

New York City teachers union announces sellout deal

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Having kept educators in the dark since contract talks started in September, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) announced a five-year tentative agreement on Tuesday with the right-wing city administration of mayor Eric Adams. The deal includes 3 percent annual raises which, when accounting for inflation, cuts the pay of approximately 115,000 educators and other Department of Education (DOE) employees.

At a Tuesday press conference at City Hall, Adams said, “Today’s agreement includes major victories, including wage increases and additional programs to retain our educators, along with groundbreaking new programs, like the option of a virtual learning program, to ensure our students receive a world-class education.”

At a separate press conference, UFT president Michael Mulgrew said, “We’re saying to all of our titles and every member, whether you’re in the first year or your 25th year, New York City is saying that we appreciate you, we recognize the challenges that you take on every day and you will receive \$1,000 every year for that.”

These are boldfaced lies. The New York City school system, the largest in the United States, has been struck a blow by the COVID-19 pandemic that the agreement does not even consider addressing. As in the rest of the country, the city’s schools are suffering from a massive loss of educators, high student absenteeism, overcrowding, and the closing or co-location of schools.

Adams has announced that there will be budget cuts of hundreds of millions of dollars next year that will result in the firing of over 500 school crossing guards, and drastically cut the city’s pre-K program. Hundreds of other programs and positions that were cut last year will not be reinstated.

On Friday, Adams announced that he will impose a cut-rate privatized Medicare Advantage on city retirees. Mulgrew worked closely with the Adams administration in imposing the new healthcare plan, which limits the

choice of physicians for retirees and will be prone to denying necessary medical procedures.

The UFT bureaucracy is seeking to rush through the contract approval as quickly as possible. There are only two weeks remaining in the school year, a busy time for educators. A vote has not been scheduled and the bureaucracy is concealing information on the exact character of the contract.

On Tuesday, a leader for the opposition United for Change caucus was heckled at a UFT delegates’ assembly by members of the ruling Unity caucus, for daring to ask that delegates be allowed to see the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) before they voted to release it to the membership.

On Wednesday, the UFT released the MOA. The MOA itself is an attempt to deceive UFT members. It is impossible for educators to tell what is missing, but some gaps are significant, and even what the MOA proposes amounts to an attack on educators working conditions and compensation. Here are only a few highlights:

- Not only does the MOA take no account of inflation in the last years, but it has no Cost of Living Adjustment to protect against inflation in the future.

- Paraprofessionals will continue to earn poverty wages. The highest salary achievable by a parapro after five years will be less than \$52,000 annually in the most expensive city in the world.

- The bureaucracy has omitted any material about medical care – a highly contentious issue given that the 2018 contract promised the city \$600 million in medical care savings, in conjunction with other city unions. That sum is now being taken out of the hides of city worker retirees, who will be relegated to a privatized Medicare Advantage program in September.

- While educators are allowed to do some remote work, such as making parent calls, this is entirely at the discretion of the DOE, which can remove the option for

remote work for an individual educator – without the right to grievance – at any time.

- Educators are now expected to work remotely on snow days.

- The retention incentives will not be applicable to educators' pensions.

- The MOA says nothing about pandemic preparedness – let alone about the ongoing threats to health from COVID-19 and other airborne pathogens, or air quality. There is not one syllable about testing, social distancing, masking, or other mitigation measures. There is no guaranteed right of educators to work remotely in case of a public health emergency.

The last point is among the most significant. Schools are one of the main vectors of transmission of COVID-19, and in New York City over 45,000 people have died of the disease. The Biden administration, as well as Adams and his predecessor Bill de Blasio and successive Democratic state governments, have removed all COVID measures with the active support of the UFT bureaucracy.

In its MOA, the UFT is showing that not only is all forgiven, but it is also forgotten. The MOA not only has no reference to a pandemic plan, but gives complete control to the city over remote learning. This paves the way for another health disaster, whether it is a resurgence of COVID or the spread of another disease.

There are no doubt other tricks and hidden clauses in the contract as well. Nothing can be taken for granted. The bureaucratic apparatus of the UFT is hostile to the interests of educators, and it will play every trick and tell every lie to pass a concessions contract.

The austerity agreement follow the same de facto wage cuts given to other city office, parks, maintenance, and other workers. One Wednesday, eleven other city unions signed agreements with similar below-inflation wage increases.

New York City transit workers, who are employed by the state and not the city, are facing similar de facto wage cuts with 3 percent annual pay raises. The tentative agreement would also force them to work five more days a year, and they will also be forced on the privatized Medicare Advantage healthcare program.

Educators took to social media to condemn the deal.

Responding to the UFT's Tweet announcing the agreement, one educator on Twitter commented, "How is a 'raise' that is lower than the cost of living increase a 'win'??? This is lipstick on a pig...wake up and get us a REAL, FAIR, LIVING WAGE!!!!"

Another said, "How tf is this a win??" A third educator

remarked, "It's pure garbage" Some educators said simply, "Vote no!"

A no vote for the contract is necessary, but it must be the start of a movement for independence from the union apparatus. The various factions in the United for Change (UFC), the official opposition to the Mulgrew bureaucracy, are calling for a no vote. But if this sellout is voted down, the bureaucracy will only conspire with the Adams administration to try to ram through another, almost identical deal.

This means that teachers need other means to impose their will and fight for what they need.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), founded in 2021 has been fighting to unite workers around the globe in a movement that is independent of the trade union bureaucracy and the capitalist parties with which it is so closely allied.

The Northeast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (NE ERFSC), affiliated with the IWA-RFC, anticipating the sellout, declared in a statement earlier this year: "Rank-and-file committees, independent of the UFT bureaucracy, must call on educators to take collective action to shut down the city's schools until a decent contract is reached and voted on by educators."

Educators in New York City must build such committees. In the first place, they must demand to see the full contract and have adequate time to discuss it before any vote is taken. They must prepare a common struggle to repudiate the sellout contracts foisted on other city workers and the Medicare Advantage swindle foisted on retirees. They must work in unison with other sections of the working class, particularly the city's transit workers and school bus drivers, to ensure the protection of health and safety throughout the city and a significant rise in the standard of living.

To join this struggle, educators should contact the NE ERFSC.



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