

# Oppose the attempt by the teachers union to sell out Scranton strike!

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Late Friday evening, the Scranton Federation of Teachers (SFT) announced it had reached a deal with the Scranton School District and called upon teachers in the Pennsylvania city to return to the classroom Monday morning before seeing and voting on the contract.

On November 3, 800 teachers in Scranton walked out after working without a contract since 2017. Teachers were fighting for better pay, no cuts to health benefits, reduced class sizes and the restoration of cuts in classes.

Revealing the likely nature of the contract she had just agreed to, SFT President Rosemary Boland told the Associated Press, “You know, nothing is perfect. You have to compromise at the table. We all know that going in, and I think that is actually what happened.”

The WSWs urges educators to vote “no” on what can only be a rotten agreement. The union is allowing classes to restart before teachers have ratified the agreement, aiming to dissipate any momentum they have built up on the picket line. The SFT is not allowing teachers to see the contract until they are behind closed doors on Tuesday.

One Scranton teacher remarked to the WSWs, “At this point, the newspaper knows more than I do.”

The SFT based its negotiations entirely on what the impoverished Scranton School District claimed it could afford. Any gains for the teachers, who currently receive a miserly starting wage of \$38,000, will come at the expense of funding for school programs which have already been cut to the bone. The union and the district are hoping to drive a wedge between teachers and the community. What small pay increase the contract may contain will be paid for by cutting teachers’ benefits and services for the students.

In fact, the main motive for many teachers striking is

to win better conditions and a better education for their students. Teachers in Scranton, like everywhere else, face large class sizes and next to no time during the school day to prepare. The district wants each teacher to take on an extra class, as well as cover for absent teachers so that the district can fire one-fifth of the teachers and not hire substitutes.

As a teacher in Scranton described it, “The district wants to save money on teachers’ salaries.” This is despite salaries not increasing in the district’s budget over the last decade. Taking into account inflation, this means a real wage cut of nearly 20 percent since 2011. The teacher continued, “Teacher salaries are the only way that the district can imagine saving money. They say they don’t have money, yet they pay their administrators more every year, and they add more administrators every year.”

The teacher further explained that the size and structure of classes already means that teachers can only spend one minute working with each student individually, many of whom are dealing with disabilities and have never been taught English.

This confirms what many are coming to see clearly now: The ruling elite views the public school system as cheap day care for workers’ children. Particularly under conditions of the pandemic, the ruling class has been determined to force children back into understaffed and unsafe classrooms in order to get their parents back to work.

Teachers must reject the claim by the SFT and the school district that there is no money to pay teachers and provide for students. Pennsylvania is home to 17 billionaires with a combined wealth of \$55 billion. This is seven times greater than Pennsylvania’s entire 2021-2022 education budget, and it is 330 times the grossly inadequate 2021-2022 Scranton School District

budget!

There is more than enough money to pay educators a livable wage and restore the libraries, art and music classes and afterschool programs taken from students under a Department of Education “recovery plan.” However, the ruling class will not willingly part with the wealth they have squeezed out of Pennsylvania workers.

Teachers must wage a determined political fight, linking up their struggle with striking Kellogg’s workers in nearby Lancaster, autoworkers at the Macungie Mack plant, and teachers throughout the US and internationally who for two years now have been waging a fight to keep school buildings closed and communities safe as the pandemic continues to rage.

This requires the development of a rank-and-file committee, independent of the American Federation of Teachers and its local affiliate, the SFT.

The AFT in particular has a sordid record of betraying teachers’ struggles for better conditions for themselves and their students. In 2018, the AFT smothered wildcat strikes that erupted in West Virginia after teachers revolted over the continued underfunding of their health care. The AFT did everything in its power to end the strikes before they could link up with rebelling teachers in other parts of the country and the world.

Since the start of the pandemic, the AFT has played a leading role in the Biden administration’s campaign to reopen schools and the economy. Not content with demanding teachers sacrifice their time and well-being to protect capitalist bank accounts, the AFT and its affiliates have been demanding teachers lay down their lives.

Starting with the major school districts of Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Baltimore and Philadelphia, the AFT corralled teachers back into classrooms, with the anticipation that students would soon follow, freeing up their parents to go back to work in unsafe factories amidst a deadly pandemic. This has fueled the recent waves of the pandemic and has tragically resulted in a number of teachers dying.

Throughout the strike in Scranton, the SFT and AFT have kept the strikers isolated and promoted Democratic politicians as the only ally available to teachers. In some cases, they have promoted the same Democrats who are directly responsible for cutting

education budgets and pushing teachers to the brink.

This is because the AFT is intimately tied to the Democratic Party. AFT President Randi Weingarten, whose salary is \$500,000, is a sitting member of the Democratic National Committee and was a contender for Secretary of Education in the Biden administration. The position ultimately went to Miguel Cardona, who had previously been responsible for enforcing budget cuts on educators in Connecticut.

This year alone the AFT has already given over \$3.25 million to various Democratic candidates and groups, according to FEC filings, while not giving teachers any strike pay. In return, the Democratic Party is promoting the unions to clamp down on a wave of working-class struggles. Any appeal to Democratic politicians or their trade unions allies is a dead end.

The Pennsylvania Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee released a statement at the beginning of the strike outlining the path Scranton teachers must take to carry their struggle forward. This perspective has lost none of its relevance as the AFT moves to shut down the strike.

Teachers who want to continue their struggle for decent working conditions should contact the WSWS and join our committee. We will do everything to assist educators in setting up an independent organization and connecting with other rank-and-file workers to broaden their struggle.

For more information about joining this fight, email the Pennsylvania Educators Rank-and-File Committee at [paedrankandfile@gmail.com](mailto:paedrankandfile@gmail.com), text (412) 336-8245 or fill out the form here .



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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