

This deal is not what the strike was about!

Socialist Equality Party
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The following statement was distributed by supporters of the Socialist Equality Party to Chicago teachers attending a meeting of about 800 delegates called Sunday to decide whether to end their strike. The delegates voted not to return to work. (See “Chicago teachers vote to continue strike”.)

Delegates are arriving today to make a fateful decision on whether or not to end the strike of Chicago teachers. There should be no mistaking the significance of today’s vote. An end to the strike now will mean a defeat for the teachers and a major setback for the fight to defend public education nationwide.

The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) will present as a significant “victory” a contract in which major concessions to the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) authorities have been sugar-coated with a few sweeteners to sell the agreement to the teachers. CTU president Karen Lewis refused to release any information, even to delegates, over the past three days—despite assurances that a “framework” on all major issues had been reached. This was done to allow the CTU sufficient time to package the sellout, and the membership insufficient time to consider it.

The CTU leadership has released vague “highlights” of the contract, which represent the union’s efforts to present the deal in the best light possible. The real language in the contract is undoubtedly worse, but even the highlights make clear that it gives Rahm Emanuel everything he was looking for.

The most important provisions of the contract, according to the information so far available, are:

1) Expansion of test-based evaluation systems used to victimize teachers and blame them for the crisis of public education. The union highlights indicate that 30 percent of evaluations, and perhaps more in future years, will be based on “student growth” (testing). Tenured teachers will have only one year before they

can be fired on the basis of these evaluations, while non-tenured teachers will be subject to immediate dismissal.

2) Capitulation to the Emanuel administration on teacher recall. Principals will have the decisive say in hiring teachers. There are provisions to give laid-off teachers preference in rehiring only at schools that take in students from schools that are shut down.

3) No restrictions on the shutdown of public schools, the mass firing of teachers, and the opening up of charter schools. The Emanuel administration has plans to close up to 120 schools over the next five years—one fifth of the entire Chicago Public Schools system—and open up 60 new charters run by for-profit companies.

4) No provisions to address chronic understaffing and deteriorating conditions in the public schools. According to the union, the CPS is committing to hire some nurses, social workers and counselors “if it gets new revenue.”

5) A wage increase of two to three percent a year over three years, barely keeping up with inflation. Any increase in wages to teachers will be more than balanced by layoffs and school closings, and the extension of the day and year without compensation.

In attempting to sell the contract, the CTU is employing truly Orwellian language. “Job security” refers not to guarantees against mass layoffs, but to a provision that one-half of CPS hires be laid-off members. Yet CPS is not planning on hiring teachers, it is planning on firing them. To call this “job security” speaks volumes about the cynicism of the whole thing. And the expansion of testing is placed under the headline of “fairer evaluation procedures”!

The CTU is trying to quickly put an end to the strike on the basis of these provisions, without allowing any serious discussion and review of the contract even among delegates, let alone among the teachers as a whole. They worry that the more the contract is discussed and reviewed, the more opposition there will

be.

Even before the contract details, the character of the agreement was clear. This is because it is not possible for teachers to defeat the forces that they are up against in the way that the struggle has been conducted by the CTU.

Emanuel is not acting alone. He has the backing of the entire political establishment, in Chicago and throughout the country. The mayor, the former chief of staff of President Obama and the top fundraiser for Obama's super-PAC, is carrying out in Chicago what the Obama administration is pursuing nationally.

Immediately after the strike was launched, the political and media mouthpieces of the corporate establishment lined up against the teachers. Republican vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan declared his support for Emanuel, saying that education "reform" is a "bipartisan issue." The politicians who speak on behalf of the corporate elite see Chicago as a test case for a nationwide policy of tearing down public schools, victimizing teachers, and opening up education to the unrestrained profit-making of big business.

There is no way that issues of such magnitude can be settled on the basis of a one-week strike.

Yesterday, the CTU organized a rally in which it assembled teachers to hear empty declarations of support from trade union officials and Democratic Party politicians. Despite already having a "framework" for a contract, nothing was said to teachers about what the CTU had agreed to. Demagogic denunciations of testing and charter schools were propounded from the podium even as the union prepared to push through an agreement, 24 hours later, that accepted these very measures.

Amidst the speeches, one word was never uttered—"Obama." This was no accident. The CTU is desperate to obscure the fact that in their struggle to defend their livelihoods and public education as a whole, teachers are in conflict with the Democratic Party, which no less than the Republicans is committed to an agenda deeply hostile to the working class.

For a week, the CTU has wasted time attempting to reach an agreement with the Emanuel administration. It has come back with all that can be expected from such a strategy. In doing so, the leadership has exposed the bankruptcy of its entire perspective.

Teachers, a return to work on this basis is an abject

defeat. A new type of struggle is required!

The strike must go forward, but it cannot continue in the same way. The conduct of the strike and negotiations must be taken out of the hands of the CTU through the formation of rank-and-file committees.

The continuation of the strike will be met with a torrent of denunciations of teachers and threats of legal action. In response, an appeal must be made to workers throughout Chicago and nationally for joint action to defend the teachers, public education and all the rights of the working class. There is mass support for the struggle of teachers, and it is only through actively mobilizing this support that the corporate and financial elite can be defeated.

It is to the social strength of the working class as a whole that teachers must turn, not to Democratic Party politicians, the AFT and other union officials, who are nothing but false friends. This struggle must not be subordinated to a political alliance with the Democratic Party and capitalist profit system it defends.

Victory to the teachers! No to privatization and school closures! Public education is a social right!



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