

# What happens if we reject this contract?

by Peter Lamphere, member of the UFT Negotiating Committee

One of the key questions facing rank and file UFT members at this moment is what happens if we decide to reject the contract proposal from Mayor de Blasio and our leadership. Few educators are jumping up and down happy about the contract, and many are downright upset, but everyone wants to know – What happens if we vote this down? **Is it possible to get something better? What about the leadership’s argument that we would have to “go to the back of the line” and wait for all 150 other city unions to settle?**



First off, the money is clearly there for something better.

Economist James Parrot of the Fiscal Policy institute recently told our union in a briefing that “the city’s tax revenues have been growing by 5 percent a year, adding \$2.5 billion to its available funds” according to the Chief-Leader Newspaper. The question is whether the political will is there to spend this money on working people or not. Remember, this is not about just our union – its about the pattern that will be set for cafeteria staff, custodians, nurses, and every other person who works for the city.

Secondly, we have to remember that this contract is seen now as a key political achievement of the de Blasio administration and the Mulgrew/Unity caucus leadership of the UFT. For it to be defeated in a ratification vote would put the mayor’s political project on more precarious footing and he would have to come up with something better, that could pass, immediately. **There is no reason that any other city union (or its rank-and-file) would accept a deal that we, one of the largest, had rejected.** The most politically expeditious course for the city would be to come back to the UFT quickly with a better deal.

MORE has put out some strong ideas of what could be better in the Contract that NYC Educators Deserve. Many of the gains that we could win don’t cost the city a dime – scrapping the evaluation system, or at least replacing its testing component with a portfolio option – would be easy. Getting rid of the merit pay “Master Teachers” might make the NY Post unhappy, but it would make for a stronger union. The same goes for equal work protections for our ATR brothers and sisters.

Thirdly, it is important to remember the lessons of history. In 1995, the membership rejected a similar contract from Mayor Guiliani that also had two zeroes (this contract has no raise for 2009 or 2012), and the Mayor had to come back with a deal that was at least slightly more acceptable. See Kit Wainer’s description of this important episode at MORE’s website, [morecaucusnyc.org](http://morecaucusnyc.org).

Lastly, it is extremely unlikely that a renegotiated deal could get worse. They need this to pass, and so would have to do or offer something to improve the deal – we have very little to lose by voting no.

Voting no is a great start, but Its important that UFT members who are disappointed or angry about the contract don’t just vote no. We need to be having conversations and distributing Vote No materials to as many of the 1700 schools in the system as possible.



Next, we need to knit together those who have been activated by the fight against contract into an organization of on-the-ground educators. Only with such an network can we shift the direction of this union to become one that fights for our members and the communities we serve.

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