

SCTA/SEIU selling out strike!

Sacramento teachers: No return to work without seeing the contract!

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Last night, shortly after 9 pm, the Sacramento City Teachers Association (SCTA) and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) announced they had reached a sellout agreement with the Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) impacting thousands of teachers and support staff. The union ordered teachers to return to work Monday morning, with less than 12 hours notice.

The SCTA and SEIU provided teachers with no details of the deal, but an announcement from the district shows the deal includes a paltry 4 percent wage increase for the upcoming year, far below the cost of living. Inflation has risen 11 percent since that last contract ended. What is being proposed is an outright sellout.

Teachers and support staff must reject this deal and demand no return to work until they have had enough time to study the contract and read the fine print.

The SCTA/SEIU press conference announcing the deal was a pathetic exercise in deception which provided no details of the deal or even of the time for a vote. The union bureaucrats gave no details on school funding, on wages, on healthcare, or anything else. The only information available on social media is that a union official, Chris Johnson, declared “there were some compromises.”

During the press conference, one union bureaucrat called negotiating with the district a “heartwarming experience.” Another said teachers upset over their conditions should simply “call your representatives”—that is, the same politicians who are cutting teacher pay, forcing them back to school in the midst of the pandemic, and slashing budgets for public education. Every bureaucrat agreed that it was great the strike was coming to an end. Their press conference concluded when the bureaucrats gave themselves a round of applause.

Talk is cheap, but gas and rent are expensive! The fact that union representatives did not provide any information about the contract is a sign that it is a total sellout.

It is no wonder the union doesn’t want workers to know what is in the deal. According to an announcement last night by the school district, the deal includes just a 4% salary increase for the 2021-22 school year and a \$1,250 stipend. The deal

includes minuscule stipends for SEIU members as well as for part time SCTA employees. After tax, these stipends will barely cover two trips to the grocery store. Moreover, teachers have already lost 4 percent of their annual pay from this 8-day strike.

Under conditions of massive inflation and increases in the cost of living, it is not possible for teachers and support staff to survive on anything close to this wage “increase,” which is really a pay cut.

Low wages combined with the stressful and dangerous conditions during the pandemic have left many teaching positions unfilled, including substitutes. On any given day in Sacramento, 3,000 students have no classroom. The horrifying conditions in Sacramento schools from chronic understaffing are familiar to teachers across the country.

Instead of uniting teachers in a common defense of public education, the SCTA, alongside its parent unions the California Teachers Association (CTA) and National Education Association (NEA), has worked to keep teachers isolated district by district and limit any raises to well below inflation. Since the last SCTA contract in 2019, teachers have seen their pay effectively slashed by 11 percent inflation.

Striking support staff in SEIU Local 1021, including bus drivers, maintenance workers, nutrition service workers and instructional aides, have had their livelihoods similarly undermined by the SEIU and district. Though California’s Consumer Price Index has risen by 24 percent since the beginning of their prior contract in 2014, employees have received raises totaling just 7.6 percent, far less than inflation.

Based on the last contract, a Laborer-Gardener earning a wage of \$20.58 an hour would have to earn \$25.48 today just to keep up with California’s 23.8 percent inflation over the last 8 years. An electrician who earned \$32.95 in 2014 would need \$40.79 today to maintain his family’s living standards. Rising prices have chipped away real income by tens of thousands of dollars.

In their last filing on December 2019, SEIU Local 1021 listed assets of \$54,550,519. The local union has achieved significant gains through investments and a determination to avoid strikes.

A year ago, despite an overwhelming vote, the union called off a strike in Sacramento schools at the last minute.

Now that it has been forced to call its members out, the union is doing everything to weaken the strike. They have a “strike hardship fund that provides \$20 per person, per day, for members who demonstrate financial hardship as a result of a strike in which they participated. Those funds can be matched one-to-one by chapter funds up to \$50 a day, meeting certain conditions, for every day after the third day.” That adds up to \$200 for the first week, if a member can “demonstrate financial hardship.”

Adding insult to injury, the SEIU has even set up a GoFundMe page so workers can beg for alms rather than drain the union’s bank account through adequate strike pay. Despite the miserly treatment of members, the union has been lavish with its support of Democratic Party politicians who have campaigned for unsafe school reopenings, education budget cuts and charter schools. The SEIU spends millions each year on candidates who work against them. Gavin Newson, who pushes charter schools and has been helped weaken education budgets, was praised by the local at his gubernatorial inauguration.

Teachers and staff are coming under increasing pressure from government officials trying to end the strike with no significant gain in wages. David Gordon, the Sacramento County Superintendent of Schools, backed the district’s hard-line stance and issued a statement on Friday that reads in part:

Everyone in this community should understand that the Board of Education and district leaders have been unfairly attacked over and over for doing exactly what they should be doing—standing up for fiscal responsibility and the ability to provide better services to its clients—our children.

Sacramento City Council member Katie Valenzuela, a supporter of the Democratic Socialists of America, has participated in negotiations. But not only has she refused to criticize the paltry demands that the unions have proposed, she has even praised the unions for making several concessions to the state fact-finder.

A few days ago, Minneapolis Federation of Teachers (MFT) announced a tentative agreement covering thousands of teachers in that city’s school district. Without giving members time to read the agreement and refusing to provide online voting, the union forced workers to vote on a contract with raises far below inflation and no protection against layoffs, which are likely.

Now that they have had time to review the fine print, Minneapolis teachers are furious over the agreement. Sacramento school staffers must not accept a similar

situation—an austerity contract and no time to study the contract and no easy way to vote on it.

Teachers in Sacramento are at the forefront of a growing global movement against the increasingly unbearable cost of living. Just down Interstate 80 in Richmond, California, 600 oil refinery workers are striking against Chevron Corporation because they can hardly afford to fill their own cars with the gas they themselves produce. In Southern California, 50,000 poorly paid grocery store workers have authorized a strike, but their union, the UFCW, is also holding them back from taking action.

This movement goes far beyond California. Across the world, protests are growing among workers of all different races and ethnic backgrounds as the US-led war drive against Russia has slowed supply chains and drastically increased the cost of basic goods like food and gas. Protests have erupted in many countries, including Sri Lanka, Iraq, Sudan, Tunisia, Peru, Albania and Britain as working people demand social rights to housing, health care, electricity, food, water and other basic needs.

Sacramento teachers have the wind of this emerging movement in their sails, but at precisely this moment the unions are trying to end their strike. Teachers have a right to view the contract details and to have ample time before voting on a return to work! They can win their demands if they organize rank-and-file committees to share information among themselves, plan common actions and make clear what demands the district must satisfy before they accept a return to work.

Rank-and-file committees will link Sacramento teachers with teachers across the region and the country to harness the power of the entire working class and will reach out to workers in other industries to explain their strike and win public support.

Sacramento teachers interested in joining a rank-and-file strike committee should contact us today.



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