

# Vote NO on the UTR–WCCUSD tentative agreement! Teachers must seize control of the struggle and expand it!

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United Teachers of Richmond (UTR) announced a tentative agreement with the West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) on Wednesday, ordering teachers back to work Thursday morning and calling for ratification votes to begin immediately, before teachers had read a single line of the contract.

The undemocratic way in which the union bureaucracy has shut down the strike demands a NO vote by itself. But this is only the first step. Teachers must take control of the struggle from the union bureaucracy by building independent rank-and-file committees to expand the fight across California and link it to the broader working class.

The deal comes after nearly ten months of stalled negotiations, finally culminating in a joint strike launched last Thursday between UTR and Teamsters Local 856 in WCCUSD. But on Sunday, the Teamsters bureaucracy ordered its members back to work, breaking the unity of the struggle. UTR has now followed suit, shutting down a fight that emerged because conditions have become intolerable: soaring living costs, chronic understaffing, overwhelming workloads, and the degradation of public education. The unions' coordinated betrayal has produced a deal whose purpose is to end the strike, not to meet workers' needs.

## A wage cut disguised as a raise

The wage offer adds only one single percent to the 7 percent over two years originally proposed by the district. This 8 percent does nothing to offset years of inflation or address the cost of living crisis in northern California.

Many support staff (who are members of the Teamsters)

in WCCUSD earn as little as \$34,000 a year in the Bay Area, one of the most expensive regions in the world. Even credentialed teachers, after this raise, will struggle to meet rent, car payments and basic necessities.

Karen, a WCCUSD teacher, denounced the contract: “For our last contract a few years ago, we were asking for 24 percent over 3 years. That’s 8 percent a year. This contract is a 2-year one. So proportionately we should have been asking for 16 percent. Starting at 10 percent was the first mistake.”

Introduction of district-paid family health care coverage would be delayed until 2027, giving the district time to renege on these promises, citing the funding shortfalls that will be manufactured to justify further austerity.

The agreement also creates wage tiers—special education teachers receive an additional 5 percent—that will be used to divide teachers and justify future cuts.

Karen warned: “This contract is a disaster. All of us get an 8 percent salary increase over 2 years but special education teachers get an extra five so they get 13 percent total. When the district does layoffs—which they inevitably will immediately do as soon as they can, because this contract says nothing about no layoffs for the life of this contract—the district will blame the high salaries of special education teachers for why they need to do layoffs.”

## The structural crisis remains unaddressed

Even after this agreement, WCCUSD has 71 classes without permanent teachers. Nothing in the deal guarantees full-time qualified instructors in every

classroom, mandates reductions in class sizes, or rebuilds the special education system. Mental health and support staff shortages go unaddressed. The district will continue its reliance on substitutes, contractors and part-time workers.

The deal accepts the framework of “what the district can afford,” a trap constructed by Democrats in California who insist that public education must operate under austerity. This logic has for decades produced underfunded schools, reduced staffing, unsafe classrooms and poverty wages—and it guarantees more of the same.

### **The union bureaucracy’s coordinated betrayal**

The joint strike with Teamsters Local 856 represented a threat to the union bureaucracy, whose bloated salaries and connections with corporate politicians depend upon their ability to provide “labor peace” to the school district.

UTR is affiliated with the California Teachers Association (CTA), which has spent the fall semester blocking strikes in almost every major school district in the state, under its hypocritical “We Can’t Wait” campaign. In district after district concessionary agreements that lock in austerity are being prepared.

But this is beginning to break down, as shown by the WCCUSD strike itself and by the 99 percent strike vote in San Francisco, and by impasses in talks declared in Los Angeles and other school districts. This is precisely why the bureaucracy is shutting down the strike: because it could serve as an example and galvanize support for a statewide strike by teachers in other districts.

This is what has to happen. Only through a movement in the working class can the dismantling of public education be stopped. The Trump administration is moving to eliminate the Department of Education, attacking Medicaid and food stamps and overseeing mass federal layoffs to fund Wall Street and new wars for profit.

The fight for decent wages and working conditions cannot be separated from the fight against this entire social order.

The strike must be renewed, but on the basis of a new strategy based on mobilizing teachers and the whole working class in an independent movement against oligarchy. Educators should take up the following

demands:

- Major wage increases that meet and exceed inflation, with immediate full strike pay funded by the unions’ considerable financial assets.
- Full staffing and safe learning conditions in every school, with drastic reductions in class sizes.
- Massive increases in education funding through expropriation of the wealth of California’s tech billionaires and corporations.
- No layoffs and job security guarantees for the life of the contract!

### **Vote NO and build rank-and-file committees**

Voting NO is essential. But by itself it is not enough. The next phase of the struggle has to be prepared through new organs of struggle: independent rank-and-file committees controlled by workers themselves.

These committees would fight to end the closed door talks, with full control by teachers over negotiations and the livestreaming of every bargaining session. They would place the needs of educators and students—not the district budget—at the center of the struggle. Most importantly, they would link teachers with other sections of the working class, starting with Teamsters 856 members battling their own sellout. And they would end the district-by-district isolation by sending delegations of the rank-and-file statewide to coordinate a united educators’ movement.

Mitzi Pérez-Caro, a teacher at Kennedy High, told the media, “What we were asking for initially was already a compromise” given the impossible cost of living. She concluded, “We know that the fight doesn’t end now.” She is right. The fight is just beginning—but it must be taken out of the hands of the CTA and UTR bureaucracies and placed in the hands of teachers themselves.



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