

Teachers' union calls on Elizabeth Warren in bid to strangle strike against Chicago's Democratic machine

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A rally of striking Chicago teachers and support staff on Tuesday, featuring presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten, exposed the danger of betrayal facing the 32,000 workers now in the fifth day of their strike.

The powerful walkout has shut down the third largest school system in the country, serving 300,000 students. The strike is in peril not because of any lack of militancy or determination on the part of the teachers, school nurses, counselors, social workers, janitors and bus aides manning the picket lines. On the contrary, Tuesday's mass picket and rally at DePriest High School on the city's west side, attended by hundreds of school workers, expressed the militancy and anger of the strikers and the broad support for their struggle in the working class of Chicago and the entire country.

Rather, the lineup of the national AFT and local Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) leadership with the Democratic Party, in an attempt once again to channel the opposition of educators to the destruction of the public schools behind the election of Democratic politicians, repeats the same strategy that was used to isolate and sell out all of the teachers' strikes of the past two years. In this conspiracy against the school workers, the CTU is joined by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which negotiates for a section of CPS support staff.

The rally was held following an insulting and provocative public letter sent Monday by Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) CEO Janice Jackson to CTU President Jesse Sharkey. The letter declared there was "no money" to meet the teachers' demands for more support staff and funding and for smaller class sizes. It called on the union to end the strike while contract talks continued.

Only hours before the letter was published, Sharkey, who had promised a "short-term strike" on the eve of the walkout, was trumpeting substantial "progress" and

predicting an early end to the strike. The letter exposed his effort to dupe the teachers and lull them into a return to work on the city's terms.

At Tuesday's rally, Sharkey began by pointing to an old placard from the 2012 strike, which as CTU vice president he helped sell out after seven days. He declared, "We were asking for the same things we are asking for today... the sign says CPS students deserve more school nurses, more counselors, more social workers and more services."

This was an inadvertent self-indictment. When the 2012 deal was imposed over broad rank-and-file opposition, Sharkey declared it a victory. Within weeks of the settlement, then-Mayor Rahm Emanuel began closing scores of public schools and expanding the number of charters.

Sharkey then said that over the weekend the union had received "meaningful written offers about staffing" from Lightfoot. "The mayor," he said, "gave us an offer that we believe can help us get a nurse in every school every day. The mayor gave us an offer which we believe would limit the size of our classes and let students get individual attention."

But in the next breath, he revealed facts about the "meaningful offer" demonstrating its utter worthlessness. "The class size [proposal] right now only helps about 15 percent of our students," he admitted. "It doesn't do anything for high schools. We gotta get a little further."

He added, "This staffing does not have any enforcement mechanism. We've seen CPS lie too many times... But that was progress and so I said yesterday morning that I can see a path how we could end this strike and get back to our classes, which is where we want to be."

In other words, the CTU and AFT were hoping to use the meaningless "concessions" from the CPS and the city to provide a cover for a rapid return to work and imposition of another sellout contract.

The remarks by AFT President Randi Weingarten were no less revealing. She began by holding up this year's Los

Angeles teachers' strike as a victory and model for the Chicago teachers. The AFT called off that strike after eight days and imposed a contract that met none of the teachers' demands.

She then touted the importance of expanding "collective bargaining" in education. This is code language for strengthening the grip of the teachers' unions over rank-and-file teachers, following wildcat strikes organized last year by teachers themselves in West Virginia and other states in opposition to the AFT and the National Education Association. The unions were eventually able to gain control and end the strikes on the terms of the big business politicians, aided by middle-class organizations that promote the Democrats, such as Sharkey's current organization, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).

Weingarten introduced Warren by touting her election as president as the solution to the crisis of education and the worsening economic situation of teachers and school employees. "If she is in the White House," Weingarten said, "we wouldn't need to be in the streets. We will be in the schools making America what it ought to be."

In demagogic remarks, Warren, who calls herself a "capitalist to the bones," touted her proposal for a "wealth tax" as the solution of the crisis of the public schools. She claimed that her proposal to tax two cents on every dollar of wealth above \$50 million would generate \$800 billion for the public schools, as well as wiping out student debt for 85 percent of students and providing tuition-free higher education.

Warren is well aware that such a proposal, which would do little to reduce the colossal levels of social inequality, would never be implemented by Congress. Nor would it be approved by the Democratic Party of which she is a part. Were she to be elected, she would break her promises to teachers no less brutally than Barack Obama did as president and Lightfoot has done as mayor.

She was careful not to mention Lightfoot by name. Nor did any of the speakers mention the previous Democratic mayor and enemy of teachers and public education, Emanuel.

None of the speakers spoke a word on the spate of strikes currently underway in the US, which show that the Chicago teachers' struggle is not merely a local issue, but rather part of a growing upsurge of the working class in the US and around the world. There was no mention of the General Motors strike, or the contract battle of workers at Fiat Chrysler and Ford, despite the potential for a strike that would include thousands of Ford workers in Chicago.

Nor was there a mention of the Volvo-Mack Truck strike and the walkout by copper miners in several western states, let alone the mass strikes and protests convulsing Chile, Ecuador, Catalonia, Lebanon, Iraq and a number of other

countries around the world.

Indicative of the efforts of the CTU to blind the teachers to the widespread support they enjoy in the working class and the potential for broadening their fight to embrace all sections of workers and youth, CTU Vice President Stacy Davis Gates recently declared that "the mayor holds all the power." Hinting at the union's real goal of cementing its corporatist relations with the city and Wall Street, she added, "We are asking for being made partners in making the city better."

If anything, the anti-working class content of the alliance of the teachers' unions with the Democratic Party emerges more sharply in Chicago than in any other city, since Chicago is and has long been controlled by the Democratic Party machine that produced figures who spearheaded the imposition of precisely the conditions against which the Chicago teachers are now striking.

These include Obama and his Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who headed CPS for eight years before being brought to Washington. Duncan pushed for the privatization of public schools and expansion of for-profit charter schools, a policy that was expanded and imposed nationwide in Obama-Duncan's "Race to the Top" school "reform" program.

Seven years after striking against Obama's former White House chief of staff Emanuel—a strike that was shut down and sold out by then-CTU Vice President Sharkey and then-President Karen Lewis—the teachers are once again facing a ruthless Democratic mayor determined to impose the corporate agenda of gutting the public-school system.



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