

Chicago Teachers Union announces “path” to block strike and impose austerity settlement

Kristina Betinis
14 October 2019

In the latest act of political theater in the months-long negotiations between the Chicago Teachers Union and the Chicago Public Schools board and Mayor Lori Lightfoot, CTU president Jesse Sharkey announced, “a path to a settlement” that would block a strike set for Thursday.

More than 20,000 Chicago teachers and staff have been without a contract since July 1. CTU set a strike date of October 17 to coincide the walkout of roughly 2,500 Chicago Parks District workers and about 7,500 Chicago Public Schools (CPS) staff members, covered by the Service Employees International Union. Both the CTU and the Democratic establishment are working around the clock to prevent a strike and impose a settlement on terms that meet the demands of the financial aristocracy.

Lightfoot wants teachers to accept wage increases that barely rise above the inflation rate, along with increased healthcare costs and more cuts to school services. Large class sizes, understaffing among classroom aides, librarians, nurses and social workers, and the routine layoff of senior, higher-paid teachers are major issues confronting CPS teachers.

On Friday, Lightfoot’s team made a proposal asking for a tentative agreement no later than October 14 on a five-year contract. The proposal includes a cost of living raise of 3 percent each year from 2020–23 and 3.5 percent for years 2024–25.

Throughout the negotiations, CTU officials claimed they would not budge from their demands for the hiring of more support staff and a reduction of class sizes. By Saturday afternoon, however, Sharkey announced that the CTU had “modified some of our proposals” and would accept the district’s proposals to “phase in” new support staff.

“While our proposed outline does not solve all

outstanding issues, we believe it does provide the mayor a path. Not just a path to a settlement, which we at the CTU also want, but a path to a contract which will provide wraparound services, basic education supports, equity and support for neighborhood schools,” Sharkey declared in his typical double-talk.

“The CTU initially asked for a whole number of things we believe we need in our schools. We talked about a nurse in every school, every day. We talked about counselors, case managers, special education case managers, and other issues. The district has said those are hard to provide right away. Let us phase them in. We’ve already reported we’re open to phasing in,” he announced, making it clear the CTU would do nothing to challenge the Democrats’ lies that there simply is not enough money for the schools.

“There’s a path in front of us to get there before Thursday,” Sharkey said, adding, “The mayor’s going to have to, like, pick up that mantle and go forward with it.”

The CTU takes teachers for fools. Educators are well aware that nothing is going to be “phased in.” Over the last decade, the district has laid off thousands of teachers and support staff, along with closing scores of schools. Meanwhile, the Democrats have provided millions in tax cuts for giant corporations and wealthy developers and funneled public assets into charter schools and other for-profit edu-businesses.

The CTU union bureaucrats like Sharkey, a former member of the now-defunct International Socialist Organization, and his Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE), are specialists in using pseudo-left demagoguery to cover up their craven capitulation to the Democratic Party and its austerity measures.

The *Chicago Sun-Times* offered its view of Sharkey’s empty phrase-mongering, noting “though he publicly

talks tough and can rally a crowd, he's considered a pragmatist at the bargaining table."

CTU vice president Stacy Davis Gates praised Lightfoot, declaring, "Equity is something the mayor has talked about a lot. We've taken a principle that she's set forth, as a candidate and as a mayor. And we believe that this is a way to help her get to a yes."

The CTU has planned an afternoon indoor rally and march on Monday, October 14. If past experience is any indication, the rally called will be to "celebrate" a tentative agreement that will set up another five years of resource-starved schools.

Last December, during the strike of the Acero charter schools teachers, such a CTU rally was used as a platform for Democratic mayoral candidates and the basis for declaring a victory and pressuring teachers to accept a tentative agreement on terms that did nothing to improve the crisis conditions in the schools.

Teachers immediately took to Facebook to respond to the press conference. One asks, "Why does it have to be phased in? That has been said before and nothing happens. Something doesn't sound right. I hope we are not folding. The time is NOW to make a change."

Teachers also worried aloud about the conditions in their kindergarten and lower-grade classes where class sizes are 39, 40 and even 45.

A deal has been worked out for many weeks between CTU and Lightfoot's board of education and what is being "negotiated" now is how to sell it to teachers. It is particularly noteworthy that the CTU has enlisted the help of Alex Caputo Pearl, the president of the United Teachers Los Angeles who betrayed the six-day strike of 33,000 LA educators in the beginning of the year. Like Sharkey, Caputo Pearl combines phony talk about "social justice" and the "school our students deserve" with colluding with the Democrats' austerity and school privatization agenda.

Teachers have the power to unite with other sections of workers to defend public education, but this will only be in opposition to the Democratic Party and the CTU. This means building rank-and-file committees in every school and neighborhood to organize a fight for what teachers, students and parents really need, not what the corporations, Democratic Party and union bureaucrats say is affordable.

There is a growing resistance by the working class to the endless attacks by both big business parties in the

US and endless growth of social inequality. Teachers are engaged in strikes and struggles in Croatia, Jordan and many other countries. The defense of the right to high quality public education requires nothing less than a full-scale assault on the vast fortunes of the super-rich and a radical redistribution of wealth to meet social needs, i.e., the fight for socialism.

Contact the Socialist Equality Party for assistance in establishing rank-and-file committees that can unite CPS teachers with educators in the suburban districts, autoworkers, logistics workers and other sections of workers coming into struggle around the world.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact