

Defend public education

Vote “no” on St. Paul Federation of Teachers sellout contract!

Mike Stapleton
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The proposed contract put forward by the St. Paul Federation of Teachers (SPFT) and St. Paul Public Schools is comprised of a series of half-measures that will do nothing to reverse the impact of school cuts, which have hit teachers, students and parents for many years. This sellout should be rejected and a broader struggle prepared not only for a better contract but to defend the right to public education as a whole.

Teachers must reject the lie that there is “no money” for public schools. The same specious claim is used by the Obama administration and Congressional Republicans to cut food stamps, Head Start, unemployment benefits, student scholarships, and WIC. Meanwhile, the Democrats and Republicans hand tens of billions of dollars each month to buy up the toxic assets of the Wall Street banks as part of the “quantitative easing program.” The paltry amount allotted in the proposed contract—\$11 million—amounts to .016 percent of what the Fed hands over to these financial criminals each month!

Last year, Minnesota’s Democratic Farmer Labor controlled legislature approved hundreds of millions of dollars in tax incentives and spending for private businesses like the Mall of America, 3M, and the Minnesota Vikings. Then they tell teachers, students, and parents to be thankful for a few pennies, which will do nothing to hire more support staff or create smaller class sizes and expanded preschool opportunities for working class toddlers.

Educators are facing the same struggle throughout the United States. On the national level, President Obama is spearheading a corporate-drive “school reform” agenda to fire teachers, close schools and tie pay and job security to performance. Democrats and

Republicans alike are repeating this in district after district. As far as the corporate-financial elite and their political servants are concerned, high-quality education should be available to privileged few, not “wasted” on the unwashed masses of working class children.

What is needed is a unified struggle that not only reaches out to other teachers in the Twin Cities and across the state, but to the working class as a whole. Conditions for a broader struggle are ripe with only 57 percent of the 331 districts in the state having settled contracts. This means that tens of thousands of Minnesota teachers, including those in the three largest districts, Anoka-Hennepin, Minneapolis, and St. Paul, are working without settled contracts.

Despite this, the trade unions have kept the teachers isolated and claim that their separate contract negotiations are making “progress.” The union executives are opposed to a unified struggle because this would upset their cozy and lucrative connections to the Democrats and the corporate interests behind “school reform.”

The SPFT is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), which has signed contract after contract that has rolled back the achievements won by educators over a century of struggle. AFT President Randi Weingarten—who makes \$400,000 a year or more—has cultivated the closest ties with Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg and other billionaire enemies of public education.

The AFT and the NEA are the biggest supporters of Obama. That is not because his administration defend teachers and public education—it certainly does not. It is because the Democratic Party is more likely than the Republicans to employ the services of the trade union

executives to impose its pro-corporate education policies.

That is why any struggle by teachers requires the development of new organizations of struggle, which are controlled by rank-and-file teachers and are not under the control of the unions and the Democratic Party.

A "no" vote today should be the beginning of a counter-offensive by teachers in Minnesota and nationally. Above all, the fight to defend education is a *political* struggle against the domination of the richest one percent of society, which controls every lever of political power.

As the world hunger organization Oxfam recently reported the world's richest 85 people have as much wealth as half of the world's population—some 3.5 billion people—and the 20 wealthiest Americans have as much wealth as the country's poorest 150 million.

Such levels of inequality are incompatible with the continued existence of public education or any other democratic or social right. The super-rich do not want a cultured and knowledgeable population because workers and young people will inevitably rebel against the rule of this modern-day financial aristocracy.

In the winter 1946, St. Paul teachers launched the first teachers strike in American history and fought against the DFL for reduced class sizes, building repairs, more wages and benefits, and free textbooks. Inspired by the Minneapolis General Strike of 1934, led by the Trotskyist movement, the teachers strike sparked walkouts across the country involving over 12,000 teachers over the next two years. This resulted in improved educational conditions for teachers and working class youth alike.

Today, all of these gains are being overturned by a ruling class, which has no future for youth except unemployment, low-paid jobs and fighting wars for world domination. Instead they want to pocket the hundreds of billions of educational dollars for themselves.

The rich traditions of struggle and socialism that once guided the working class in the Twin Cities must be revived and the struggle begun to build a mass political movement of the working class, independent of both big business parties, to fight for social equality and the reorganization of society to meet human needs, not private profit.

We urge teachers Socialist Party, learn about our program and history and make the decision to build the leadership necessary for this struggle.



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