

NORTHWEST LABOR PRESS

(International Standard Serial Number 0894-444X)
 Established in 1900 in Portland, Oregon as a voice of the labor movement. Published on a semi-monthly basis on the first and third Fridays of each month by the Oregon Labor Press Publishing Co. Inc., a non-profit mutual benefit corporation owned by 20 unions and councils including the Oregon AFL-CIO. Serving more than 120 union organizations in Oregon and Southwest Washington.

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Printed on recycled paper, using soy-based inks, by members of Teamsters Local 747-M.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: Individual subscriptions are \$15 a year for union members, \$23 a year for all others. Pay by credit card online at nwlaborpess.org/subscribe, or send a check to our mailing address (above) along with your name, address and union affiliation, if any. **Group rates of \$10.56 a year per person** are available for 25 or more subscriptions; call 503-288-3311 for details.

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ANALYSIS

Lessons of the West Virginia teachers strike

Nicole McCormick, 33, is a mother of four, an elementary school music teacher, and one of the leaders of a 11-day West Virginia strike that shut down schools state-wide for nine days. West Virginia teachers have no state law recognizing collective bargaining rights, and yet, bargaining with their feet, they wrangled a 5 percent raise out of a hostile Republican legislature, and sparked a teacher strike wave that spread to at least three other states. Since the strike, McCormick and other West Virginia teachers have traveled as far as Mexico, Italy, and the United Kingdom to tell other union workers about what they experienced. Monday evening, July 23, McCormick will speak at the teachers union headquarters in Portland. Labor Press reporter Don McIntosh spoke with her by phone July 12.



THERE IS POWER IN A UNION West Virginia music teacher Nicole McCormick will be in Portland July 23 to talk about the dramatic and successful 11-day statewide teachers strike.

It's against the law in West Virginia for public employees to strike, but you struck anyway. How were you able to do

that? Well, we had clear open communication with each other. We were very clear what the issues were. We had an escalation campaign. We started out with

informational pickets, like on the weekends, we would hold signs and hand out information to folks, and invite the media so we could tell the local news and the

newspaper what the problem was. We escalated things, and it came to the point where some of the southern counties decided to go ahead and walk.

We knew we wanted to walk. Our leadership actually stepped up and said if these demands are not met by such and such a date our teachers and service professionals will be out.

Then they took the strike vote, and everybody was included in that vote, whether they were members or not. We all needed to be able to walk together. We took a vote. It was secret ballot.

We found out that we had an overwhelming amount of people that were willing to walk. It was announced at a big rally with 10,000 people.

It didn't matter if it was illegal, because what were they going to do? We had 727 teacher vacancies that were being filled by uncertified people or not at all. And we never have enough subs. So what are they going to do?

Our state attorney general tried to get county school boards to file lawsuits saying that we needed to be ordered back to

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