

Students and teachers outraged as

Oakland, California school board passes devastating budget cut following union sellout

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The Oakland, California, school board voted Monday to cut more than \$22 million of funds to schools in the largely impoverished, working-class community. The vote was held less than 24 hours after the Oakland Education Association (OEA) pushed through a sellout agreement and shut down the seven-day strike by 3,300 teachers.

The passage of these devastating cuts further exposes the lies of the union bureaucrats and their apologists who called the OEA agreement a “historic victory” for teachers and public education. Typical was the article by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) supported *Jacobin* publication, which was headlined, “Why Oakland’s Striking Teachers Won,” even as students, teachers and parents express their outrage over the infamous sellout.

Although teachers walked out to fight for improvements in pay, conditions and school funding, the OEA specifically abandoned any demands to prevent school closures, stop cuts or increase staffing to relieve overburdened nurses and other critical support staff. The deal only reduced class sizes by the minimum of 1 student, while providing a paltry 11 percent pay raise over four years, which does not even keep up with Bay Area inflation. OEA President Keith Brown admitted that the pay raise hinged on the \$22 million in cuts in a rotten quid pro quo that deliberately pit teachers against the very students they serve.

While the exact details of the cuts have yet to be published, the agenda for the school board meeting included proposals to slash \$1.1 million from services for disabled, homeless and foster care youth support, \$800,000 from music, \$3.6 million from restorative justice programs aimed at stopping the “school-to-prison pipeline,” \$1.3 million from poor student nutrition, and \$2.9 million from college prep.

There was enormous opposition from teachers to the deal with dozens lining up at the mass meeting Sunday to denounce the bargaining committee and union leadership. Brown and other union officials repeatedly declared that there was no more money and if the deal was rejected the union would not come back with anything better.

The union withheld strike benefits in order to increase economic pressure on teachers, and after giving teachers only 24 hours to study and discuss the deal, and browbeating them at the meeting, the OEA claimed the tentative agreement (TA) was passed by a margin of 58–42 percent. The union also barred rank-and-file teachers from overseeing the counting of ballots.

With nearly a third of the teachers abstaining from the vote in disgust, this means, even by the union’s dubious vote count, that less than half of Oakland teachers voted to ratify this supposed “historic victory.”

The popular outrage against school cuts was expressed Monday morning as over two hundred students and dozens of teachers from across the district took part in a “sickout” to protest the rescheduled Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) school board meeting.

Christie, a Junior at Life Academy, which is slated to be merged with United for Success under OUSD’s “Community of Schools City Wide Plan,” characterized the OEA’s abandonment of the demand to halt school closures as “a betrayal.”

“Students got thrown under the bus. If you close down the schools in those communities, where will those people go? It’s really sad.”

The OEA’s Instagram post announcing the ratification was dominated by hundreds of hostile comments from students. @Jora.Ryan, an OUSD student, posted, “I don’t know what part of this is a HUGE win.” Pointing to the “anger currently being directed at the OEA,” the student

added, “You failed us. You pulled the rug out from our feet and disrupted our community’s momentum. You have broken down the spirit of students, teachers, and nurses district wide. My teachers and peers deserve better than this.”

While some students expressed frustration over the ratification of the vote by the teachers themselves, the reality is that the OEA, and standing behind it, the California Teachers Association (CTA) and the state Democratic Party, have deliberately sought to divide and weaken the working class opposition to attacks on public education. This follows the same pattern as all the strikes betrayed by the unions, including in Los Angeles, Denver, West Virginia, Arizona, Oklahoma and other locations.

The unions are told by Democrats and Republicans alike that there is a set, limited amount of money available and that it is impermissible to make the slightest incursion into the vast fortunes of the corporate and financial elite who pay virtually no taxes for schools or anything else. On that basis, whatever meager pay raises are granted are funded through draconian cuts to schools and other vital services or increases in regressive taxes that hit working class and middle class families the hardest while leaving the super-rich untouched. In exchange for enforcing austerity on teachers and communities, the Democrats, in particular, guarantee the financial and institutional interests of the unions, which are led by national executives who are in the top one percent of income earners.

Last fall, OUSD’s plans to close or merge 24 schools over the next five years—roughly a third of all schools in the district—were leaked to the public, provoking mass outrage and repeated demonstrations at school board meetings in the months leading up to the strike. At an OEA site representatives meeting a week prior to the strike, a motion was adopted that was meant to ensure that halting school closures would be a priority of OEA at the bargaining table.

During the seven-day strike, the OEA staged a march through deeply impoverished East Oakland neighborhoods, where the majority of school closures are set to take place, culminating in a rally at Roots International Academy, the first school officially merged by the school board in a near-unanimous vote in January.

This was all a cynical charade. When students and teachers picketed last Friday’s school board meeting to prevent a vote on the cuts, OEA officials tried to shut down the protests saying the strike was over. The school board then waited for the sellout of the strike to vote on

the deeply unpopular cuts. As for opposing school closures and the expansion of charters, the OEA announced Friday that these could not legally be part of collective bargaining, while surely knowing this from the beginning of the strike.

The entire experience of the strike demonstrates that the greatest obstacle to the unity of all teachers, parents and students are the unions themselves, which do not “represent” teachers but are the tools of the corporate and political establishment and its relentless drive to cash in from the destruction of public education.

The struggle in Oakland and across the country is far from over, with new sections of teachers pressing for strike action in Sacramento and other districts. But new organizations of struggle and a new political strategy are needed to oppose the bipartisan war on public education.

During the strike, Oakland teachers, assisted by the *World Socialist Web Site Teacher Newsletter*, formed the Oakland Rank-and-File Strike Committee, which campaigned against the sellout deal and fought for the spreading of the strike throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, across the state and beyond. Speakers from the committee received strong support for these demands when they raised them at Sunday’s mass meeting, and rank-and-file teachers from San Francisco solidarizing themselves with Oakland teachers distributed leaflets from the committee encouraging a “No” vote and calling for a statewide and nationwide teachers strike.

The interests of teachers, students and parents are the same. They lie not in fighting over an ever-shrinking pie but in a unified fight by all working class people for a vast expansion of school funding. This is only possible by building a powerful political movement of the working class, in opposition to the two big business parties, whose aim is a vast redistribution of society’s wealth through the expropriation of the private fortunes of the super-rich and the socialist transformation of society.

To get more information about joining rank-and-file committees to defend public education, visit this link.



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