

San Ysidro, California teachers sold out after three-day strike

Toby Reese, Shane Reynaldo
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After backdoor weekend negotiations and a final conference call between the school district and union officials, the teachers union in the San Ysidro School District (SYSD) south of San Diego, California reached a sell-out agreement late Sunday evening, ending a three-day strike.

Teachers, members of the San Ysidro Education Association (SYEA), voted to accept the contract by a 144-25 margin in a hastily-called union meeting at which they were not allowed to ask questions. The details of the settlement, some still being worked out, were not made known to teachers. Only 169 of 226 employees in the bargaining unit voted on the deal, which is essentially the same contract the teachers overwhelmingly rejected last week.

On October 8, teachers and support staff in the SYSD voted overwhelmingly to strike, demanding a pay raise and better health benefits. Over 90 percent of SYEA teachers and employees participated in strike action at the seven schools within the district. The strike came after seven years without a raise for teachers and threats from SYSD to cut pay by as much as eight percent, increase classroom sizes, extend work hours, implement full-day kindergarten, and slash health benefits. The final deal offered by the district included a paltry 0.5 percent bonus for 2014-2015 and a 1.5 percent raise, which was tied to additional work hours.

As in other cities around the country, the attack on teachers evoked mass popular opposition. On Friday, the third day of the strike, 400 teachers, parents and students rallied at the SYSD headquarters. The group pushed through the doors of the administration building, demanding to talk to the administration. (Link to video)

School attendance began to dwindle as more and more parents refused to send students to classes being

run by strikebreakers. On Friday, it is estimated that 66 percent of students did not attend school.

In the face of this determination by parents and teachers to resist cuts, the SYES worked to bring the strike to an end on management's terms. While the strike was in progress the union claimed there were no bargaining sessions scheduled and it was rumored that negotiations would not resume again until the end of the month. In reality, the union—and the local and statewide level—was working out a deal with the administration to shut down the strike short and send the teachers back to work.

The tentative contract includes a meager one percent raise this school year, a one percent lump sum for the previous school year and a raise of one percent for the 2015-2016 school year. In addition, the contract adds in full-day kindergarten beginning on November 1 and replaces one of the teachers prep days with a “Professional Development Day.” Both of these measures are an attempt by the district to garner more state funding. Since teachers will not be paid for the three days they struck, the deal effectively results in a net loss of salary for the current year.

In recent years, SYSD has continually cited a deficit and the need to balance the budget through cuts to the salaries of teachers, cuts in health benefits, and increased class sizes. The district claims that a \$2.6 million deficit and declining enrollment necessitate cuts and has sought to blame the teachers for their unwillingness to “get back to a sound financial footing.”

San Ysidro School District, with around 5,000 students, is located in the southernmost district of San Diego. The community is directly adjacent to Tijuana, Mexico—hosting the busiest international border crossing in the world. It is home predominately to poor

working families, many of which are immigrants from Mexico and Central America.

Some of the schools in the district are on a “late start” program, meaning classes begin at 9 am. The official rationale for the earlier start time is that it allows students more rest. In reality it gives students that cross the border enough time to make it to school. According to a report in the *New York Times*, some students begin their three-hour commute at 5 am in order to arrive at school on time each morning.

The administration and media have on multiple occasions threatened that a state takeover of the district is imminent due to financial insolvency, which would in turn bring more drastic cuts. In addition, a former superintendent, Manuel Paul, pled guilty this past August to extracting political contributions from a contractor. As a result, the district ended up paying millions in court fees, and continues to pay Paul even after his resignation.

School officials blamed the teachers strike for a cut in state funding. The state allocates money to districts based on the daily attendance rate, paying around \$47 a day for each student in attendance. Officials have argued that by implementing all-day kindergarten and extending the workday for teachers by five minutes, they could increase this enrollment funding.

The attack on San Ysidro teachers is part of a bipartisan attack on education being carried out across the United States. Both the California Teachers Association (CTA) and the National Education Association (NEA), of which the SYEA is a part, have played a pivotal role in facilitating the implementation these attacks in city after city.

The NEA and AFT have worked to suppress strikes and protests in opposition to education cuts and where that was impossible to isolate them and shut them down as quickly as possible.

In the wake of the move by a five-member Reform Commission overseeing the Philadelphia schools to revoke a labor agreement covering 15,000 Philadelphia, the AFT has done nothing but file a toothless court appeal while promoting the lie that the election of a Democratic governor would improve conditions for teachers.

Likewise, the NEA worked to isolate the recent four-week strike by 350 teachers in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, outside of the state capital of Columbus. In the end, the

unions pushed through a contract instituting the attacks demanded by the district, including a merit pay scheme.



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