

Seattle educators: Vote “no” on the sellout tentative agreement!

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Seattle educators should overwhelmingly reject the Seattle Education Association’s attempt to railroad them into accepting a concessions contract, which ignores everything they struck for. The SEA only released the full tentative agreement (TA) on Friday, three days after abruptly ending the powerful five-day strike by 6,000 teachers, paraeducators and support staff in the Seattle Public Schools district.

SEA officials shut down the strike in violation of the amendment adopted by membership vote, which prohibited the leadership from ending the strike until a TA was ratified. Like thieves in the night, the SEA announced it had reached a TA late in the evening last Monday—even though it had not been “finalized”—and then rushed through a bogus vote based on self-serving “highlights” to end the strike before anybody had a chance to read, let alone vote on the whole contract. The ballot was conducted online, with technical problems preventing the full participation of the membership, and under pressure of SEA President Jennifer Matter to vote for the deal.

The entire procedure was a mockery of democracy, more akin to the workings of a dictatorship than an organization that claims to speak for teachers.

This illegitimate process has produced a TA that meets none of the teachers’ basic demands, despite the SEA apparatus’s cynical declaration that it is “great.” A review of the TA, a copy of which was provided to the *World Socialist Web Site*, shows that the main demand of teachers, for lower student-teacher ratios for special education and multilingual classes, was not achieved. The general student-teacher ratios have also not been reduced.

In addition, wage increases are only 7 percent during the first year, 4 percent during the second year and 3 percent during the third year of contract. These are all

well below current inflation of 8.3 percent and below even the wage increases of the last contract. For the lowest-paid staff, there is a one-time \$1,500 bonus instead of bringing them up to parity with their colleagues. There are also only five additional nurses for the entire district, still leaving less than one full-time nurse for each building in the 52,000-student district.

The contract also maintains the reactionary “racial equity teams” and other racially divisive measures, which the SEA proclaimed as a major advance when they were first passed in 2019. The teams have been installed to assist in hiring and firing through racial quotas. Such measures have nothing to do with left-wing or progressive politics, which begin with the recognition that the fundamental division in society is class, not race. Instead, these measures pit teachers against each other when what is necessary is a common fight against any threat of layoffs and budget cuts, and to demand a massive increase in funding so that all children, of all races and nationalities, can have a well-rounded and high-quality education.

The SEA and its parent organization the National Education Association (NEA) never wanted a strike in the first place. When they were forced to call one because of the pressure of the rank and file, the NEA set about to isolate it. As Seattle teachers walked out on September 7, the NEA shut down the strike by 2,000 teachers in neighboring Kent who were fighting for the same basic demands. The NEA and its local affiliates also ensured that the numerous other struggles across Washington state, including at Eatonville, Ridgefield and Tumwater, have remained isolated from the battles in Seattle, Kent and elsewhere.

Rather than expanding the struggle, the SEA officials brought in various Democratic Party politicians,

including Kshama Sawant, a member of the pseudo-left groups Socialist Alternative and Democratic Socialists of America, to keep the struggle from breaking out of the confines of the union apparatus. When it became apparent that the strike was winning popular support and encouraging other educators to walk out, and under conditions of an impending strike by more than 100,000 railroad workers, the NEA shut down the strike.

“We should be incredibly proud of what we accomplished together,” the NEA declared, adding, “We won a great tentative agreement and started an important conversation with our community about supporting our students.”

This is nonsense and Matter & Co. know it. The deal, which was hailed by SPS officials, is a complete sellout of what teachers struck for.

There is widespread outrage among rank-and-file educators. As one educator said, “The SEA is trying to buy off workers by giving classified staff a one-time payment of \$1,500.”

Educators must organize now to defeat this sellout contract, resume the strike and link up with other educators and workers across the region and the country to launch a counteroffensive by the working class against austerity and social inequality and the capitalist system that produces it.

From the beginning, the *World Socialist Web Site* has warned about the treachery of the SEA apparatus and called on educators to form their own rank-and-file committees to take over the conduct of this struggle. Such committees have nothing in common with the various reform factions of the SEA, which are backed by the DSA, SA and other pseudo-left apologists for the union bureaucrats and corporate-controlled Democratic Party.

Instead, these committees, elected in every school and neighborhood and led by the most militant and class-conscious workers, must be the new centers of decision-making power and rank-and-file control. Instead of fruitless appeals to bought-off politicians, these committees will reach out to workers and youth to fight for a vast redistribution of wealth to meet social needs.

This includes linking up educators with Kaiser Permanente mental health workers in northern California who have been on strike since early August, striking Weyerhaeuser lumber workers in Washington

and Oregon, and more than 100,000 railroad workers across the country who are poised to go on the first nationwide rail strike since the 1960s.

The claim by Democratic officials that the Seattle Public Schools cannot “afford” teachers’ demands is a contemptible lie. Washington state is home to some of the most lucrative corporations in the world—Boeing, Amazon, Microsoft, Starbucks—all of which the state can “afford” to give massive tax breaks. At the same time, Biden and Congress have found billions to stoke up the US/NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, even though this threatens to provoke a nuclear World War III.

Teachers should also reach out to parents for support before and during a renewed strike to explain that their struggle does not cut across the interests of parents but is ultimately a fight for parents and students. Any hardship for parents that need child care during such a strike must be paid for by the district, the city and the state.

Seattle educators: Reject any contract that does not sharply reduce student-teacher ratios, especially in special education! Wage increases and cost-of-living adjustments must surpass soaring inflation! Form a rank-and-file committee to unite with students, parents, other educators and other sections of the working class nationally and internationally!



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