

# Teacher Union Bosses Prepare For Illegal Strike

## *Independent Kentucky Teachers Oppose 'Holding Children Hostage'*

After holding a late-night, behind-closed-doors meeting in Frankfort, Ky., the top bosses of the Kentucky Education Association (KEA/NEA) school union voted in the wee hours September 18 to give Gov. Ernie Fletcher (R) an "ultimatum."

According to Associated Press reporter Joe Biesk, KEA union President Frances Steenbergen unabashedly used this label for what Mr. Biesk described as "a list of demands that if not met could result in a strike by teachers and other school employees."

The teacher union brass's strike threat is their angry response to a new plan by the governor to get control over rapidly rising taxpayer costs for teachers' and other public employees' health care.

Many private-sector businesses across Kentucky and the rest of America have already implemented similar changes in order to leave more resources available for wage and salary increases while keeping their overall expenditures in check.

### **Do Teacher Union Bosses Care That Striking Public Schools Breaks Kentucky Law?**

Union bosses apparently don't care that the changes envisioned by Mr. Fletcher are common in the private sector, or that Kentuckians may be reluctant to pay higher taxes for public schools when taxpayer spending on education has already gone up 121%, *nearly triple the rate of inflation*, since 1990.

Nor does the hierarchy of the KEA, a subsidiary of the 2.7 million-member National Education Association union, seem to care that striking public schools is illegal in Kentucky.

At a September 24 rally held well after school hours, but attended by scarcely one in 10 of the Fayette County Public School system's 4650 full-time employees, Fayette County teacher union chieftain Mattie Katz claimed it was her prerogative to take "desperate measures."

Unless the governor caves in, Ms. Katz and her cohorts insist they will send teachers across the state out on strike, with no date set for returning to classes, on October 27.

Because many local school boards across the Bluegrass State have



**Mattie Katz (left) and other Kentucky teacher union bosses have presented Gov. Fletcher (right) with a "list of**



**demands that if not met could result in [an illegal] strike by teachers and school employees."**

previously acquiesced to KEA bosses' demands to be recognized as teachers' "exclusive" (monopoly) bargaining agents in contract negotiations, teachers will be under heavy pressure to obey strike orders -- even though the strike will be illegal.

Many teachers who do not want to strike want even less to cross KEA officials, who wield monopoly power to negotiate with school boards over teachers' pay, benefits, and working conditions.

However, a coalition of independent-minded teachers who oppose union monopoly bargaining is standing up to the KEA bosses.

Echoing the views of thousands of Kentucky teachers, the Lexington-based Kentucky Association of Professional Educators (KAPE) issued a statement in response to the KEA bosses' strike threat that read, in part:

"KAPE does not support holding children hostage to get better health insurance rates. KAPE believes teachers deserve better rates, but teachers should not walk out on those who look up to them for guidance and example."

### **Lack of Statewide Monopoly-Bargaining Law Could Be KEA Bosses' Achilles Heel**

While the outcome of the showdown between scofflaw teacher union bosses and the Kentucky governor is still in doubt as this Newsletter goes to press,

one factor is working against Ms. Steenbergen, Ms. Katz and company.

Unlike 34 other states, Kentucky has no statewide law setting conditions under which all school districts must acquiesce to teacher union monopoly bargaining.

KEA and other union lobbyists have tried time and again to browbeat the state Legislature into enacting such a law. But freedom-loving citizens, mobilized by Kentucky members and supporters of the National Right to Work Committee, have always beaten back such schemes.

Because a substantial number of Kentucky school boards have refused to corral their employees into unions, there are a total of roughly 15,000 Bluegrass State teachers and other school employees who don't belong to any union.

Widespread resistance among these educators may well encourage large numbers of thoughtful KEA members to join in resisting the KEA brass's strike plan. As a result, the union hierarchy may have to back away from its ultimatum.

"The lack of a statewide teacher monopoly-bargaining law in Kentucky could turn out to be the KEA bosses' Achilles Heel," predicted Right to Vice President Matthew Leen.

"But what's really needed to stop illegal and destructive public school strikes is a statewide ban on teacher union monopoly bargaining."

Mr. Leen promised to lend the Committee's full assistance to all Kentucky efforts to enact such a ban. 