

Vote No! No cuts or layoffs!

Seattle teachers must fight for the defense of public education

The WSWS Teacher Newsletter
28 August 2019

Washington state teachers face a turning point in the fight to defend public education. Seattle Education Association (SEA) members meet today to vote on a last-minute tentative agreement (TA) with Seattle Public Schools (SPS). The aim of the union is to avert a strike as the beginning of the school year approaches on September 4.

The WSWS Teachers Newsletter urges teachers to reject this sellout, which offers only 11.1 percent over three years and fails to address the need for increased staffing and good conditions for student learning. Only “highlights” have so far been made available to teachers, and they must insist on the full contract and a week to study the offer.

But what is already known is below inadequate. In addition to the derisory pay increase for teachers, substitutes will receive only \$10 more per day of instruction, and the vast majority will remain without access to healthcare or other basic benefits. Such salary increases will do nothing to improve the lives of teachers in Seattle, which has the fourth-highest cost of living in the United States and the highest outside of California.

The time to unify educators across the state is now! Kennewick teachers in southeastern Washington have walked out today, rejecting a similarly inadequate 7.25 percent offer on Monday evening. Strike action has been authorized in La Center and Toutle Lake and nearly 100 districts throughout the state of Washington are in negotiations.

Teachers should not let their struggles be isolated and sabotaged once again, as they were last year when the Washington Education Association (WEA) forced through rotten deals, often without teachers having the

time to read the details. The WEA, working with the NEA, prevented localities from linking up their struggles and specifically opposed the demands raised by many educators for a national strike, developing out of the struggles which had spread across the country from West Virginia to California.

It is time for a new perspective—uniting the whole working class in defense of public education and taking control of the struggle from the hands of the pro-capitalist union apparatus which is tied hand-and-foot to the big business administration of Democrat Jay Inslee.

While teachers are told that levy caps are responsible for the chronic underfunding of schools, billions of dollars of tax cuts have been handed to Boeing, Amazon, Microsoft and Google by Inslee. This is the nationwide policy of the Democrats (and Republicans), who have handed military contractors a blank check for war while eviscerating public education and especially special education.

The writing is already on the wall. According to the *Seattle Times*, “253 of the 295 districts expect to face a budget shortfall this upcoming school year... More than a third of all districts anticipate drawing down their entire cash reserves through 2022. And though school districts are required by law to have balanced budgets, some even project their reserves will fall into negative territory.”

This tentative agreement will open the door to further staff eliminations. In fact, Kate Eads, a member of the SEA bargaining team, told *The Seattle Times* that the district had explicitly warned the bargaining team that there could be further budget cuts and layoffs like the ones the district has implemented over the past

year.

After last year's agreement, promoted by the union, Social Equity Educators and other fake socialist outfits as a "victory" for teachers, the district almost immediately cut dozens of full-time teachers, mostly from elementary and alternative education schools, converting them to part-time subs with little or no healthcare coverage or most other basic benefits. At the end of the last school year, the district sent out layoff notices to 10 more teachers and other school staff.

Layoffs were likewise imposed on Vancouver, Battle Ground, Spokane, Tacoma, and Olympia schools in the aftermath of the McCleary strikes.

Far from protecting school employees from these reprisals and cuts, the tentative agreement, no doubt with the collusion of the Social Equity Educators (SEE) of Jesse Hagopian, contains \$265,000 in funding for "racial equity teams" in each school to use racial composition as a factor when making layoffs and hiring decisions. In other words, SEE members can "assist" the district in selecting individuals to layoff using racial quotas!

The WSWS Teachers Newsletter rejects entirely the argument that education must be subordinated to the rapacious profit appetites of the ruling elites. Washington state is home to the two wealthiest people in the world, Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates, with a combined wealth of over \$245 billion. There are plenty of resources to expand and develop public education.

We urge school workers in Seattle to form rank-and-file committees, answerable to teachers, parents and students themselves, to reject the union's sellout deal and reach out to teachers everywhere who are facing the same rising class sizes, layoffs, and funding cuts.

This is not an isolated struggle. In fact, the challenges facing educators are not "American" problems, but international ones. They arise not merely from the fascistic Trump-DeVos administration, but globally from the crisis of capitalism. When "Red Pen" teachers marched in the French "Yellow Vest" protests, they described exactly the same conditions—low wages, lack of supplies, overfilled classrooms.

These conditions have prompted an upsurge of teachers around the world, from New Zealand to Poland to Bangladesh, underscoring the social power of the working class. Mass protests in Puerto Rico which forced the resignation of Governor Ricardo Roselló

included thousands of teachers who demonstrated against mass layoffs, school closures and privatization following Hurricane Maria.

The working class must mobilize independently of both big business parties and the capitalist system they defend. Teachers, young people and students should build new organizations of struggle—workplace, factory and neighborhood committees controlled by rank-and-file workers themselves—to create a powerful industrial and political counteroffensive of the whole working class.

Such a movement must fight for what working people need, not what the big business politicians claim is affordable, including a massive infusion of resources to drastically improve public education and the livelihoods of teachers and other school employees.

The fight for public education requires a frontal assault on the ill-gotten wealth of the capitalist elite. It means a fight to establish socialism, a society based on social need, not private profit, in which the wealth produced by workers is owned and controlled democratically, and in which every individual has the right to a high quality education, a decent job, a livable income, health care, a healthy environment, and access to culture. Such a society can only be based on the international unity and collaboration of working people around the world who together can put an end to the danger of fascism and world war.

Email us today to get involved: teachers@wsws.org



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