

Under threat of injunction, Chicago teacher delegates to vote on strike

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18 September 2012

The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) House of Delegates is set to vote this afternoon on continuing or ending the strike by 26,000 teachers, with city officials holding out the threat of a court injunction.

On Monday, Mayor Rahm Emanuel sought a court order declaring the strike illegal. Judge Peter Flynn delayed a hearing on the request until Wednesday, pending a decision by the 800 delegates, themselves teachers representing the various schools and workplaces in the district.

On Sunday, the delegates met and decided not to end the strike after having just received details of a contract reached between the CTU and Chicago Public Schools (CPS). The agreement accepts all of the major demands of CPS and Mayor Emanuel, including the expansion of test-based evaluations, the gutting of job security, the wholesale closure of public schools and a proliferation of charter schools (see, “This deal is not what the strike was about!”).

The delegates’ decision was a clear setback for the union leadership, which wanted a quick end to the strike, the first teachers’ walkout in Chicago in 25 years. On Friday, CTU president Karen Lewis had said she was “very comfortable” with the deal and hoped the teachers would be back at work on Monday.

Thus far, the political establishment in Chicago has relied on the CTU leadership to push through the deal, which is seen as a critical component of the nationwide attack on teachers and public education. Emanuel has the backing of the Obama administration as well as the Republican Party, which are both committed to

privatizing education through the victimization of teachers and the promotion of charter schools.

Having encountered a hurdle in this effort—the teachers’ refusal to end the strike on the basis of an agreement they had not even read—the Emanuel administration has turned to the threat of repression.

The city’s court filing asserts that the strike is illegal on the grounds that it was called over non-economic issues and that it constitutes a “clear and present danger to public health and safety.” The strike, the city’s motion claims, “prohibits students from receiving critical educational and social services” including meals and a “safe environment during school hours.”

This attempt to blackguard teachers for harming children comes from an administration that is acting on behalf of the corporate and financial elite, including those seeking to profit from the charter school business, at the cost of decent education for working class youth. The teachers are the ones who are fighting to reverse the deterioration of the schools and address the conditions of poverty and unemployment that make quality education impossible.

The fury of Chicago’s establishment over Sunday’s vote was expressed in an editorial Monday morning in the *Chicago Tribune*. The editors complained that Lewis “couldn’t sell the deal to her own House of Delegates” and demanded that CPS make clear there was no better deal in the offing. The budget situation of CPS, the *Tribune* wrote, meant that more school closings and deeper attacks on teachers’ benefits, including pensions, were in store.

Both Emanuel and the CTU hope that the threat of an injunction will intimidate teachers into ending the strike at today's meeting. The entire political establishment, including the trade union leadership, is worried about the potentially explosive implications of an attempt to enforce an injunction with arrests and fines. They are well aware of the widespread popular support for the teachers.

The CTU has no intention of fighting for a better contract. Lewis insisted repeatedly on Sunday that "this is the deal we got." She and CTU vice president Jesse Sharkey have accepted the entire reactionary framework of so-called school "reform" and the claim that "there is no money" to improve the public schools.

At a press conference after Sunday's delegates' meeting, Lewis said, "We all know that the board doesn't have a lot of money standing around to do what would make us all happy."

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to several teachers Monday morning on the picket line at Amundsen High School on the city's far north side. They said they were fighting against the entire "reform" agenda that was being used to destroy public education across the US.

"They don't understand that these are human beings, not widgets coming out of a factory," said Jim. "If a child does not have a place to live, enough food and a safe life, well, they aren't going to do their homework."

"We've been vilified for the results of a terrible learning environment. It's inhumane. Even the Cook County prison system has rules saying the temperature in the jails can't go above 82 degrees. We ask the same for our kindergartners, who don't have air conditioning, and they tell us to get bent. We can't get what the students need. The banks get bailed out and the teachers get pushed out."

Another striker with 20 years in the Chicago public school system said, "They told us to accept a lousy contract that takes away any job stability for teachers. The CTU is going along with the politics, but the teachers are saying enough is enough."

"Under this contract, if you don't improve student test scores in two years you're gone. We know they want to close more than 100 schools. This is a fight to defend public education. They want to privatize the schools."

"At the beginning of the strike I wanted to make a sign appealing to the Democrats to help us. But Emanuel has proved this is not just an issue with the Republicans. The Democrats are doing the same thing. They say we don't deserve a raise and passed a bill saying you needed 75 percent to approve a strike. The next bill will say teachers can't strike."

"Over the two decades I've worked in CPS, everything has deteriorated. Teachers have been less empowered in the classrooms. It's like all we're doing is training our students to go to prison. They have to go through metal detectors to get to class. There is a chemistry lab so crowded, with 35 students, that they are sitting in the aisles."

"And Emanuel says that it's the teachers who are endangering the students. There are too many kids packed into classes where the temperature is over 90 degrees. There are not enough social workers and nurses—now that is endangering the children."



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