



Labor Today



El Trabajo Diario

Bilingual Publication (Publicación BILINGÜE) of Labor United for Class Struggle

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Teachers' Public Education Strike Wave Comes to Denver-We Fight, We Win!

Denver Teachers Reject Divisive Bonuses

By Joseph Hancock

Editor, Labor Today

Early Thursday morning, the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) reached an historic agreement with Denver Public Schools on behalf of Denver's educators. The tentative agreement, which must be ratified by the full DCTA membership, reforms a pay system which largely relied on unstable bonuses, and provides stability for students who, for the past ten years, have had their education disrupted by a compensation schedule that drove their teachers away from the district. DCTA teachers may return to the classroom today. If teachers choose not to return to work, DPS has stated that they will be unpaid.

An anonymous source close to the negotiations told Labor Today, "we want a living wage, not bonuses to the bosses' favorites." Clearly, this strike was about bonuses the district offers to teachers who work in difficult to fill positions (math and science teachers) or at low-income or high priority schools. The union and the teachers' position that those bonuses are ineffective and should be redirected to base salary, was finally negotiated in the new contract that runs through 2022. Under the current financing system in Denver Public Schools, all bonuses come at the expense of the base pay of the teachers, which is lower than the national average. The teachers, with their class-oriented approach to trade unionism, won their argument and the strike.

The strike wave began in Chicago, passed through West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Arizona, Washington state, and Los Angeles and Oakland California before touching down in Denver, where the issue of teacher compensation and support for public education were once again the center of the struggle.

The victory of the Denver teachers is particularly powerful today because February 14 marks the first anniversary of the mass shooting of students in Parkland, Florida at **Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School** that killed 17 students. The students sparked a national movement against gun violence in public schools that included the teachers' unions. From there, the teachers and their unions launched a national campaign to preserve and protect public education. In each and every case, the classroom teachers have taken on powerful interests of capital and won. The struggle continues.