

Sacramento teacher speaks out against SCTA sellout contract: “I’m not happy about any of this”

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7 April 2022

On Sunday night, April 5, the Sacramento City Teachers Association (SCTA) and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1021 announced tentative agreements with the City Unified School District. The unions called off a strike of 5,000 educators and school service workers, demanding they return to work the next day, before reading, let alone voting on, the proposed contracts.

The agreements were rushed through by the SCTA and SEIU, which presented the contract language to their members Tuesday and then forced them to vote on it by 5 p.m. Wednesday, meaning educators had no real time to study and discuss what they were voting on. With the strike already ended, many teachers felt that their hands were tied. The SCTA announced Wednesday night that the contract was ratified by 98 percent, but did not state what percentage of its members voted.

The deal is entirely within the framework of “fiscal responsibility,” i.e., austerity, demanded by district administrators and the Democratic Party. The contract includes a miserly pay raise of 4 percent, plus three one-time payments, far below the rate of inflation. There are no substantial guarantees that woeful understaffing will be improved, and funding for open positions will be tied to health care cost cuts.

The sellout of the strike in Sacramento follows closely on the betrayal of the 20-day strike by educators in Minneapolis, Minnesota, which similarly failed to meet the demands of teachers for major improvements to wages and school funding. Anger over the deal continues to simmer. When the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers (MFT) recently praised the Sacramento tentative agreement on Facebook, a number of educators responded with hostility, one popular comment stating “Why are we calling pay raises far below the rate of inflation ‘historic wins’?”

Yvonne, a Sacramento teacher, recently spoke to the WSWs about the conduct of the district and the union. She also made clear the real conditions that teachers and staff are

facing in California and throughout the US, and addressed the ongoing attacks on public education.

Yvonne said she and her colleagues did not receive the proposed contract until late Tuesday night. “We were waiting for our union [SCTA] to even tell us, then a rumor went around. Then they said, ‘Oh yeah, check your email.’

“I saw the agreement at 10:30 Tuesday night! We didn’t even have a chance to talk with teachers in our own department. I’m not happy about any of this because we always get left behind.”

Yvonne spoke to the fact that the tentative agreement does nothing to address long-standing funding issues for critical programs like early education and special education. “They don’t want us to know what is really happening. I’m thinking that at least 75 percent of our preschool program will be gone within three years. We have I think 48 classrooms. We used to have about 72 classrooms in 2019. The new superintendent came in, destroyed our department, laid off half of our teachers and closed half of our classrooms. Now, a few years later, we have 48 teachers left.”

“They say there will be no layoffs next year. But I’ve been working for this district since 2001. I’ve been through six pink slips. But this one is different because they are actually taking our classrooms and turning them into transitional classrooms. We are watching them destroy our program. They are going to put us with a transitional kindergarten teacher for a year, but where do we go next year? We won’t have a classroom. They will lay us off.”

The SCTA has done nothing to stem the tide of layoffs and pay cuts. In fact, the union has rubber stamped every contract reducing pay and staffing levels for decades.

The district and union offered this advice to Yvonne when she asked if she had any job security whatsoever: “They tell us we have to go back and get another degree. I already have a degree. Why would I want to go back to school all over again? I’m really not happy. This makes me so angry after

being a teacher for so long.”

Yvonne said that the rising cost of living has made life increasingly difficult for her family, her colleagues and her students.

“I have two adult kids that have moved back home because of COVID. Everything costs more, so you don’t get to do anything. During COVID, when we used Zoom to teach kids, I would deliver stuff to the kids’ houses every week. I used my internet, my cellphone. I used all my own things. The superintendent said we’d be reimbursed, but we were never reimbursed by the district for gas costs or anything else. Now I’m delivering supplies and homework to students again. Even though we are in a classroom, costs are so high now that many parents can’t afford things and need to ask me for help. This puts a huge financial burden on teachers. But the district doesn’t care.”

School staff, such as bus drivers, food service workers and custodians, are in a particularly desperate situation. Most of these workers earn around \$35,000 per year, forcing some to sleep in their cars. SEIU members will also receive just a 4 percent raise, plus several one-time stipends.

“Some workers think they are going to get a raise,” Yvonne said. “I thought, ‘Oh no, you don’t even know.’ It isn’t even going to affect your check. They think they are getting something, but they really are not getting anything. I was in the SEIU union when I first started in this district, then I went back to school so that I could teach. I thought back then how awful it was. That’s partly why I became a teacher.”

Speaking on the role of the SCTA in pushing through the contract, she continued, “I’ve been in positions where I’ve almost lost my job because of the ruthless things the district has done. The union did help me a couple of times, but this is very different now with the union ramming this agreement down our throats.

“The union is saying ‘This is a win for us.’ Well tell me, really, is this a win, or are you guys saying it’s a win so that you can say you have things under control. But teachers and other workers are the ones that pay the price for whatever we get or don’t get. The union is in a building in a different neighborhood. We are the ones in a classroom and have to deal with the fallout.”

She continued, “It is not important if teachers know their union representatives personally. They [union reps] have no answers for anything outside of ‘we won.’ I asked if we can at least know if we need to find another job? The union representative just said ‘yes.’ The union is completely vague. The union promises our department isn’t going away. Yes, it is. That’s just the way teachers are treated.”

Yvonne agreed that the contract will put more work onto teachers. “That’s correct, and they know that. We’ve had

this conversation on the picket line. Yet, the union still signed the agreement. I don’t even have an aide. Normally, our classrooms have 16 kids. This year I’m working with a substitute teacher whom I’ve known for 20 years because we have no aides. That’s because the district laid off too many people, and they never brought them back. We have multiple classrooms like this right now.”

Yvonne indicated that many teachers do not get a preparation period to prepare their lessons because of the staffing shortage, which has been so severe that students have been “warehoused” in auditoriums and cafeterias because no teachers are available.

“The principal will say over the speakers, ‘We have no PE teachers today because our campus has no PE teacher, so sorry teachers you have no prep time because you need to keep your kids in your classroom.’ But that’s not in our contract. The union always says they’ll address it. I don’t get a lunch or break because I don’t have staff in my classroom. I have to scramble at the end of the day to prep. I always end up taking stuff home with me. I do about 10 to 15 hours of week at home a week. But I have a family at home too.”

After the tentative agreement was announced, the WSWs urged Sacramento teachers and staff to vote “no” on the sellout contract and organize rank-and-file committees to demand a restart of the strike.

Asked whether she thought the unions were betraying the interests of workers, Yvonne responded, “I totally agree. My husband was in a union, and was asked why he doesn’t come to union events. He didn’t go because his wife is in a union, and we don’t like that the unions don’t offer protection for their employees. The union only protected me a couple of times because the person trying to fire me was wrong, not because they wanted to stand strong for teachers. But unions are not what they used to be. Not even close.”



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