

Chilean union bureaucracy pleads with teachers to end five-week strike

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The Colegio de Profesores (CdP—Teachers’ Association) in Chile led by the pseudo-left coalition Broad Front is openly calling on the 80,000 public school teachers that have continued a national strike since June 3 to end their walkout and accept an offer that effectively dismisses their demands.

After a closed-door meeting with Education Ministry officials on Monday, the president of the trade union, Mario Aguilar, came out empty-handed, presenting teachers with the same offer that 74 percent of them had rejected exactly a week earlier.

Portraying the “recognition” of extra hours and the removal of “double teachers’ evaluations” as “a major achievement,” Aguilar declared: “Let’s take what they are offering and make it happen. Let’s pull our movement back, end the strike and go back to school before vacations. That way we can elaborate a plan of action for the coming months.” Another vote is being carried out today among teachers as a last-ditch effort to give a democratic semblance to the imminent betrayal of the strike by the union.

However, it was the elimination of history, physical education, arts and music from the core curricula at high schools that was the straw that triggered spontaneous mobilizations last month among teachers and university students across Valparaiso, Santiago and Antofagasta that were heavily repressed. This spontaneous action compelled the Colegio de Profesores to call an “indefinite” strike.

Teachers began presenting their demands to media outlets and on social media, describing leaks, rodent infestations, precarious structures, lack of textbooks and other deplorable conditions in public schools that evince the reality of the “Chilean miracle” in which finance capital has enjoyed freedoms virtually unmatched anywhere else.

On top of the changes to the curriculum, teachers are demanding major increases in investment in safe and decent schools and needed pedagogical materials, as well as the billions of unpaid bonuses accumulated since 1981—labeled the “historic debt”—and professional-level salaries for special and pre-school educators.

Teachers expressed their profound indignation toward the

CdP Tuesday on the union’s social media page. “Why do you lie to the rank-and-file, claiming that the historic debt is recognized [by the contract] if that is not the case?,” one teacher demanded. “It’s sad that we sacrificed our children so much to back this strike so that you sell it out anyway,” said another. “This response is a mockery. I feel it like being spit in the face,” a teacher wrote. “After reading, analyzing and discussing the response, I’m left with a black shame in the soul. I just feel like crying and that our efforts were worthless,” a teacher wrote. “Why do you lie if this is still discriminatory [for special and pre-school educators], with more exploitation, having to get the CPEIP certification for a joke of a payment,” was among the many more denunciations.

The privatizations and liberalization imposed since the CIA-backed coup that installed the fascist dictatorship under general Augusto Pinochet in 1973 and upheld by the entire political establishment since have resulted in the most privatized and “segregated” education system among nations in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Fully 60 percent of students go to private schools, while 70 percent of students in public schools come from poor families, according to the OECD.

Seeing that teachers were taking a serious stance against such social inequality, hundreds of thousands of doctors, nurses, rail workers, shipyard workers, students and broader sectors of the working class have participated in mass demonstrations along with teachers and expressed popular support for their strike.

The declarations by the minister of Education, Marcela Cubillos, scapegoating teachers for the social crisis caused by capitalism led to an even greater popular uproar in the streets and social media. The strike was “harming children in public education the most, generating a gap and an inequality that is hard to solve,” she claimed.

The wave of militancy that has swept Chile saw a 14-day strike by miners at the state-owned Chuquicamata mine, which was sold out by the unions affiliated to the Chilean Workers Union (CUT), which also had workers vote the

same contract twice.

More than 17,000 workers at Walmart voted in an overwhelming majority to wage the largest strike ever in the private sector against mass firings related to automatization. However, during the legal “conciliatory” period of five days, the Inter-Company Leader Union (SIL) of the CUT immediately accepted the appeals by the company to postpone the strike at least until today. Far from securing jobs and reinstating the more than 2,000 workers already fired this year, SIL has offered to sell out for a meager 4 percent wage increase.

The CUT bureaucracy and the government of right-wing billionaire President Sebastián Piñera are doing everything possible behind closed doors to prevent a confluence of these struggles and to suppress popular discontent. Such corporatism was consolidated in Chile by the creation of puppet unions like the Colegio de Profesores under the Pinochet dictatorship.

During the “transition to democracy” in 1990 and ever since, the subordination of the trade unions to the ruling class was only strengthened with the elevation of the Stalinist Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the Broad Front into the leadership of these unions. Their role has been crucial in protecting bourgeois rule and the continuation and deepening of the dictates of the financial aristocracy in Chile and its American and European patrons.

The ongoing betrayal of the teachers’ strike is another stark exposure of the bankruptcy of the entire political establishment. The Colegio de Profesores (CdP) president Aguilar, a member of the Humanist Party, was elected in 2016 with the support from other forces belonging to the Broad Front coalition, the third largest block in the Chilean Congress. The eleven-person national directory includes current and former members of the Stalinist Communist Party, including the former president Jaime Gajardo and the CUT leader, Bárbara Figueroa.

The Aguilar leadership participated in major national strikes and protests during 2017 and 2018 that were ultimately used to diffuse mass anger over the unfulfilled promises by the Stalinist and Social Democratic coalition government under President Michelle Bachelet to make higher education free and phase out the privatized pension system.

Now, this union leadership finds itself at the forefront of the ruling class’ efforts to contain another wave of unrest that, while triggered by the collapsing state of public education, is part of an incipient social explosion against social inequality and capitalism. Bloomberg recently cited Valpariso University political analyst, Guillermo Holzmann, who warned: “Piñera is at a turning point where he needs to address the issues around inequality. If he doesn’t, Chile

will descend into a scenario of higher social conflict.”

A no less criminal role has been played by the reformist fraction Nuestra Clase within the CdP, which is led by the Morenoite Workers Revolutionary Party (PRT). Their online publication, *La Izquierda Diario* and their member and president of the Antofagasta section of the CdP and leader of Nuestra Clase, Patricia Romo, have operated as a left flank for Aguilar and the CUT, directing teachers’ militancy into appeals to these tested and tried operators and institutions of the capitalist ruling class, undeserving of the slightest bit of confidence by the working class.

“The only way to really win teachers’ demands and keep the unity of the sector, supporting special teachers, is for the CdP, CUT, Confech [Confederation of Chilean Students], student federations and social movements to convoke a great national strike,” the PRT writes in response to the call by Aguilar to end the strike.

Stalinist, Social-Democratic, Morenoite and other pseudo-left groups speak for affluent layers of the middle class that employ a “left-populist” rhetoric, at times even mentioning socialism and social revolution, and identity politics to betray and channel the working class behind bourgeois politics and its institutions, chiefly the trade unions, at the behest of the national bourgeoisie and imperialism, in exchange for positions, financing and privileges in unions, academia, politics, and NGOs.

Workers must draw the necessary conclusions from the history of endless betrayals by petty-bourgeois and bourgeois nationalism and their role in the trade unions and fight to build a new revolutionary leadership based on the socialist and internationalist program fought for by the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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