

Anger grows among Denver teachers, as union gloats about closed-door negotiations

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In the days following the Denver teachers' strike, the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA), the Democratic Party, and the media are continuing their efforts to sell the tentative agreement (TA) reached last week as some sort of major victory for teachers. With many unconvinced, anger is building among many teachers who see the TA as a betrayal of their fight for better pay for all school employees, more school funding, and an end to Denver Public Schools (DPS) hated "pay-for-performance" compensation program.

The TA, which was announced in the early hours of February 14 just before the start of the school day, provides for minimal pay increases for some employees, while cutting compensation for others and deepening the DCTA's collaboration with the school system in the implementation of the merit-pay system, ProComp. The additional \$23 million that the DCTA allegedly won to fund the limited salary hikes is contingent upon the implementation of "ProComp 3.0," the last page of the contract states. In other words, the money to finance the new agreement is based on the union working with the DPS to update and extend merit pay. Nowhere in the TA does it spell out of what ProComp 3.0 consists.

The union sent teachers back to work last Thursday morning, hours after reaching the agreement and with no ratification vote by teachers. The DCTA made it clear it would do nothing to defend anyone who continued to strike. "If teachers choose not to return to work, the DPS (Denver Public Schools) has stated that they will be unpaid," declared the DCTA in its press release announcing the end of the walkout.

Teachers have still not voted on the contract. According to social media posts, the DCTA is planning to hold an information meeting followed by a ballot on Tuesday, February 25. The timing is intended to

steamroll teachers into approving the contract before educators have time to question and challenge the contract.

As teachers study the TA, it is becoming increasingly clear that thousands of present and future educators will see far less than the "average 11.7 percent" pay increase touted by the union and the media as victories of the strike. Newly-hired teachers with a Bachelor's Degree, for instance, will receive a starting salary of just \$45,800 a year, a mere \$2,545 boost over the previous contract and hardly enough to have a significant impact on the monthly budget of a worker who must hold two and three additional jobs to make ends meet. Inflation, in a city where the median home price is double the national average, will consume much of workers' pay increases.

Beck, a first-grade teacher in DPS, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "Teachers haven't had a cost of living raise in 10 years. If they get an 11 percent increase, it's really a 1 percent raise."

Lillian, a first-grade teacher in DPS, echoed these comments and also pointed to the contract's failure to address the chronic underfunding of schools. "Even with this new proposal I still can't afford to buy a home in Denver, and it continues to be hard to serve nonsense. We shouldn't have to serve schools," she said, referring to high poverty schools where educators are paid incentive bonuses to teach.

In the recently-negotiated TA, the DCTA bargained away salaries for School Service Providers (SSPs), such as nurses, psychologists, speech pathologists, and other staff who provide essential services. Many will see a fall in their pay as a result of changes agreed to as to how professional credentials are calculated and compensated. This "backward lane movement," as it is called, also paves the way for a future attack on salaries

by moving workers into an overall lower compensation bracket.

Writing on the Fair Pay for Denver Teachers Facebook page, one angry educator wrote, “Friends, 1/6 of educators are SSPs. Our SSPs are taking a hit on this proposal. The goal for us was for a transparent pay scale that is competitive with other districts. Under this proposal SSPs will be set back either one or two lanes. SSPs joined us on the picket lines, it’s time for us to support them. They currently earn MA+30 and will be dropped to MA or MA+18. It will also be more difficult for them to move up lanes. They care for our students’ mental and emotional wellbeing, which is so vital! We have to stand with them as they stood with us. This is not ok!”

She and other teachers are calling for a “no” vote on the contract. They are joined by others expressing significant concern over different aspects of the agreement, the details of which are confusing to many workers because of the complex system of “lanes” and “steps” and changes to how they are calculated.

Anger at the union and DPS is also growing because it was just announced that teachers who went out on strike will not receive back pay for the days they walked out. Previously, the DCTA informed the membership that they were negotiating the issue on behalf of teachers. Instead, “a lot of people were put down as absent without pay for the entire week, even though they worked today,” wrote one teacher on Fair Pay for Denver Teachers. “I was told by my union guy that we are just to trust the union,” she added. “The union screwed over my friends who live in LA. So I’m not trusting anyone,” replied another teacher, making reference to the recent union sellout of teachers in Los Angeles.

Another educator denounced Susana Cordova, head of the DPS, for her attack on teachers who struck and expressed discontent over the TA. “I can’t believe how vindictive and petty she is. It’s not even a very good contract for the majority of us. Doesn’t she realize we are not weak or stupid and we haven’t ratified the contract yet. VOTE NO ON TUESDAY.”

A recent article in the *Denver Post* reveals the real character of the relationship between the unions and state and local Democratic Party politicians, who all conspired to ensure that the rank-and-file teachers would be kept in the dark as the sellout deal was

worked out. Although teachers thought the negotiations were being live-streamed on the DCTA’s Facebook page, this was a ruse and the real decisions were being made behind closed doors.

“Because DPS by law must allow the public to observe direct negotiations with its teachers’ union, the private caucusing that took place overnight had to be conducted separately,” the *Post* wrote. “The district’s team was in one room, the union in another. Downstairs in the basement, at the public bargaining table, the remaining teachers and members of the press waited,” noted the *Post*.

“What happened in that room stays in that room,” declared Rob Gould, the lead DCTA negotiator in a Friday interview about the contract discussions. According to the *Denver Post*, the bureaucrat “joked that most will never know what really happened during those wee morning hours.”

Denver teachers must ask, what did the DCTA agree to behind closed doors? What under-the-table agreements have been reached at the expense of workers? Teachers must vote down the TA and build rank-and-file committees of educators to take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands. These committees should resume the strike, link up with other sections of workers and expand the struggle to defend public education throughout Colorado and across the US.



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