

Philadelphia Community College teachers face union sellout

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9 April 2019

Philadelphia Community College teachers should reject the sellout contract announced last week by the Faculty and Staff Federation of Community College (FSFCC), Local 2026 of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Voting will reportedly take place this week.

The deal, which would block a strike overwhelmingly approved by the rank-and-file, meets none of the most critical demands facing teachers, support staff and the school's 28,000 students. It creates a permanent category of educators—everyone who is hired after the contract's ratification—who would work more hours for the same pay.

Few details have been made public, but the union also touts a meager wage increase. However, this would reportedly be dribbled out over six years and would reportedly bring the minimum wage for the lowest paid support staff to \$15 an hour by 2026. Even at full-time hours such a wage would not keep a family out of poverty.

Local union leadership could scarcely conceal the abject betrayal. Co-president John Braxton admitted that the imposition of heavier workloads on new hires was “forced overtime,” and that in the longer run it might divide teachers against each other. He nonetheless advocated passage, calling the deal “a victory under the circumstances we’re living in.”

The “circumstances” Braxton refers to—chronic funding shortages—have been created by years of budget cutting at the state and city level. When Pennsylvania founded its community college system in 1963, the state and city each pledged to provide one-third of PCC's funding, with students paying the final third. Now students pay 56 percent, with the state and the city splitting the remainder. Average annual tuition at CCP, which serves socially distressed layers of the

population, is now \$17,532.

The budget-cutting has been overseen by decades of Democratic Party administrations in Philadelphia's city hall, while, at the state level, Democratic and Republican governors and legislatures have worked together to impose the cuts. All of this has been done with the express intent of benefiting the state's corporations—who command resources counted in the hundreds of billions of dollars—and its billionaires, who dispose of combined personal wealth approaching \$25 billion, according to *Forbes*. CCP, which performs the socially necessary task of educating workers who cannot afford to attend elite institutions, has a budget of \$130 million, roughly one-tenth the personal \$1.2 billion fortune of the “poorest” billionaire in Pennsylvania, financier Alfred West, Jr.

Any strike waged by teachers must identify these inescapable political and social questions. On such a basis, it will win support from students and workers throughout the city.

It is clear that teachers and staff at CCP face the same conditions as educators throughout the state, the US, and internationally. Yet the AFT, along with the National Education Association (NEA), work consciously to divide education workers. Since the eruption of the statewide teachers strike in West Virginia last year, AFT President Randi Weingarten has traveled the country to block strikes, shut them down once they start and ensure that no two strikes of educators happen at the same time.

Weingarten, whose annual salary is \$514,000, putting her in the social and political orbit of the very rich, appeared in Philadelphia over a week ago with this last purpose in mind. Within a week of her departure, the deal averting the strike was announced.

To defend their wages and conditions, CCP teachers

and staff must chart their own course. They will have to vote down the sellout contract and then take the struggle out of the hands of the bureaucrats through the formation of a rank-and-file committee that appeals for the broadest support among students, workers and educators throughout the country and beyond.



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