

Detroit teachers outraged over sellout contract

Phyllis Steele
23 August 2023

Register now to attend our online meeting on Saturday, August 26, 1 p.m. EDT. Fill out the form at the end of this article for more information on joining the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee.

Detroit educators are angered by the lack of discussion and the snap contract vote imposed by the union leadership, which demonstrate once again the contempt of the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT) bureaucracy for the rank and file.

In discussions with *World Socialist Web Site* reporters, most Detroit educators responded negatively to the tentative agreement being pushed by the DFT and stressed the need for a pay raise of at least 10 percent across the board. They were generally hostile to the use of bonuses, which do not go toward pensions, in place of increases in base pay.

Many pointed out that under the proposed deal, teachers who are on steps 11-14 are shortchanged. All educators on steps 1-10 were moved to step 11 in September of 2020, but a teacher who was on step nine was only moved to step 11 and made the same as a new-hire who began on step 11.

While moving veteran teachers up, the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) failed to properly compensate them for their many years of service. New-hires were brought in at \$51,000 per year as an incentive to attract them to the DPSCD. But there are still many veteran teachers who make only \$2,000 more than those hired in 2019.

Kris, a teacher with nine years seniority, explained:

I make \$2,000 more a year than someone else who started last year. That's after working for the district for nine years. Tell me how that makes sense. I am furious about this. I also will not get the \$4,500 in longevity pay that people with 15 or more years get. This is the divide-and-conquer method. How dare the union agree to this! I am voting no.

Rochelle, a veteran Michigan teacher, added:

All these struggles where all these contracts were voted down that I have been reading about on their websites this summer, and then they come in and say that the vote just passed. All of them "narrowly" passed. Most don't believe it really passed. Where is the verification?

The unions end strikes prematurely and prior to the votes

even being taken, and with very little time for the rank and file to read over the contract. They force it through very quickly. Like with the rail workers—the government stepped in to make a strike illegal. The same type of thing is going on in England.

[AFT President Randi] Weingarten is working behind the scenes with the Biden administration. There were emails between them back in March about COVID. The legislature passed laws that schools would be penalized and districts would lose funding if they did not open up. Obviously, that included Governor Whitmer here in Michigan. The metrics changed after Biden demanded they open up.

The Michigan Education Association is also involved in all this. How many buildings have been updated? I worry particularly about the urban school districts that have old, poorly maintained buildings with existing issues, let alone air quality.

Another teacher who is completely disgusted with the union asked to remain anonymous. She said:

The best way to describe myself is as a socialist. [DFT President] Lokia [Wilson-Lumpkins] is way too in the pocket of [DPSCD Superintendent] Vitti. I felt that many times we were fighting against the union. I did not feel the person at the negotiation table was for me.

Last year was my third with the district. Lokia came to Henry Ford and gave us a big speech about her being in charge. She gathered us all in the cafeteria and acted in charge. It was suspicious because the election wasn't even final. Something smelled and was off when she left the room. She came to our school a couple of times. Now here we are.

Heather, a veteran teacher, was upset about the lies and the laughing during the online membership meeting on Sunday, where the tentative agreement was read to the membership. Members listened, unable to engage in discussion because the chat feature was disabled. Questions were answered at the end of the meeting in a truncated way, despite the obvious frustration of members who were desperately seeking answers.

She said:

To be members and not be able to say anything, that's deceitful. To not have the chat on, they didn't have a democratic discussion. Lumpkins said they struck a deal at 10:24, but we were told at 8:30 that there was a tentative agreement. At least have the union reps be able to speak based on what the people in their buildings are saying.

It was not a TA [tentative agreement] review, it was an introduction. There is no room for us to discuss changes. What about the changes we would have wanted to ask for? Don't we get any input? They didn't want to distribute it because they didn't want it on social media. Why do they care if it's on social media? What are they hiding?

Fred told the WSWS:

The TA is not good as far as I'm concerned. It should be 10k more across the board for everyone, at the least. They can give us 6 percent then get it back with healthcare costs, but not everyone is getting it. Just those at the top of the pay scale. Everyone else just gets bumped up a step, or about \$1,750. It's basically a pay cut. The DFT is indifferent to our plight!

Parents are supporting the teachers. Francheska, a DPSCD parent, said:

I support the teachers. Everybody needs to band together and shut everything down. Healthcare, auto and the teachers! People are really starting to think of ways to fight. I see that there seems like there is going to be a strike. I am proud of people fighting.

I agree that inflation and the new contract make zero sense. For the teachers to have to work part-time as tutors or help home schoolers. People are smart and are standing up. They offered teachers a couple of bucks, but everything is going up. Inflation is so much more than the 6 percent they are offering teachers.

I am glad teachers are not falling for that. Why would they take that? The working class needs to look out for each other. I think this will be the start of a broader movement as more and more people see that there is more than just the two parties. We need to rely on each other, band together in our interest. Young, old, black and white. Color should not matter. Teachers don't deserve this and the schools need you!

With decades in the plants, Cliff, an autoworker at Dearborn Truck, was appalled at the description of the online meeting of the DFT by the *World Socialist Web Site*, based on reports of teachers who were in attendance. Selected parts of the tentative agreement with SPSCD were outlined by the DFT bargaining team. No discussion from teachers in attendance was allowed.

He said:

That's not fair, that's not right. Historically, you always

have a question-and-answer period and a general discussion to get clarification on what is presented in a contract. People should understand what they are authorizing when they vote on the contract.

The fact is, we have a lot of people with degrees working on the line. They come here hoping to do better. You have teachers who are actually working their regular job and then coming in here to work, maybe part-time, to make ends meet. It is hard nowadays. You cannot maintain a household on what they pay here, so you find people here also looking for extra jobs to pick up, or taking work here because their other job does not pay enough.

And then you have the pensions. For the UAW workers, getting pensions back is paramount. That's why they can't get enough teachers in the schools—they took their pensions too.

Ronda, a grandmother, said:

There are teachers who are going to say that they care about the children when they consider a strike. If they have to strike to straighten it out, then I see their point. It was just a couple years ago they went through the same thing.

Teachers already do not make enough money. I hear about them offering bonuses instead of just making it a wage increase. I read special-ed teachers will get a bonus. I speak to a teacher in Detroit from time to time and she mentioned to me last year that they were constantly sending special-ed students into her class. So obviously they don't have enough special-ed teachers. So why don't they pay enough to get the teachers they need?

Register now to attend our online meeting on Saturday, August 26, 1 p.m. EDT. Fill out the form below for more information on joining the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Committee.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact