

# Reject the sellout in Seattle! For a statewide and national teachers strike!

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The *World Socialist Web Site Teacher Newsletter* urges Seattle teachers to reject the deal agreed to by the Seattle Education Association. The teachers assembled today in Seattle are in a powerful position to take a stand against the attack on public education and declare their active support for the struggles underway throughout the state.

Across Washington, teachers and education staff are fighting for substantial pay raises, expanded health benefits, and major improvements in the quality of public education for their students. On Wednesday, 2,400 Tacoma Public Schools teachers joined thousands of other educators in the largest wave of teacher strikes to hit the state in 35 years.

This struggle now stands at a crossroads. In attempting to push through an agreement, the SEA is not only trying to impose conditions that fail to meet the basic demands of Seattle teachers. It is also attempting to isolate teachers currently on strike from the largest district in the state. If Seattle teachers don't walk out, it will block all efforts to transform the local strikes into a statewide struggle, ensuring their defeat.

Teachers in Seattle should not only vote "no," but immediately constitute themselves as an independent, rank-and-file committee to discuss and plan measures to carry out a serious struggle. An appeal should go out to teachers in every district to walk out. An open letter should be addressed to the entire working class, explaining why teachers are fighting back and urging their support.

The state and local affiliates of the NEA are repeating the role of the teachers unions in the strikes in the spring. In each case, these strikes were propelled by the actions of rank-and-file teachers, including a vote by teachers in West Virginia to defy a back-to-work order from the unions. The unions—the NEA and the

American Federation of Teachers—intervened to suppress the strikes and impose rotten agreements.

As schools open, teachers in West Virginia still face crushing health care costs. In Oklahoma and Arizona, meager funding proposals fell way short of social needs. The Arizona Supreme Court just struck from the ballot the Invest in Education initiative that would have led to a modest increase in taxes on the wealthy to make up the \$700 million shortfall in funding.

The NEA and AFT call themselves "unions." They don't work to unite teachers, however, but to divide them. There is a powerful sentiment among teachers in Washington for a statewide strike, and educators have the support of the working class as a whole, which faces the same conditions and has a deep interest in the defense of public education.

The SEA already undermined the strength of teachers by agreeing to start school even before teachers had a chance to study and vote on the contract. But teachers did not vote by 98 percent to strike to get hustled into accepting a sellout deal!

The 10.5 percent wage increase, which is lower than what has been agreed in many other districts, does not make up for years of stagnant wages and rising housing and other living expenses. The agreement continues to deny substitute teachers the right to health care coverage, and the ratio of school counselors and nurses to students will remain far too high.

There is also nothing in the contract to protect teachers against the explicit threat made by SPS in August to lay off teachers in the event of budget shortfalls. While bargaining away the rights of rank-and-file teachers, the SEA made sure it gained provisions that would shore up the income of the union executives, including getting a full hour at new hire orientation to pressure teachers to pay union dues.

Teachers have powerful allies in their struggle. A walkout by all Washington teachers will inspire teachers throughout the US to fight, including in Los Angeles where 33,000 teachers have voted virtually unanimously to strike.

The issues facing educators everywhere are the same: overcrowded classrooms, chronically underfunded schools, shortages of teachers and paraprofessionals and relentless attacks by both big business parties, which are diverting public money to for-profit charter schools and are scapegoating teachers for educational problems born from poverty, social inequality and decades of budget cutting.

The actions of the unions are determined by their political alliance with the Democratic Party and their support for the capitalist system. The unions, controlled by wealthy executives that make as much as half a million dollars a year, have spent decades colluding with the austerity agenda of both big business parties and their corporate-backed “school reform” schemes.

A special warning must be made about the Social Equity Educators faction, which is an apologist for the union and the Democratic Party. The Social Equity Educators has not even called for a strike by Seattle teachers, let alone a statewide walkout.

After selling out the struggles in the spring, the unions said the only way forward for teachers was to vote for Democrats in the November elections. But the Democrats, no less than the Republicans, are shills for the banks and big business and equally responsible for the crisis in public education. Washington Democrats chiefly ran the state during the period that the state supreme court declared Olympia had violated its “paramount duty” to adequately fund education.

While Democrats have claimed there is no money for schools, Governor Jay Inslee handed over the largest state tax cut in US history—\$8.7 billion—to defense contractor and aerospace giant Boeing. Billions more have been given to Amazon, whose CEO Jeff Bezos makes the equivalent of an annual starting teacher salary every 20 seconds.

It is time to say: Enough is enough! A stand by teachers in Washington will win mass support. Throughout the country and around the world, there is growing opposition among workers to unprecedented levels of social inequality, endless war, and the destruction of basic democratic rights. As trillions are

made available to the wealthy, public infrastructure, including education, is starved of resources, workers face poverty-level jobs and crushing student debt.

The Trump administration is waging a war on the working class, while the Democrats try desperately to contain opposition while advancing their own right-wing, militarist and anti-working-class agenda.

The fight to defend public education must be connected to the political mobilization of the working class for the socialist reorganization of economic life. The disaster confronting the working class arises directly out of the capitalist system, which is based on private ownership of production and the subordination of all the rights of the working class to the wealth of the super-rich. The alternative is socialism, a society based on production for social need, not private profit.



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