

Minneapolis teachers' union praises "historic" tentative agreement despite Minneapolis Public Schools demands to gut school funding

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Nearly a year after the contracts of Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) teachers and support staff expired, the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers' (MFT) and MPS last week announced that they had reached a tentative deal. Separately, the MFT announced it had reached a tentative agreement between Educational Support Professionals (ESPs) and the MPS on Wednesday as well.

The TA, which the MFT has called "historic," has not been shared publicly and the MFT has stated that it does not plan to share any details of the TA publicly until it is ratified. Teachers are set to vote on the tentative agreement from May 8-10.

A question naturally follows: If it is of a "historic" character, why not share the details of the agreement? If the MFT is withholding details, the only logical conclusion is that the union apparatus knows they have sold out teachers and do not want to give time to rank-and-file teachers to mobilize and vote down the deal.

A dark cloud looming over the entire "historic" tentative agreement is the recent revelation that MPS officials have stated that they will need to cut \$110 million from education spending, and that "everything is on the table," including school closures.

It is simply impossible that the contract could meet any of the teachers' demands when the school administration has stated its determination to slash \$110 million. This was spelled out by MPS superintendent Lisa Sayles-Adams, who said recently, "We will potentially be facing layoffs." So, essentially layoffs are part of the "historic" win contained in the

tentative agreement.

The announcement of the TA right as MFT teachers were voting to authorize a strike, which was unanimously approved by 92 percent, was a blatant attempt by the union to stave off a strike. For nearly nine months, while teachers worked without a contract, the MFT refused to call for a strike, let alone hold a strike vote. This included avoiding any discussion of a joint strike while the St. Paul Public Schools (SPPS) teachers had voted to strike against poverty wages and inadequate resources. This divide-and-conquer tactic enabled the St. Paul Federation of Educators (SPFE) to push through a contract in advance of any action by the MPS teachers.

Instead of joining SPPS educators, the MFT organized several stunts aimed at managing teacher anger over the conditions they face. These stunts consisted of protests at the MPS building and an "open letter" to MPS containing the call to "rebuild" the MPS with funding.

The MFT did everything it could to avoid a strike against MPS and a clash with the Democratic-controlled school board and city administration. MFT president Greta Callahan justified their lack of a call for a strike among Educational Support Professionals, professing concern over the impact on students, as though the cuts being proposed by MPS would not disrupt the lives of students.

In 2022, teachers in the Twin Cities, Minneapolis and St Paul, were determined to win wage increases exceeding 20 percent in a reversal of decades of

stagnation. However, due to the combined treachery of the SPFE and MFT leadership, Minneapolis teachers faced the MPS without support from striking SPPS teachers. Eventually, teachers received minimal raises of 2 and 3 percent, falling significantly below the high inflation rates of the time.

Over the course of working nearly one year without a contract, every one of the MFT's moves was aimed at preventing widespread opposition from coalescing into a confrontation with the Democratic Party-run school administration over plans for massive cuts.

The top bureaucrat of the parent union of the MFT, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) president Randi Weingarten, has joined forces with the Biden administration in slandering students, claiming opposition to the genocide in Gaza is "antisemitic." This is in opposition to the majority of teachers who are against the genocide.

Minneapolis teachers should not wait for the MFT to push through the sellout contract and instead should organize independently of the union. Teachers should prepare to vote the contract down. They should have at least a full week to study the entire contract and discuss it. Teachers should form rank-and-file committees led by the most militant teachers to discuss and hammer out demands based on the needs of educators and students, not the supposed budget realities.

Along with a "no" vote, contract talks should be transferred to the oversight and control of the rank-and-file, led by the most trusted teachers. These committees must be democratically elected and controlled by teachers in every school.

To win their demands, teachers above all need a political strategy based on a socialist and internationalist perspective. The working class must take control of the resources of society and reorganize production based upon the needs of workers—including funding for high-quality public education—and not private profit for a tiny minority of the super-rich.



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