

# افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد  
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

European Languages

زبانهای اروپائی

February 20, 2018

By Otis Grotewohl  
22.02.2018

## *Statewide education strike looms in West Virginia*



*Thousands rallied at the West Virginia state Capitol Feb. 17, 2018.*

Charleston, W.V. — Thousands of public, state and education employees rallied here at the state Capitol on Feb. 17 to protest plans by the billionaire, coal-baron governor and his right-wing-led legislature to increase out-of-pocket insurance costs and break the unions.

Members of the American Federation of Teachers-West Virginia, the West Virginia Education Association and the West Virginia School Service Personnel Association were joined by their sisters and brothers of the Service Employees, the Teamsters and the United Electrical Workers.

Speakers at the rally included state leaders as well as National Education Association Vice President Becky Pringle, who is African-American; American Federation of Teachers Executive Vice President Mary Cathy Ricker; and Teamsters General Secretary-Treasurer Ken Hall.

Kotanya Hart, a member of United Electrical Workers Local 170 and leader of “Race Matters in West Virginia,” told Workers World: “The state’s legislature is trying to divide

us public employees by offering a small pay raise to some and nothing to others. They want to build a wall between us and we need to tear down that wall.”

At the end of the rally, the state presidents of the AFT-WV and WVEA announced a statewide walkout of all education employees on Feb. 22-23. The presidents announced that if nothing better is offered by the legislature before then, they are prepared to either stay out or continue other actions.

This is in defiance of the state’s prohibition of strikes carried out by public employees, as well as threats of a possible injunction from the reactionary state attorney general.

A statewide struggle has been looming since the 2018 legislative session started in mid-January. On Feb. 2, workers in four counties staged a defiant walkout and took their anger to the Capitol. (“Education Workers Fighting Back in West Virginia,” Workers World, Feb. 5.) In retaliation, that same day Senate Republicans introduced a Koch-brothers-sponsored bill to eliminate the deduction of union dues through the teachers’ payroll. The labor movement commonly refers to this elimination as “payroll deception.”

The following weekend Feb. 3-4, AFT-WV and WVEA state and local presidents administered an authorization vote taken by their members across the state. The vote showed overwhelming support for an action. On Feb. 16, workers in six more counties — Cabell, Clay, Lincoln, Mason, Wayne and Brooke — staged another walkout and occupied the Capitol.

The Feb. 16 action was significant because Friday is the day legislators try to leave Charleston and get back to their hometowns. Workers know how much it irritates the reactionary legislators to face a Friday confrontation.

The Senate adjourned a little after noon, thinking the teachers and union members would leave, and reconvened at 6 p.m. But the workers stayed and the politicians were met with angry protesters who continued chanting.

### **What led to the struggle**

In December 2017, the Public Employees Insurance Agency finance board, which covers all state and education employees, introduced proposals to drastically increase premiums and deductibles on health insurance. While West Virginia teachers are ranked 48th in the U.S. in pay, Gov. Jim Justice, already a billionaire, is the fifth-highest-paid governor in the U.S. (CNBC, Jan. 25)

Additionally, Justice is also the richest person in the state of West Virginia and owner of The Greenbrier, a luxury resort for many in the U.S. ruling class, which actually contains a survivalist-style bunker for the U.S. Congress.

When the governor introduced a meager 1 percent raise for teachers, it was viewed as a slap in the face. Since then, the House of Delegates introduced a petty 2 percent increase to be followed by a 1 percent increase three years later. This is also seen as a low blow that will not make education employees' salaries competitive with those in the rest of the country.

To add insult to injury, the legislature also introduced bills to strip teachers of their seniority and replace public schools with for-profit charter schools.

### **Momentum growing for statewide action**

All across the state, education employees have been holding informational pickets both before and after school. Many pickets have been carried out in front of businesses, law offices and houses of the arch-reactionary legislators who are pushing the anti-union agenda.

Michael, a high school teacher in Morgantown, W.V., told Workers World: "Walkouts and walkins across the state have emboldened us. Talks of a strike are now commonplace. More hopeful, though, is that they are discussed as a solution to our ills."

West Virginia has no collective bargaining. Work stoppages are illegal here. That the public sector unions are solidified is significant; they are often pitted against one another by management and the state government under such "right to work" (for less) conditions. The last time there was a major statewide teachers' strike was 1990. There have been one-day walkouts and "blue flus" since that time. The mobilization happening now is advancing the class struggle.