

Chicago teachers: Reject the contract betrayal! Broaden the fight to defend jobs and public schools!

Statement by Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Jerry White

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The following statement is being distributed at a rally Saturday of Chicago teachers called by the Chicago Teachers Union. The PDF version is available [here](#).

At today's rally, teachers will be bombarded with empty phrases about a "victory" in their strike. Officials from the American Federation of Teachers, the Chicago Teachers Union and other unions, along with Democratic politicians such as Jesse Jackson, will tell the teachers that they have beaten back the attack on public education and won "respect" from Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the powers-that-be.

The truth is that the CTU and the AFT are preparing a betrayal of the strike and the imposition of a sellout contract that will have devastating consequences for teachers and the future of public education in Chicago and across the country.

Statements from CTU officials and media reports make clear that the deal being worked out accepts the major demands of Emanuel and the Chicago Public Schools authorities. It will reportedly allow school officials to fire non-tenured teachers immediately and dismiss tenured teachers after a year. The weight of standardized test scores in teacher evaluations will increase to 35 percent, with a committee of CPS and CTU officials deciding whether to raise this to 40 percent in four years.

The CTU has accepted the mayor's plan to shut down more than one hundred schools and sharply increase the number of charter schools. The main concern of the CTU leadership is that school closings and privatizations be carried out with the collaboration of the union and not unilaterally by CPS.

As the presidential candidate of the Socialist Equality Party, I urge teachers to reject this sellout. The teachers have

remained solid since the strike began and won powerful support from parents, students and workers throughout the city and across the country. Now is the time to broaden the struggle and stand fast against the phony "reform" agenda of Emanuel, Education Secretary Arne Duncan, Obama, and the entire political establishment.

The assault on teachers and public education can be defeated only on the basis of a recognition that the struggle against it is a political struggle against both parties of big business and the financial-corporate elite whose interests they serve. This elite includes the speculators and parasites looking to cash in on the carve-up of public education and proliferation of privately run schools.

I urge teachers to broaden their strike and fight to mobilize all school workers, public employees, auto workers, young people and unemployed workers behind them and in opposition to the united front of Democrats and Republicans, the media and big business. The union leadership has no intention of waging such a fight. Teachers should organize rank-and-file committees to take control of the conduct of the struggle and oversee the contract negotiations.

From the beginning, the political and media establishment has seen the strike as a challenge to the Obama administration's reactionary school "reform" agenda of merit pay, "accountability" schemes that scapegoat teachers for poverty and under-funded schools, and a vast expansion of charter schools.

"How dare the teachers strike!" screamed the editorial pages of "liberal" as well as conservative newspapers, as though the teachers were serfs revolting against their lords. The mutual mudslinging in the election campaign was put aside and the Democrats and Republicans closed ranks, with Republican vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan declaring

his support for Emanuel and insisting that “education reform is a bipartisan issue.”

New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof wrote contemptuously that “some Chicago teachers seem to think that they shouldn’t be held accountable until poverty is solved.” This in a country where bankers, corporate CEOs and politicians lie, cheat, steal and commit massive crimes and are never held accountable!

The Obama administration’s pose of “neutrality” in the Chicago strike is a fraud. Emanuel was Obama’s White House chief of staff and recently resigned his post as co-chair of Obama’s reelection campaign to head up the Obama super PAC and raise \$150 million from millionaire and billionaire donors. Obama chose Arne Duncan as his education secretary to oversee nationally the assault on public education Duncan carried out in Chicago.

Public school systems nationwide, starved of funding as a result of the economic crisis, have eliminated more than 300,000 teaching positions since 2008. Obama has responded by tying meager federal Race to the Top funds to the elimination of restraints on charter schools and the implementation of test-based evaluation systems.

Every teacher knows what is necessary to improve educational results. Students have to have enough to eat and decent living conditions. Teachers must have adequate resources, reduced class sizes, and up-to-date textbooks and supplies in order to provide a safe and productive learning environment.

Instead the opposite is happening and public education is systematically being gutted. This attack on public education is one of the most telling signs of the failure of the existing social system—capitalism. A system that cannot educate its youth and provide them with decent employment and a secure future deserves to perish.

In the US and around the world, unemployment, poverty and hunger are growing. Rather than carrying out genuine reform policies to alleviate social suffering, governments in every country are using the crisis to impose austerity and destroy the social gains won by the working class over more than a century of struggle. The assault on teachers and public education is part of a social counterrevolution.

The American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association are supporting Obama’s reelection even as he spearheads the assault on public education and the jobs and living standards of teachers.

In 2010, Chicago teachers voted out the old CTU leadership and elected the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE), which includes supporters of the International Socialist Organization such as CTU Vice President Jesse Sharkey. While posturing as “left,” CORE has accepted the firing of hundreds of teachers, the closing

of schools and the extension of the school day. Last year, Lewis and Sharkey collaborated with Democratic state legislators in the passage of the anti-teacher SB 7 bill.

Just like their predecessors, CORE is tied to the Democratic Party and accepts the lie that there is no money to improve public education.

As the presidential candidate of the Socialist Equality Party I reject this. The issue is not a lack of resources, but the monopolization of society’s wealth by the super-rich and the exclusion of working people from any decision-making over how the wealth that workers create is allocated. The Bush and Obama administrations found trillions to bail out the Wall Street speculators. Trillions more have been squandered on criminal wars to control the oil wealth in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Decent public schools are today incompatible with the continued existence of a system in which social needs are subordinated to private profit and the enrichment of a narrow elite. Basic democratic and social rights in general cannot survive in a society riven by social inequality.

That is why the fight of teachers, parents and students to defend public education is a struggle against the entire economic and political order. A vast redistribution of wealth is required so that hundreds of billions of dollars can be poured into the public schools to hire teachers and provide the necessary resources to raise the intellectual and cultural level of society as a whole.

To fund such an effort, the Socialist Equality Party calls for sharply increasing taxes on the wealthy and nationalizing the major corporations and banks under the democratic control of the working class.

To achieve this, workers must break with the Democratic and Republican parties and build a mass political movement whose aim is the socialist transformation of society, the only means to guarantee genuine equality and democracy.



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