump administration, must be held accountable.

Our immigrant brothers and sisters work alongside us, and their kids go to school with our kids. We must stand shoulder to shoulder just like we need to do at work. An injury to one is an injury to all. I encourage teachers, schoolworkers, unionized and non-union workers to form rank-and-file committees to respond to raids, arrests and suspensions. Only an organized working-class movement, acting independently of the pro-corporate union bureaucracies and both corporate-controlled parties, can abolish ICE and dismantle the police-state apparatus.

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