

One thousand teachers to be fired in Chicago

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This week, 1,000 pink slips are being sent out to Chicago Public Schools (CPS) teachers. In addition, 150 educational support staff members who provide extracurricular help in mathematics and reading are also to lose their jobs.

Teachers who are fired as part of budget cuts are not eligible for their pensions, and are only eligible for day-to-day work as substitute teachers. Since 2009, around 4,000 teachers have been laid off as part of school closures, consolidations and budget cuts.

Chicago's new Democratic mayor, Rahm Emanuel—Obama's former chief of staff—recently announced a \$75 million budget cut for CPS. The cuts are expected to result in increased class sizes, poorer transportation services for students, and the lack of janitors to clean classrooms.

Earlier this month, the Chicago Public Schools board rescinded a scheduled salary increase for teachers. Board members appointed by Emanuel include billionaire heiress Penny Pritzker and other corporate figures. The cutback was publicly attributed to budget concerns, which apparently do not affect the salaries of CPS executives.

In fact, the newly appointed CPS executives were given record salary increases, drawing up to 30 percent above the salaries of their predecessors. Emanuel's appointee to head CPS, Jean-Claude Brizard, signed a contract to draw a \$250,000 salary this year, with a 15 percent incentive. CEO Brizard's remarkably high compensation package was the subject of national attention, even for cash-driven "educational entrepreneurs" in other cities such as New York.

Heather, a young elementary school teacher, spoke

about the policy of regularly firing thousands of teachers and re-hiring some at lower professional grades and pay scales. She said the policy was aimed at demoralizing the workforce and boosting the rate of attrition by forcing resignations and early retirements.

She told the WSW, "A lot of principals put pressure on the teachers to do the impossible. They get these young teachers in to work their butts off and then make them feel like it's all their fault and then fire them and bring in a whole new crop. They're all 25, 26 or under. You get a class where the students have learning disabilities or have lived somewhere else where they missed years of school. How, in a class of 33 students can you get these students up to par?"

School principals, the middle management, are charged with carrying out the hiring and firing of teachers and staff at the schools they oversee. Complaints about using firing to settle personal scores, and rid the school of "troublesome" and better-paid teachers, and nepotism in hiring are constant.

This policy has been accelerated since 2009, without any opposition from the Chicago Teachers Union. Last year, after two months of firings and 3,000 teachers left without jobs, the CTU file a lawsuit against the firing of 750 higher-seniority teachers, while accepting without question the firing of the remaining educators. A court ruling against the firings has been challenged and no resolution has been reached. The teachers have not been reinstated.

Earlier this year, the CTU and other teachers unions in Illinois backed a reactionary school "reform" bill sponsored by the Democratic-controlled state legislature and billionaire foundations spearheading anti-teacher measures around the country. Senate Bill 7

expands the use of standardized tests to fire teachers without regard to seniority or tenure and gives school districts the power to add extra hours to the school day and weeks to the school year without compensation. In addition it all but prohibits Chicago's 30,000 teachers from striking.

The support for the bill was a further exposure of the CTU and the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE), a faction, which includes members of the International Socialist Organization and other pseudo-left organizations tied to the Democratic Party. (See: "The ISO and the betrayal of the Chicago teachers").

The passage of the bill—hailed by Obama's education secretary Arne Duncan as a model of labor-management cooperation for school "reform" across the country—has paved the way for Emanuel to escalate the attack on teachers and the drive to privatize the public schools.

In spite of her relatively short time at CPS, Heather has been fired three times already and sought other positions. At one point, she was hired to teach a class that, in the first three months, had had six different teachers.

Noting how this affects the students, she said, "The young kids think 'she didn't care about us. We were bad so she left' and the older kids think they can do whatever they want because nobody cares. They can be rough because none of the adults know their names. The kids need adults who are there every year to see them progress, to know them and their names and their family and to keep them out of trouble."

Remarking on the future, she said, "It's a crisis. Every week I see a headline saying something bad about teachers. Every time something is poorly run, they blame the little people, it's just really demoralizing."

Heather said if she cannot continue to work in CPS, she will move and teach in suburban schools, "I just love teaching, the kids keep me here. I can't afford to teach at a charter or Catholic school."

She was fired last year after working at one school for

three years, in spite of her class's improving test scores, the supposed new criterion for educational "success." She said the CTU did nothing to protect her job or find another. Her experience with the union is limited to receiving phone calls at home in the evening with messages to vote for this or that Democratic politician.

The complicity of the CTU with the Democratic Party and school officials has left teachers without any means to defend themselves against arbitrary firing and discipline. "Teachers are afraid to speak up. I know a teacher that spoke up at a school board meeting and got fired and blacklisted. Four years later she still can't find a job and she is suing the [school] principal. They go after any teacher that speaks out publicly or even at the board meetings."

When asked where she thinks education is headed, she said, "Towards privatization. The new mayor is not a fan of public school systems. He wants to bring in teachers from Teach for America to replace the teachers, then fire them after two to three years and bring in a whole new crop." She noted here that a teacher cannot even become proficient until after five years of teaching experience.

This week, Mayor Emanuel announced the expansion of the Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL) into 14 schools over the next two years. AUSL manages the "turnarounds" of schools, which begins with the firing all teachers and staff, and re-staffs the schools with AUSL trainees.

AUSL was founded in 2001 by venture capitalist Martin Koldyke and draws most of its funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the US Department of Education, and the New Schools Venture Fund, which backs entrepreneurs seeking to cash in from the \$600 billion "education market."



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