

# As Chicago teachers strike completes second day, union and Democratic Party working together to shut it down

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Striking Chicago Public School teachers and staff completed their second day of picketing yesterday. Over 30,000 Chicago educators are fighting to improve their schools; demanding smaller class sizes; more librarians, social workers, and nurses; increased spending and better pay.

After years of school closures and austerity imposed by both Republican and Democratic parties, educators are determined to fight back. However, the Chicago Teachers Union, SEIU and the Democratic Party are working closely together to rapidly bring the strike to an end.

Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot said yesterday, “The fact is there is no more money. Period.” CTU President Jesse Sharkey has criticized the mayor for “stonewalling” on the budget. This is, at best, kabuki theater. The CTU did not want to call a strike, but due to the determination of the teachers it had no choice. It is attempting a “Hollywood” strike, a short strike to blow off steam and then ram through a concessions contract.

In 2012, the CTU called off the powerful Chicago teachers strike of 26,000 educators after seven days. This in turn cleared the way for then-mayor Rahm Emanuel to shutter 49 public schools.

While not providing teachers with any information about negotiations, a CTU official said of negotiations on Friday, “We still got a little bit to go, but we’re getting there.” Lightfoot and CPS CEO Janice Jackson issued a statement the same day saying that the “negotiations were productive and yielded real movement.”

Given that the position of the city is that there is “no money” to meet teachers demands, “progress” in

negotiations can only come at the expense of the teachers.

Diana, a special ed teacher at Douglas Taylor Elementary in Chicago’s industrial East Side, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “There aren’t enough nurses, social workers, psychologists. Any dedicated personnel that were once at our school are gone. They keep cutting funding. It’s an erosion of our profession, and it takes away from the children. And our students are living in poverty. Ninety-nine percent of our children are defined as in poverty.”

Diana continued, “And the conditions for kids today are even worse. Our children don’t have economic opportunities to begin with because the industrial jobs have gone. Around here their parents are mostly service sector employees. And we’re pushing the young people into that service industry. Educators don’t want that, we try. But we’re not given the resources.”

When asked if she supported the call to unite with GM autoworkers, Diana affirmed, “Yes! That’s just down the street from us [referring to Ford’s nearby Chicago Assembly Plant]. This is an industrial corridor.

“They work long hours and they produce cars that get everyone to and from work, so we all need them as much as they need teachers. And they need medical care, because of their arduous job. Just two years ago around here a worker had something fall on them at a factory and that person lost their life. We saw the helicopter come. They’re basically risking their lives to go into work every day.”

The strike is finding broad support among students and workers. Oscar, 17, and Abigail, 16, both juniors at Benito Juarez Community Academy, joined their teachers on the picket line on Cermak Road on Friday

morning. They said that despite the extraordinary efforts of teachers, “huge class sizes” and a lack of resources made it difficult to learn.

Abigail said it was the norm for her teachers to spend their own money on classroom supplies. “Teachers are always taking out of their pocket for their students. The teachers have so much love for their students, and they want what’s best for them, so they’ll do it if they have to. But we have up to 36 or even 40 students in some classes. There are not even enough desks. We have some people just sitting in chairs.”

Referring to the \$700 billion spent by the US government each year on endless wars, Oscar said, “I think it’s shocking how much they spend on the military, but not the future. Students are literally the future. We’re going to be here for a long time.”

Abigail said she was on the picket because “it’s something that has to be done. Everyone should support the teachers. You should be given health care; you should be given an education. You shouldn’t have to fight for things like this.”

Some 7,000 striking educators are part of SEIU Local 73, which claims to represent 29,000 public service employees, but none have been called out to support the strike. Instead, the unions are deliberately isolating the strike.

The CTU has not issued a single cent of strike pay. It intends to, at minimum, starve workers into accepting a new contract. Meanwhile, SEIU’s President Mary Henry makes over \$250,000 a year, while American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten makes close to \$500,000 a year.

There is more than enough money to meet and exceed the needs of all students and educators. Illinois alone has 18 billionaires, one of them being Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker, whose has a net worth \$3.4 billion. The total net worth of all of Illinois’s billionaires amounts to almost \$60 billion.

However, what is happening behind the scenes is not a genuine fight between the Lightfoot administration and the CTU and SEIU, but a discussion of tactics and plans to best ram through another sellout contract.

To fight back, workers must begin now creating rank-and-file committees to take this strike into their own hands. These committees must put forth and fight for what educators and students need, not what the CTU or Lightfoot administration tells them is affordable.

To provide the resources needed to improve schools and neighborhoods, eradicate poverty and raise the material and cultural level of the whole population, teachers must carry out a frontal assault on the wealth and power of the super-rich, to radically redistribute the wealth created by working people to meet their needs.

*We urge teachers to subscribe to the WSWS Teacher Newsletter, which will do everything possible to provide Chicago teachers with a voice and perspective for this struggle, assist them in building rank-and-file committees, and link up their fight with autoworkers and other sections of the working class.*



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