

Seattle union pushes through deal that includes hiring and firing of teachers based on race

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Seattle teachers and support staff voted last week to approve a contract, averting a strike in the state's largest school district and isolating strikes in the smaller districts of Kennewick and Toutle Lake. The ratification of the deal was not a vote of confidence in the Seattle Education Association (SEA). Teachers were convinced the SEA would not come back with anything better, if they rejected the deal, and large numbers of teachers abstained from the vote.

The deal between the SEA and Seattle Public Schools (SPS) is a significant step backwards in every way. It includes a thoroughly inadequate 11 percent raise over three years for certified staff and a 12 percent raise over three years for paraprofessional and office workers in one of the nation's most expensive cities. Substitute teachers, who are increasingly being used to fill in long-term teaching vacancies as full-time teachers are laid off, will receive an insulting \$10 more per day and most will remain without the guarantee of basic benefits such as decent health care.

A mere \$5,000 will be allocated for library materials in higher-need schools and only 10 new school counselors, three nurses, and two family-support workers will be hired to serve the 54,000 students in the district.

Toutle Lake Education Association and Kennewick Education Association followed suit, with similar pay agreements last week, ending those local walkouts. Negotiations are continuing in many state school districts, with teacher anger propelled by the punitive layoffs and budget cuts imposed following last year's walkouts.

At that time, teacher struggles in over 200 districts across the state were isolated and shutdown by the

Washington Education Association (WEA) and its local union affiliates. The Seattle district has already warned of additional "budget cuts and layoffs."

The most reactionary component of the deal is the allocation of \$260,000 toward the expansion of "racial equity teams," alongside other such racially divisive measures, which the SEA grotesquely claims is a major advance. These teams will assist in layoff and hiring decisions based on racial quotas, while purportedly addressing "racial bias" within schools.

The SEA-SPS contract breaks new ground in this campaign to divide the working class with the words "racial equity" mentioned 40 times just in the 14-page summary. This includes a "racial equity lens" to be used during the hiring, development, and especially firing of teachers, so that "teachers of color" are given priority.

Teachers will be hired and fired in part on the criterion of their skin color and in part based on the racial composition of a particular school. "Racial equity" criteria are introduced in every key section of the contract, including family support workers, nurses, library resources, English Language Learning programs, assistive technology, special education, and professional development. The agreement even changes the name of "Education Opportunity Gap Days" to "Racial Equity Days."

The SEA is largely adopting the program of its loyal "left" Social Equity Educators faction, founded by Jesse Hagopian, a former member of the now-defunct International Socialist Organization. Defining the crisis in public education in racial, not class terms, helps cover up the unions' collusion with the austerity program of both corporate controlled parties by

advancing supposedly “anti-racist” demands that do not cost the political establishment a penny but are welcomed because they divide teachers along racial lines.

The outlook of Hagopian, an ethnic studies teacher, and his ilk is to blame white workers for the social inequality caused by capitalism in the vein of the *New York Times*’ racist falsification of history, the 1619 Project, and the campaign strategy of the Democrats in the 2020 elections.

The pseudo-left Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), Socialist Alternative (SA) and Social Equity Educators (SEE) promote this filth under conditions in which the massive teacher strikes and protests over the last two years, including in Washington state, have brought out educators of all colors and nationalities over the same fundamental issues—inadequate funding, privatization, huge class sizes, and low or stagnant pay. The unions, Democrats and their pseudo-left apologists clearly sense that workers are beginning to move into struggle on the basis of common class interests.

Allied with the Democratic Party, the unions are pledging once again to operate as enforcers of the state budget cuts. While Democratic Governor Jay Inslee handed \$9 billion to multibillion-dollar military contractor Boeing and hundreds of millions more to Microsoft and other grotesquely profitable businesses, the unions concur with the lie that there is “no money” for schools. Increased funding can only be secured, they claim, by regressive local levy taxes on the working class.

It should not be forgotten that the Obama administration bailed out Wall Street while employing the Race to the Top scheme to reward the school privatizers and expand the charter school industry. All of the pseudo-left promoters of identity politics like to conceal that the “first black president” (endorsed twice by both the National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers), oversaw the greatest transfer of wealth from the working class to the financial elite in its history.

For a unified struggle of teachers in defense of public education!

The *World Socialist Web Site Teacher Newsletter* and the Socialist Equality Party rejects racist politics. We stand for the unity of the working class—black, white, native born and immigrant—in the fight for social

equality and the abolition of class oppression. We fight for the social right to decent jobs, quality education, healthcare, housing, safe and healthy environments, art and music, and all that is needed to raise the material and cultural level of society.

Teachers must unite with educators, parents and students across the US and internationally and establish new forms of organization that are independent of the unions and major political parties. These organizations—rank-and-file workplace committees—will counterpose the democratic will of teachers, students and parents to the dictates of the corporate and political establishment. The committees can open up the lines of communication denied by the unions, providing teachers with the means to coordinate a nationwide and international strike of teachers, and appeal to all sections of the working class to support this vital struggle.

This struggle is inseparably linked with the fight to defend all social and democratic rights, including the freedom of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning, the defense of immigrants and opposition to war. It requires a struggle against capitalism and for socialism. A mass political struggle of all workers must fight to secure the trillions of dollars in wealth squandered by those at the top of society and reallocate these resources on a socialist basis, that is, in the interests of all humanity.



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