

Sacramento teachers: Vote “NO” on the sellout deal! Form rank-and-file committees to carry the struggle forward!

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The *World Socialist Web Site* urges Sacramento teachers and school staff to vote “no” on tentative agreements which have been used to shut down their strike. We urge teachers to form independent rank-and-file committees to organize opposition to the union betrayal of their struggle and demand a restart of their strike.

The deal was announced late Sunday night by officials with the Sacramento City Unified School District [SCUSD], the Sacramento City Teachers Association (SCTA) and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1021 and the strike called off before workers even had a chance to look at it, the clearest indication that it is a sellout agreeing to all of the district’s demands.

Teachers and school workers were expected on the job the next morning and were sent their respective tentative agreements late Monday night. Voting began early Tuesday morning and will close at 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday. Workers have been given less than 36 hours to read through, study and vote on the tentative agreements.

Major cuts to real wages and health care benefits

The deal is an open betrayal of the demands of teachers and school workers for better pay, adequate health care, a resolution to the severe staffing shortage, and COVID safety. Teachers have instead been presented with a contract expiring after the 2022-2023 school year that includes a paltry 4 percent raise plus three one-time payments, that amount to three percent of their salaries and are only offered to teachers who worked in the allotted years. The raise and bonuses do not make up for the 11 percent rise in inflation over the three years teachers had been working without a contract.

These paltry increases are well below the current rate of inflation of 8 percent. This means that teachers, who begin at only \$47,000 in the district, will experience cuts to real wages over the life of the agreement. The pay increase amounts to between \$157 and \$334 per month depending on seniority, while the cost of living is rising at \$433 per month for the average US household, according to Bloomberg Economics.

The district and SCTA agreed upon major concessions on health

care, which was a major point of contention for teachers. They plan to move to a less expensive Kaiser HMO plan and will negotiate an alternative plan, comparable to the Kaiser plan, by the end of the year. While the union falsely claims that the contract preserves the more robust current plan, it in fact will be phased out of the district’s benefits plan by the 2023-2024 school year. Those who want to maintain their present HealthNet coverage will have to opt out of the district-covered benefits and are instead offered a mere \$250 to pay for their premiums, which is a small portion of the full cost to teachers to maintain these benefits.

More overwork for teachers instead of staffing guarantees

The Memorandum of Understanding [MOU] adds deceptive language that health plan “savings” the district acquires from these changes will be added back into the district. According to the agreement, the cuts to health care will be used to add Full-Time Equivalent for new full-time positions in the district that “enhance the equitable learning for all students.”

In other words, the burden of the cost of improved staffing will be forced upon teachers, not on the district. Yet even here, there is absolutely no guarantee that any positions will be filled. In fact, the agreement stipulates that the district is only required to post open positions to be funded by the health care savings “unless and until [!] a reduction in force is necessary.”

Severely underfunded programs such as special education, early education and pre-K continue to face cuts and broken promises for future funding. The present agreement offers only empty language that the district and union will create “work groups” for special education and early education “to address ongoing issues.” These “work groups” are only another layer of labor-management “cooperation” which will do nothing to alter the declining state of these programs.

Nowhere in the tentative agreement is the staffing crisis resolved. In fact, the agreement provides the legal framework for hyper-exploitation of its existing staff, including teachers and nurses.

In the MOU section titled “Substitute pay and extra work,”

teachers are expected to bear the brunt of mass staffing shortages. They will be offered 25 percent of their hourly salary for the hours worked covering other classes during their prep periods or free periods.

Further, teachers who carry a substitute certificate may be assigned, as needed, to serve a long-term substitute assignment for up to 60 days. The agreement also notes that teachers may “volunteer” to take on more students on their caseloads or combine classes when a teacher is absent. These “volunteer” assignments are often pushed onto educators under crisis conditions, in which many educators feel pressured and compelled to accept the assignments.

It is, in fact, cheaper for the district to have a teacher lose his or her prep time or combine a class rather than pay a substitute an estimated \$187 per day. With a lack of substitute teachers working and taking assignments in the district, this only incentivizes forcing extra work onto existing teachers in the district.

Nurses are similarly being set up to take on more work. The MOU entitled “Nurses Extra Hours” allocates overtime pay for nurses who conduct contact tracing or other COVID-related extra work beyond their regular six-hour workday. At present in SCUSD, there are only 18 nurses and one head nurse for the approximately 40,000 students in the district. Nine of the nurses in the district serve anywhere from five to eight separate school sites each, and three schools have no nurses assigned to their site. Nurses are some of the most understaffed and overworked school employees in school districts, a situation that has only been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Full steam ahead with end to COVID restrictions

On COVID safety measures, the district and unions are following the policy of the Biden administration to eliminate all remaining restrictions, including mask wearing and even quarantining positive cases. The District’s COVID safety plan will follow the guidelines set by the CDC and local and state public health departments, which are antiscientific and politically motivated and directed to ending all restrictions on economic activity, sacrificing human lives for profit. Students and staff will be left to self-screen for symptoms and testing will take place only on a volunteer basis by the district, even during a major outbreak. Mask mandates will be lifted on Monday, April 19 when students and staff return from spring break.

Virtually all mitigation measures in schools are ending just as the BA.2 variant, the most transmissible form of the virus yet, is spreading across the world and is already driving outbreaks across the US. The policies in place accept a pandemic in perpetuity, and with it, ongoing mass death, infection, and long-term illness.

The way forward

This sellout is another demonstration of the role of the educators’ unions in violating workers’ rights and suppressing opposition on behalf of Wall Street and both big business parties. For two years, teachers across the US and the world have risen up repeatedly to demand serious measures to contain the spread of the pandemic in schools. But in every case, their struggles were sabotaged and betrayed by the AFT and the NEA, as well as the SEIU and their counterparts around the world, who went behind the teachers’ backs to conclude deals to reopen schools and eliminate safety measures. This makes them complicit in the entirely avoidable infection and death of thousands of teachers and students.

This is a continuation of the pro-corporate role they have long played. After the 2008 Wall Street crash, President Obama oversaw hundreds of thousands of teacher layoffs and instituted the corporate-backed Race to the Top and Every Student Succeeds Act, which the national AFT and NEA endorsed. Now, during the pandemic, the unions prove themselves willing to accept not only assaults on teachers’ living standards, but literally deadly working conditions.

A “no” vote is only the necessary starting point. The SCTA and SEIU will not respond to a “no” vote by reversing course and organizing a real struggle. That this miserable deal was brought to educators at all after a weeks-long strike only proves that they are corrupt, bureaucratically controlled organizations that serve as an obstacle to the growing wave of resistance by educators.

Sacramento teachers and school staff must draw the necessary conclusions. They must find a new road to develop their own initiative, organize opposition to the unions’ betrayals, formulate and fight for their own demands and appeal for the broadest possible unity with and support from teachers and workers everywhere. This means they must form a rank-and-file committee, independent of the control of the union apparatus, following the examples set by teachers in school districts across the US and the world.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is ready to assist teachers in this struggle. For more information, fill out the form below.



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