

“The UFT says there is no giveback but there is plenty giveback”

New York teachers angry as union hides givebacks in new contract

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13 November 2018

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site Teacher Newsletter* spoke with New York City public school teachers following the vote on October 31 on the new contract. Many expressed anger at the three-year and seven-month long contract rushed through by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT).

The newsletter spoke with teachers at several schools. None of the teachers interviewed wanted their names used, which highlights real concerns about possible victimization by the school administration or the union.

An experienced social studies teacher whose previous school had closed declared: “Even though I have 28 years as a teacher, I have to be so careful because I started at a new school this year. I think the contract was rushed because the UFT wants to prevent any discussion of politics. They are like one of the arteries of the Democrats.”

A teacher for 18 years, who is one of the chapter leaders in the Washington Irving campus building, which houses six “mini-schools,” said the contract “is a sellout by its tiered system for healthcare. Mulgrew claimed this was negotiated by the Municipal Labor Committee, so it is out of UFT control, but he sits on that Committee.”

One teacher said he voted “no” on every contract except this one. However, he did not know about the health benefits cuts because they were not described in the summary he received, which is the only material on the contract he had read. He agreed that wage increases over the years did not keep up with inflation and is therefore a cut in real wages. He said teachers need a cost-of-living clause in the contracts.

At the Environmental High School building, a teacher did not think the contract change for teacher

observations would do much. “The minimum number of observations is set lower, but they can still observe ten times if the principal wants to get on your case, like mine did last year when he went after one teacher especially. But actually, even administrators are being pressured from above. It is the corporate model—they are afraid to give you higher evaluations because they have to give the higher-ups what they want. It is punitive.

“Turnover in the New York schools is huge. The more important conditions are the working conditions. There is micromanagement of teaching. There is no freedom like we used to have when I started. This is important because we spend a lot of our lives at work. They used to give us so much materials for classrooms, but now even workshops for teachers cost. We were paid to go to the Historical Society for professional development, but now you pay.”

We also spoke to a chapter leader with 17 years teaching experience from a Brandeis Campus high school in Manhattan. “I voted no on the contract,” he said. “There is the satisfaction of a reduction of observations by administrators for veteran teachers, but the pay raise does not keep up with inflation. And we have the 150 extra minutes each week, split on Mondays and Tuesdays, that was added in 2014. It is not a raise if I have to work for it. It also is not respectful of what teachers do. I don’t need to be mandated to stay later and call parents. The popular term we use is ‘teacher detention.’ The UFT says there is no giveback but there is plenty giveback.

“The new contract ups new teacher starting pay to about \$56,000. I only make \$30,000 more after 17 years. On Long Island, teachers with 17 years and a

master's are making \$100,000 a year. The middle of the pool got screwed. I guess the union felt that [New York City mayor] de Blasio has been better than the previous mayor Bloomberg, so maybe the union feels better about making this agreement with him. Yet if states with weak unions can strike, why did they roll over so quick [in New York City], four months before?"

An Earth Science teacher at the Washington Irving Campus added, "We need a union that educates and organizes the teachers from the bottom, not from the top down. We live in a disgusting capitalist system. This is a fake democracy. We have a bunch of billionaires running things. They have cut medical and other programs. They prioritize endless military spending and tax cuts for the rich. I support the socialist idea, but I think it is a long-term thing."



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