

Minneapolis, St. Paul teachers vote to authorize strike

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On Thursday, St. Paul Public School (SPPS) teachers, assistants and community support staff voted to authorize a strike following a vote Monday by Minneapolis Public School (MPS) teachers to authorize a strike as well. The strike authorization votes were held under conditions of massive opposition by teachers to the deadly reopening of schools.

The reopening of schools this year, with the support of the teachers unions, has been catastrophic. COVID-19 infections have accelerated with the Omicron variant running rampant, causing the deaths of at least eight teachers and three students in Minnesota and the hospitalization of many more.

The MPS and SPPS require a 10-day notice of the intent to strike before any strike begins. This would require the leadership in the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers and Education Support Professionals (MFT) Local 59 and the St. Paul Federation of Educators (SPFE) Local 28 to vote for a strike.

The strike authorization vote passed by an overwhelming majority, with 97 percent of Minneapolis teachers, 98 percent of Minneapolis support staff and 78 percent of teachers in St. Paul approving. MPS teachers began contract negotiations for their 2021-2023 contract in February of last year. According to the MFT, the primary issues the union claims to advocate for are higher wages and better benefits, as well as other issues that plague schools, such as inadequate resources for support staff.

Striking a pseudo-militant posture, the MFT is proposing 20 percent increases in salary for the first year followed by 5 percent for the following year of the contract for salaried teachers. This is also coupled with the proposal to double the rate of hourly workers from \$25 per hour to \$50. This increase, despite its size, will likely still fail to catch up due to decades of wage

stagnation.

However, in a move that totally undercuts the demands of the MFT, the St. Paul Federation of Educators Local 28 (SPFE) is proposing a measly 2.5 percent yearly increase in salary increase and the SPPS just 1.5 percent.

While negotiating their previous contract in 2020, SPPS teachers went on strike with similar demands for increased wages, hiring of more teachers and support staff, a limit to class sizes, and resources to help teachers, assistants and support staff. That strike was the first since 1946 in St. Paul. The strike ended abruptly when the COVID-19 pandemic mitigation measures began in March, with the SPFE prematurely ending the struggle and agreeing to SPPS terms, citing “concern over the health and safety of our students and staff.”

Minneapolis teachers last struck in 1970, when MPS denied demands for livable wages. The teachers walked out in defiance of no-strike laws and court orders intended to muzzle their demands. In the previous round of negotiations, the MFT and MPS converged on a memorandum of agreement that emphasized the hiring and firing of teachers based upon skin color.

Nervous at the prospect of a teachers strike in Minneapolis-St. Paul, the local media has already begun attempts to pit teachers against parents. KSTP News, reporting on the authorization of a strike by teachers in Minneapolis and St. Paul, warned of “parent concern over [the impact] of possible teacher strike.”

Significantly, in statements to the press and in negotiations, union officials avoided placing teachers’ demands for remote learning at the forefront despite the overwhelming sentiment in favor of this by both educators and parents.

Teachers and students have demonstrated for remote

learning across the US as part of a protest by educators and students internationally who have spoken out against the homicidal reopening of schools.

Teachers confront extremely dangerous conditions in their classrooms, with the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to spread uninhibited due to the relaxation of public health measures and the bipartisan drive to fully reopen schools, which enjoys the full support of the unions. These conditions have generated a fierce response among teachers in the US and globally, from Chicago to Paris.

This movement has been sabotaged by the unions. Notably in Chicago, after teachers who voted overwhelmingly to close schools to in-person learning last month, the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) signed a rotten deal, without meeting a single demand of the teachers, forcing a full return to in-person learning. This pattern has repeated itself across the US and internationally.

The vital question is that of leadership. No confidence can be placed in the SPFE and MFT to wage a fight for teachers' demands. These organizations have time and again demonstrated their complete subservience to the interests of the corporate-controlled political establishment. Teachers must set up their own independent rank-and-file committees to map out demands based on their real needs, including the right to remote learning until the pandemic is contained.



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