Concessions imposed on Chicago-area teachers

Shane Feratu, James Brewer
14 November 2012

Despite a determination to fight, teachers in Chicago-area suburban schools are having concessions contracts imposed attacking wages, benefits and working conditions. The betrayal of the 10-day strike by 26,000 Chicago teachers is being used as a precedent by both school districts and teachers' unions to implement cuts.

Similar tactics are being used by both local school boards and teachers' unions to diffuse the determination of teachers to fight the erosion of wages, benefits and working conditions.

***

In the Geneva School District 304, after a Monday strike deadline called by the Geneva Education Association (GEA), a deal was announced by the board of education, yet no details were made public until a ratification vote on Wednesday, should it be approved.

The union filed an intent to strike October 26 and teachers were threatening to strike as early as November 9, if the GEA and board were not able to find a compromise for a new contract. They have been in negotiations since August this year. The deadline was pushed back to Monday to use the weekend for negotiations.

The union agreed not to call for a strike until the very last hour. Negotiations wrapped up at 12:30 a.m. Monday morning with a tentative contract, effectively canceling the strike.

The main negotiation points for Geneva teachers are pay increases and retirement benefits. Pay increases in District 304 are based on different steps and lanes which have requirements for teachers to complete before they are allowed to obtain that salary increase. Steps represent one year of employment with the school district., which historically has been a 2.65 percent increase. Lanes represent the varying salary increases based on the amount of graduate education a teacher has completed.

The last published offer by the unions, on October 29, was a pay freeze for the first year except for those teachers that qualify for a lane movement. For the two years after, the union is asking for a raise of salary by 13.25 percent and a raise of base pay for new teachers by $407. Teachers that qualify for lane movement should be allowed to do so without restriction

***

On Tuesday, October 2, after negotiations fell through in Evergreen Park District 124 over retirement benefits, wage increases and health care, teachers walked out for the first time in the history of the district. After two weeks on strike, the teachers union agreed to send teachers back to school after ratifying the contract.

Teachers had been without a contract since June 30, and the negotiations with the union had been in progress since April. The school board boasted $16.2 million in savings, which they said were for remodeling, repairs and future pension funds. After the two week strike, the union and the board came up with a verbal tentative agreement on a contract.

Both the school board and union officials agreed not to release any details of the contract until teachers voted on it, yet school resumed on Monday, October 15, the same day teachers were scheduled to vote on the agreement.

During the last contract negotiations teachers asked for a 9.6 percent raise over three years, while the school board was only willing to concede to 5.5 percent over the same time period. The school board is also asking teachers to pay more for their health insurance, and wants to implement a test-based evaluation system, which would tie a 1 percent "bonus" to the result.

The union had already agreed on cutbacks in retirement benefits, adding up to $180,000 in savings annually for the school board. They also asked for reform in the "just-cause discipline" policy, allowing teachers to dispute disciplinary actions brought against them, and for an increase in compensation for aides that work with

© World Socialist Web Site

disabled children.

On the third day of the strike, Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers, called for compromise at a rally of the 205 teachers, organized by the Evergreen Park Federation of Teachers (EPFT) Council of Local 943.

"There is no reason this board, like Chicago and others in the area, cannot reach a compromise that will benefit kids and professionals in Evergreen Park schools," stated the AFT president. "When we stand united for a better future for kids, ourselves and our communities, we prevail."

***

In the North Shore School District 112, over 400 teachers fought for a new contract, going on Strike on October 16. One day later, a tentative agreement ended the strike, forged after both sides stated that they were "far apart" in the negotiations.

Once again both sides agreed to not talk about or publish the tentative agreement until the union membership voted to ratify it, to make sure they have the teachers completely under their control. However, from reports it is known that the board was trying to make teachers accept a two year pay-freeze.

The board also want to decrease the compensation for teachers who have done graduate level work or have additional training. To do this, changes have to be made to the requirements for pay increases for each pay raise level, making it harder for teachers to gain the promised compensation. The union had already agreed to decrease retirement benefits.

***

Crystal Lake union, based in the Prairie Grove School District 46, has been in negotiations with the school board for 22 months when it called for a strike on October 12. Major hurdles were wages and benefits.

After only eight hours, the union agreed to a tentative four-year contract and canceled the strike. Teachers were shown the tentative agreement the next day and ratified it the following day after that. However the school board still needs to approve the contract at their meeting in November.

A final offer made by the board in May, states clearly at the end of the wage summary that "This salary proposal is fair given that other neighboring districts have frozen or cut salaries in recent contract."

***

In Carpentersville District 300, teachers have authorized a strike by 97 percent, after having been in contract negotiations since last November. The union and board came to an impasse on November 5, meaning that the union will not budge on its last proposal. This starts a 28-day countdown to a possible strike.

Teachers are demanding higher wages and safe and better learning and working conditions for themselves and their students, including smaller class sizes and a stop to "bullying and intimidation" tactics being used by administrators to have teachers volunteer additional time after school.

The contract negotiated by their union, Local Education Association of District 300 (LEAD 300), last year, made concessions on pay and benefits and now they are trying to make up for it by returning the pay back to the same level of other area schools. According to Michael Williamson, the union's public relations chair, District 300 is second-to-last in teachers pay out of twenty-six schools. West Aurora places in the last spot.

***

In the September-October strike, The Chicago Teachers Union gave in to all of the concessions demanded by Rahm Emanuel and the Chicago school board, boasting about it as an "austerity contract" with "historic gains." The teachers were forced to accept an expansion of test-based evaluations; principals will be given the power to fire and hire teachers at their discretion; there is no protection for teacher pensions, no job security and regressive changes in health care benefits among other concessions.

Just as in the Chicago strike, the suburban school boards have relied on the unions, who are trying to follow the same agenda, such as making the teachers vote without seeing the details of the contract, to shut down the struggles of teachers against concessions.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site