

Solidarity with West Virginia's Teachers from Socialist Transit Workers in New York City

We socialist transit workers in New York City, members of Transport Workers Union Local 100, offer our heartfelt solidarity to West Virginia's heroic striking teachers. We are stirred by your example of defying the threat of anti-labor laws to exercise your right to strike. And we are inspired by your refusal to accept the lousy deal that was offered by the politicians and initially accepted by your union leaders. We hope that you will win your rightful demands for decent wages, healthcare security and respect – as well as an amnesty from any potential penalties for your strike action.

We are not intimately familiar with your immediate situation, but we fear that the authorities will soon move to crack down on your strike. We hope that the signs we have seen of wider public support will enable your strike to spread to other workers, especially public sector workers who face similar injustices. We will do all we can to encourage active solidarity with your struggle from our union and the rest of the labor movement. Your victory would be a desperately needed beacon for working people everywhere.

Like you, transit workers in New York face laws that unfairly deny us the right to strike. We've experienced first-hand how these laws are used to force us to accept declining wages and cuts to our pensions and healthcare.

Your strike offers a chance to begin to turn around the long and depressing decline of the union movement in this country. Decades of broken promises and betrayals by Republican and Democratic Party politicians, as well as by the bureaucrats who control our unions, have had catastrophic consequences for working-class people's living standards and social stability. A sense of powerlessness and cynicism has spread, allowing for the rise of racist and anti-worker Trumpism. Now the Supreme Court is on the verge of dealing a crippling blow to public-sector workers by making so-called "right-to-work" anti-union statutes the law of the land.

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During the Obama years the Republicans didn't hesitate to mobilize right-wing protests like the Tea Party movement to press for their regressive demands. But even with Trump in power, Democrats and union leaders have refused to organize mass mobilizations for workers' interests: defending the positive aspects of the Affordable Care Act ('Obamacare'), halting the vicious attacks on immigrants, defending public schools, or protesting the trillion-dollar tax giveaway to the rich that was a set-up for slashing Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare.

Last year, when 'Obamacare' was threatened, we fought in our union for the labor leadership to call a mass march on Washington against the threat. And we pointed out that by taking the lead in such a mass mobilization in defense of working-class and middle-class people's healthcare, the unions could have built massive support for a struggle against the Supreme Court's "right-to-work" threat. Our motion was adopted by a number of divisions of our union but its top leaders rejected the idea. (You can read some of the literature we issued in this campaign here: "Support the Campaign for Labor to Call a March on Washington to Defend Healthcare," www.lrp-cofi.org/statements/samuelsen_letter.html; and here: "John Ferretti for Executive Board!" www.lrp-cofi.org/TWU100/ferretti/ferretticampaign.pdf)

Nonetheless the mood in the country is shifting. Last summer, mass protests that confronted neo-Nazi and white-supremacist rallies in Charlottesville, Boston and elsewhere won the support of millions across the country. Now young students in Florida and all over are forcing politicians to listen to their demands for a solution to school massacres. And your strike in West Virginia is giving new hope to union members.

We hope that as struggles like yours rise, workers and young people who see the need for such united mass action will begin to work together more broadly to advance the movement to defend our democratic rights, jobs and living standards.

As socialists, we believe that your strike is confronting a capitalist system in decay. Business tax cuts have starved hospitals and education as well as kept wages down; as you know, West Virginia ranks 48th out of 50 in pay for teachers. Health care costs are skyrocketing while benefits stagnate. Nationwide, inequality between the capitalist billionaires and ordinary working people is at record highs.

That system must be changed. We need a genuinely caring society that offers good jobs, good wages, good health care, good education, good public services to all people. In our union, we socialist transit workers publish a newsletter, Revolutionary Transit Worker, to urge our fellow workers to unite and fight back against the capitalist attacks. And we seek explain how those struggles can and must grow to challenge the entire capitalist system.

Today, this country's working class is largely demoralized and divided by many different political ideas. Over time, however, we believe the experience of united struggles by workers will see more and more become convinced of the need for working-class people to seize power from the capitalists in order to start to build a new world of freedom and abundance for all.

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