

National Education Association union announces deal to end strike by staffers

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After locking out its employees for over six weeks, the National Education Association (NEA) bureaucracy has reached a deal with the 300 employees of the National Education Association Staff Organization (NEASO).

The details of the new tentative agreement (TA) have yet to be disclosed and will only go into effect once it is ratified by both sides. The two organizations ended the strike before the opening of the Democratic National Convention, in order to prevent the dispute from impacting the union's electioneering efforts for Democrats and Kamala Harris.

"A contract could help [the] NEA get back to election-related activities," stated University of Nevada Associate Professor on Education Policy Bradley Marianno in a comment cited by *Edweek*. "It's going to help Kamala Harris that she is soon able to better interface with the NEA again, without crossing picket lines," he said.

According to the publication, "teachers' unions historically have proven critical for Democratic funding and turnout," with both the NEA and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) having "increased political contributions in the past 20 years and have proven to be one of the most consistently blue labor groups, with 94 percent of their contributions going to Democrats."

The NEA's actions demonstrate the national trade union apparatus functions as a strikebreaking institution in support of the two-party capitalist system. It is organically hostile to any movement of the working class. That it treats its own functionaries—the average NEASO member is a lower-level trade union official—with such ruthlessness only hints at the ferocity with which it deals with its members.

From 2012 to 2021, NEASO employees had their pay

frozen and make around \$124,000 a year, while the union's top brass bring in upwards of \$300,000 to \$600,000. Both parties, however, make far more than the teachers who pay their salaries. Average teacher pay, according to the NEA, is \$45,000 a year.

The strike began on July 7, as 300 NEASO members walked out midway through the NEA's Representative Assembly convention in Philadelphia. It started over a dispute in pay, working from home, hiring outside contractors without employee advice and the NEA's retaliation against its workforce.

The NEA sabotaged its own convention, where many local delegates had submitted motions for new policies, including in some cases opposing the Israeli government's genocide in Gaza and withholding support for the Biden campaign unless it responded to a ceasefire demand, rather than cave in to the staffers' basic demands. President Biden was scheduled to speak at the NEA convention but backed out so as not to create the negative optics of crossing a picket line.

To break the strike, the NEA leadership rummaged through the playbook of corporations for tactics. The NEA employees took to social media detailing the union's strong arming tactics, saying NEA bureaucrats canceled employees' hotel rooms and flights, forcing them to foot the bill. It also suspended their pay.

Families had been stranded in Philadelphia and workers' phones and computers had been cut off, despite the fact that some are traveling across the United States and internationally. The NEA even called the cops on protesters outside its headquarters in Washington D.C.

Kim Anderson, the executive director of the NEA, called the NEASO strike illegal, the lockout "defensive" and threatened to terminate employees' healthcare:

“All pay and benefits associated with employment with NEA cease with this protective lockout. Bargaining-unit employees will receive notices related to COBRA and any other benefit information. Your NEA Medical, Dental, and Healthcare FSA coverage under the Plan will end on July 31, 2024.”

The NEA, the largest teachers union in the United States, will now attempt to marshal its hundreds of thousands of working class members to “get out the vote” for a capitalist political party which has, together with Republicans, been the spearhead and organizer of the destruction of public education in the United States.

In fact, Biden, Harris and the NEA itself fully endorse attacks on teachers and support scab labor in general. In regards to educators, Biden has overseen a nearly \$500 million cut in education spending in his most recent budget for the 2024-2025 fiscal year. Experts expect this shrinking of the budget to lead to the axing of nearly 384,000 education jobs. In addition to this, Biden ended the federal pandemic funding doled out to local governments for COVID-19, leading to a further shrinkage of resources.

Biden illegalized a threatened strike of 120,000 railroad workers in late 2022 after its members voted to strike against the exploitation and abuse they faced. His administration has regularly intervened in various contract negotiations in order to force workers to accept substandard contracts or to force them to remain at work (even to endure speedups and other intolerable conditions) after contracts have expired.

During the strike, the NEASO leaders sought to work out a deal as quickly as possible with their peers at the NEA to avoid the negative impact on the Democratic Party machine.

The main fear of both organizations is a movement of rank-and-file teachers in opposition to the NEA and the Democratic Party.

With its attempt to break the strike, the NEA bureaucracy revealed itself as no different than school administrations and management in any district across the country. This is a warning to educators who are determined to fight for their own demands and defend their students in order to reverse the abysmal state of public education.

Only through a rebellion by rank-and-file teachers in opposition to the trade union bureaucracy and the Democratic and Republican parties will it be possible

to create an organized movement to fight for the defense of public education.



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