

Mobilize the working class to defend public education

Vote “no” on the CPS-CTU concessions contract!

The Socialist Equality Party
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) calls on teachers to reject the contract backed by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and the administration of Mayor Rahm Emanuel. The agreement, fraudulently presented as a “fair deal” by both Emanuel and the CTU, is a further major attack on teachers and public education.

Rejection of the contract must become the starting point for a campaign to broaden and deepen the struggle of teachers against benefit cuts, layoffs and school closures by mobilizing students, parents and other sections of workers, both public-sector and private-sector.

Details of the tentative agreement, which has not even been finalized, make clear that, if anything, it is worse than the one rejected by the CTU House of Delegates in February after details were leaked online, provoking outrage among teachers. The major provisions include:

* Eliminating the pension “pick up” for new teachers, requiring them to pay 9.4 percent of their salaries into their pensions, compared with 2 percent for current teachers. To sell this attack on retirement benefits, the CTU is touting a salary increase for new teachers that will not even cover the full cost. This provision creates a two-tier system of benefits, which will be used by CPS to pit teachers against each other and push older teachers to retire early.

* Teachers will have their pay frozen for the first two years of the contract, followed by a combined 4.5 percent pay raise in the second two years--far less than the rate of inflation. This is coupled with the requirement that teachers pay nearly 1 percent more of their salaries into their healthcare plans. The net is that teacher pay will be essentially frozen.

* The new contract eliminates a prohibition in the earlier agreement prohibiting the layoff of teachers for “economic reasons”--i.e., budget cuts and school closures. Instead, the contract requires 10 months of severance pay, up from five months. The CTU’s claim that the increase in severance pay will prevent the city from laying off teachers is a fraud. The corporate elite is willing to pay a moderate additional cost for the CTU’s collaboration in suppressing opposition to the dismantling of the public education system.

* Claims by the CTU that it has secured or will secure additional funding from the state and the city to prevent additional cuts are equally fraudulent. The state is supposedly promising an additional \$200 million, while CTU President Karen Lewis has claimed she has an agreement from Emanuel to provide a miserly \$88 million from “tax increment financing” (TIF) funds for the schools. Both of these pledges are worthless, and in any case would make up only a fraction of the \$1 billion budget deficit.

Emanuel, a Democrat with the closest ties to the Obama administration, and the administration of Republican Bruce Rauner, are determined to escalate the attack on public education in Chicago and throughout Illinois. After the 2012 contract was forced through, ending the nine-day strike by Chicago teachers, the city proceeded to shut down 50 schools and lay off thousands of teachers. Similar plans are in store if and when the new contract is adopted, once a moratorium on school closings ends at the beginning of 2018.

Teachers should reject this contract with the contempt it deserves. A “no” vote, however, is only the beginning. The defense of the rights of teachers and the

institution of public education must be carried out on a new basis.

This begins with an understanding of the role of the CTU. It does not represent teachers. It is a co-conspirator with the Emanuel administration and the Democratic Party in the attack on public education. In the 2012 strike, the CTU did everything it could to isolate teachers and force through a contract that accepted all of the main demands of Emanuel.

The determination of teachers to resist the attack on public education in 2012 nearly led to a situation where the CTU lost control of the strike. The SEP and the *World Socialist Web Site* played a leading role in mobilizing opposition to the contract, which the CTU initially sought to get passed without even allowing teachers to read it.

The main lesson that the union took from the 2012 strike was that under no conditions could another strike be allowed to take place. This is why the CTU kept teachers working without a contract for 15 months as it engaged in behind-the-scenes negotiations with Emanuel.

The CTU's determination to prevent a struggle is only increased by the growth of working class opposition throughout the country to social inequality and a corrupt two-party system that represents the interests of the corporate and financial elite. There is a growing mood of militancy among nurses, autoworkers, telecommunication workers and other sections of the working class that threatens to develop into a political conflict with the Democratic Party.

In the 2016 elections, the AFL-CIO, including the CTU's parent organization, the American Federation of Teachers, is enthusiastically campaigning for Hillary Clinton, who is running the most right-wing campaign in the history of the Democratic Party. On foreign policy, Clinton is pledged to a program of war and aggression, including against Russia and China. Both Democrats and Republicans agree that trillions of dollars must be spent on the military while they claim that there is no money for schools, healthcare, pensions or decent jobs.

At home, a Clinton administration will intensify the assault on the working class waged by Obama, who has presided over the largest transfer of wealth to the rich in American history. This will include a further attack on public education, building on Obama's "Race to the

Top" program and other incentives to expand charter schools and privatize public education.

To defeat the attacks on teachers and public education, teachers need to establish new organizations of struggle, completely independent of the CTU. The SEP calls on teachers to form rank-and-file committees to carry forward a struggle to defend public education. Such committees must be based on:

1) A rejection of the claim that there is no money for public education and good-paying jobs and benefits. Instead of agreeing to concessions, teachers should demand a massive infusion of funds into the public education system, to be paid for through a sharp increase in taxes on the wealthy and the elimination of military spending.

2) Complete independence from the Democratic and Republican parties, the twin instruments of the corporate and financial elite. An immediate appeal should be made to all sections of the working class for a common struggle against the renewed assault on jobs and benefits that will take place regardless of whether it is Clinton or Trump who is elected in November.

The defense of teachers and public education is fundamentally a political struggle against the entire economic and social system, capitalism. In the 2016 elections, the SEP is running candidates, Jerry White for president and Niles Niemuth for vice president, to build a socialist leadership in the working class to prepare for the struggles to come. We urge all teachers to support the SEP election campaign and take up the fight for socialism.

Niles Niemuth will be speaking at a public meeting on November 1 at 7:00 pm at the University of Illinois, Chicago, Lecture Center Building F, Room F004, 807 South Morgan Street. For more information, visit sep2016.com.



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