

Seattle Education Association shuts down strike of teachers in antidemocratic maneuver

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The Seattle Education Association (SEA) announced Tuesday afternoon that a vote it called to shut down the week-long strike of Seattle teachers passed 57 to 43 percent. Teachers and staff have been ordered back to work Wednesday.

Educators should reject this antidemocratic maneuver, vote down the still unreleased tentative agreement (TA) and organize themselves to take control of and continue the strike.

The entire process through which the SEA held and passed this vote is illegitimate. A TA was announced by the union Monday late in the evening, at about 10 p.m. Pacific, yet no details were released to the membership.

In a Facebook Live video, SEA President Jennifer Matter stated that it would “at best ... provide a summary,” while she and her fellow bureaucrats “finalize the language of the full text.” Shortly afterwards, local news organizations reported on the developments as if the strike had already been called off.

Then the vote to suspend the strike was held at a day-long meeting Tuesday, based only on highlights. The vote violated a resolution that was earlier proposed and passed by the rank and file that the strike could only be ended after a vote on the TA. Moreover, the vote was held online and controlled by the SEA itself, with no oversight from the rank and file, providing ample opportunity for ballot-stuffing.

Finally, the most recent update from the union on the contract is that “info on voting on TA ratification will come later in the week.”

As an elementary teacher said to the *World Socialist Web Site*, “[The] SEA leadership/bargaining team came in with a very clear bias. The email for today’s general assembly stated the meeting was ‘to hear highlights of

the TA and vote to suspend the strike.’ Many of us are frustrated and feeling disrespected by SEA leadership at this point.

“Originally, we voted to go on strike with the stipulation that the strike would end only if membership ratified the TA. Today, it ended up that we voted whether or not to suspend the strike, while we all know full well if we suspend, that’s the end of it. We will have lost our momentum and leverage in bargaining. Essentially, we were agreeing to a TA that we still have not seen.”

Another teacher commented on social media, “We are going back to work with 7 [percent wage increase] including the Cost of Living Assistance. ... I am voting no on the TA. Also, membership in other districts saw drafts of everything including actual numbers for class sizes and a salary schedule... we have not seen actual numbers. I am very disappointed.”

An article in the *Seattle Times* confirmed the figure, as well as noting a 4 percent increase in year two of the contract and a 3 percent increase in year three, plus small bonuses for certain tiers of educators. This is under conditions in which inflation is at more than 8 percent, in fact higher in cities like Seattle, meaning that the contract would sanction significant cuts in real wages.

The *Times* also reported that most student-teacher ratios for special education stayed the same.

The highlights are a slap in the face to teachers, all of whom have raised the need for a sharp increase in teachers working with multilingual students and those with individualized education plans.

Moreover, an entire fifth of the union’s 6,000 teachers either did not vote, were unable to vote or even unable to attend the membership meeting. One substitute teacher wrote on social media, in a post that

has since been taken down, “Although I am a union member, I was unable to vote in or even attend the meeting today for reasons I don’t quite understand—were other substitutes able to?”

That so many teachers were excluded from the vote speaks to the broader strategy of the SEA. The strike was called not to launch an offensive against years of cuts to special education, diminishing resources for students and declining wages, but to try to let off steam while a deal was worked out behind closed doors with the district that would continue the offensive against teachers.

The machinations of the SEA to shut down the strike raise the need for educators to seize their struggle for themselves, through the development of rank-and-file committees.

The SEA has carried out its maneuvers in close consultation with the National Education Association (NEA) and in turn with the Biden administration.

The Democratic Party is relying on the unions to suppress a growing movement of workers throughout the country against soaring inflation and inequality.

Currently, the Biden administration, along with Democrats and Republicans in Congress, are preparing to intervene to prevent a strike by 100,000 railroad workers. Last month, the NEA assisted in the shutting down of a strike by teachers in Columbus, Ohio, on the basis of a “conceptual agreement” that educators did not have a chance to vote on.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on educators in Seattle to organize a powerful “no” vote on the tentative agreement. However, this must be connected to the development of independent organizations, rank-and-file committees, to unite the struggle of teachers in Seattle and Washington with educators throughout the US and other sections of the working class.



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