

Evergreen Education Association shuts down teachers' strike and forces sellout agreement in less than 24 hours

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After striking since August 30, roughly two thousand teachers in Vancouver, Washington were forced to vote on a sellout contract on Monday and go back to work the same day. The action came just days after teachers in the nearby Camas School District were rushed into a vote on a separate sellout agreement.

Over the weekend, without warning, the Evergreen Education Association (EEA) announced on its Facebook page that an agreement had been reached on Sunday at 7:00 pm. Teachers were informed that they would have to vote on the tentative agreement at 8 am the following day, without receiving any of the details beforehand.

Not only would the vote take place before teachers could review the contents of the agreement, but Evergreen School District officials called for schools to reopen at 9:45 am the same morning. The combined actions of the union leadership and district officials pushed teachers into a corner, where for many, as intended by the union officials, it seemed there was no option other than to vote “yes.” The contract was approved by 94 percent, according to the EEA.

The teachers were presented with “highlights” of the new contract during the voting process. The full contents of the new contract are not available on the district website and have not been revealed by the news media. The EEA effectively blocked access to the 74-page agreement and held the vote on the new contract as rapidly as possible, while seeking to pit parents and families against the teachers.

These sordid, anti-democratic maneuvers elicited an outpouring of anger from teachers on social media.

One teacher wrote: “I’m sorry but this is some shady

mess right here. We haven’t even SEEN the TA yet and now we’re committed to be back at work tomorrow?” He went on to say it “feels like a pressure campaign,” adding, “If we vote yes, it’s still a mess and there’s no turnaround time between the meeting and school start times, and if we vote no all the community support we’ve had gets upended because the district can then easily blame teachers for any further delay.”

Another teacher wondered: “Is it possible they might do a bait n switch? Guilt teachers into going back to work bc [because] the kids are already at school?”

The sellout of the Evergreen teachers by the EEA bureaucracy took place only four days after Camas School District teachers were sold out by the Camas Education Association. The CEA announced that a tentative agreement had been reached late last Wednesday night and forced teachers to vote on the new contract the next day at 3:30 pm.

The unanticipated announcements of tentative agreements, followed by a rapid voting process and return to school, can only mean that the teachers of both districts were offered sellout agreements. The most publicized aspect of the negotiations had been increases in teacher pay.

The EEA highlighted cost-of-living increases of 6.6 percent in the first year and 5.8 percent in the second year. In the third year there will be an increase between 4.65 percent and a maximum of 5.05 percent.

Camas teachers will receive a similar 6.6 percent increase for 2023-24 and a 5.8 percent cost-of-living increase for the next year. However, these cost-of-living increases amount to a pay cut when compared to real inflation rates.

Between April 2021 and April 2023, the cost of basic commodities such as food, gas and utilities went up by 20 percent. The cost of all items on the consumer price index has gone up by 13 percent over the past two years. The new contracts ensure that Evergreen and Camas teachers will face a further decline in real wages.

The cost-of-living pay increase was not the only aspect of the contract that was totally inadequate. The CEA committed Camas teachers to a “lowering” of middle school and high school classroom sizes to a huge 29 and 30, respectively. In an earlier period, such abysmal student to teacher ratios were the rare exception. So far, no details about class size reductions in the EEA agreement have been released to the public, but one can expect only minimal changes.

Evergreen teachers are also upset about the lack of additional support for special education programs, which are consistently understaffed and underfunded. According to *The Columbian*, “The district has apparently agreed to hire up to 10 certificated special education support teachers this school year and up to 12 in the second and third years of the contract. K-8 teachers have also received additional time built into their schedules to collaborate with special education teachers on necessary support for students not yet meeting learning goals.”

The union previously stated that there existed more than 125 vacant positions for paraprofessionals, or classified support staff. The contract commits the district to nothing regarding filling these positions.

Seattle teachers went through a parallel experience last year. Seattle Education Association (SEA) officials shut down the teachers’ week-long strike on September 14 and corralled teachers back into their classrooms days before they were able to vote on the contract. A vote to “suspend” the strike was forced on Seattle teachers, despite the teachers themselves having no say in the decision to hold the vote. SEA leaders even admitted that the tentative agreement had not been finalized, and only revealed the full TA three days after the strike had been shut down by the union.

The anti-democratic maneuvers carried out by the official leadership of the Evergreen and Camas teachers unions reflect the growing collaboration between the unions and the capitalist state apparatus in suppressing

the opposition of rank-and-file workers. Teachers in Washington are part of a growing movement of workers across the US and internationally in opposition to declining wages, hazardous working conditions and increasing exploitation.

In order to defend their wages and interests, Camas and Evergreen teachers must work to create independent organizations that operate outside the control of the trade union apparatus. These organizations of rank-and-file teachers will be run democratically by the teachers themselves. Through these organizations, teachers will be able to reach out to other sections of workers and coordinate their strikes with Seattle dock workers, warehouse workers, transportation workers and others.



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