Vote NO on the West Contra Costa schools sellout deal! Organize rank-and-file committees to unite educators and school support workers!

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In the early hours of Sunday morning, Teamsters Local 856 announced a tentative deal to end a strike of 1,500 school support workers at the West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) in northern California. The deal isolates around 1,500 of the district's classified staff from educators in the United Teachers of Richmond, with whom they launched a strike on December 4, following strike votes of 96 percent and 98 percent respectively.

The deal, which workers have not even voted on, is almost identical to one which workers overwhelmingly rejected only two weeks ago. Workers must reject this sellout, but this is only the beginning. Workers must organize themselves into rank-and-file strike committees to force the re-launch of the strike alongside their brothers and sisters among the teachers, and to override any further violations of their will by the union officials.

The first deal called for a paltry 3 percent raise, structured as a 2 percent increase retroactive to July 1, 2025, with an additional 1 percent in January 2026, followed by vague wage reopeners offering no guarantees.

The "new" tentative agreement remains trapped within this same poverty-wage framework. It offers a 3 percent ongoing raise in 2025, retroactive to July and a 4 percent increase in 2026, which still is not enough to offset inflation. A wage-reopener in 2027 leaves workers entirely at the mercy of the district's austerity demands.

None of this comes remotely close to reversing decades of collapsing living standards in the Bay Area, the center of hi-tech billionaires where a family of four requires $100,000–$120,000 to survive without hardship.

Classified workers in WCCUSD earn as little as $34,000 a year, with the highest-paid positions rarely exceeding $60,000. Teachers, whose salaries average between $69,000 and $84,000, cannot afford the basic costs of living required to support a family in the Bay Area. Yet the union bureaucracy and the district insist that it is workers who must tighten their belts and accept "budget constraints," even as billions continue to flow without question to Wall Street and the U.S. war machine.

The initial ask was for 8 percent per year for three years, already modest and insufficient, but even this was quickly bargained down by the Teamsters themselves to 6 percent. The district opened with zero. Now the bureaucracy dares to present anything above zero as a "victory."

If workers reject their contract and force a resumption of the strike, it would have a galvanizing impact on educators across the country also fighting poverty wages and funding cuts.

Almost every major school district in California has operated the entire fall semester on expired contracts, but the California Teachers Association has refused to call strikes anywhere. Recently, impasses have been declared in contract talks in Los Angeles, Berkeley, Oakland, Twin Rivers, Natomas, Madera and San Francisco. In San Francisco, more than 99 percent of United Educators members authorized a strike last week.

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But the West Contra Costa strike shows that, if the CTA calls walkouts at all, it would do everything in its power to limit and undermine them. A stand taken by Local 856 members, on the other hand, would create momentum for a broader movement capable of overriding the delaying tactics and enforcing the rank-and-file's decision for a statewide strike.

The Teamsters contract would do nothing to address the funding crisis in the district. WCCUSD schools began the year with 71 classrooms lacking permanent teachers, relying on temporary replacements, substitutes and rotating staff. Special education is in crisis, with severe shortages in paraprofessionals and specialists. Educators report unbearable class sizes, collapsing learning conditions, and the near-impossibility of providing individualized support.

Meanwhile, many classified staff work part-time and are demanding sustainable full-time positions with benefits.

The district claims that a $17 million deficit leaves its hands tied. But this crisis is not the fault of educators and classified workers. It is the product of decades of bipartisan austerity. For more than half a century, both Democrats and Republicans have slashed public education and privatized services, while pouring billions into tax cuts, policing and the global war machine.

The Trump administration is brutally attacking immigrants, dismantling every vital social service, including education, to pay for capitalism's endless wars and to secure profits for the wealthy. The democratic and social rights of the workers are under attack by the ruling class.

Meanwhile, Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien, who has helped destroy tens of thousands of jobs at UPS and other logistics companies, is one of many union bureaucrats to become major Trump supporters. Their joining the would-be Führer in his attacks on immigrants and foreign workers confirms that the apparatus stands squarely with U.S. nationalism and corporate interests.

The Teamsters tentative agreement must be rejected with the same determination workers showed before. But simply voting "NO" is not enough. The bureaucracy will continue to manipulate the process and attempt to ram through concessions even after multiple rejections, as seen throughout the country.

This is why workers must organize independent rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by educators, classified staff, parents and students, not the bureaucracy. Such committees should demand:

• Drastic pay increases, full staffing and safe learning conditions

• An end to all cuts, with budgets expanded dramatically at the expense of the state's tech billionaires and massive corporations, and;

• Substantially improved classroom sizes.

To prepare for this fight, and to prevent another betrayal, classified staff must take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands. They should organize a rank-and-file strike committee, with joint membership of both Teamster members and teachers from the UTR, to enforce a new strategy including:

• Full strike pay, paid from the nearly half-billion in assets controlled by the Teamsters union, supplemented by the furloughing of non-essential union personnel;

• Full rank-and-file control over future bargaining sessions, which must be livestreamed publicly;

• No back to work without a ratified contract, and adequate time to study before the vote, and;

• Delegations of workers sent to school districts across the state to establish contact with other rank-and-file educators and prepare a statewide strike.

The strike has revealed enormous determination. Now workers must take the next step: seize control of their struggle and expand it.

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