

Chicago Teachers Union attempting to ram through tentative agreement over widespread opposition

Kristina Betinis
31 October 2019

On Wednesday night, the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) House of Delegates approved a tentative agreement that betrays all the aspirations of the 24,000 teachers who have been on strike for ten days.

At an evening meeting of the delegates, comprised of teachers from each of the city's schools, CTU leaders rammed through a deal that teachers did not have time to read or discuss. The CTU called the meeting at 6:00 pm to review the 41-page agreement and hold two votes, one to accept or reject the agreement and one to continue or end the strike and return to work Thursday.

The result of the vote of the delegates, which is composed of teachers closer to the CTU, makes clear that there is enormous opposition to the agreement. The agreement passed by a vote of 364 to 242 against, with four abstentions.

However, the delegates voted not to end the strike. Instead of returning to work on Thursday, teachers will attend a 10 a.m. rally at City Hall to demand Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot approve make-up school days for the duration of the strike. If there are no make-up days, it will mean that teachers will lose thousands of dollars in income as a result of the strike.

In response, Lightfoot declared, "I'm not compensating them for days they were out on strike. I'm not going to negotiate."

The CTU lauded the contract for its "great gains." In a press conference immediately following the vote, AFT President Randi Weingarten declared, "This TA is not perfect, but we want to close this chapter, and we want the mayor to be with us in closing this chapter."

These are lies. The tentative agreement is wholly in line with the demands of CPS and Lightfoot, who has declared throughout that there is no money to meet teachers' demands.

Teachers will see a 16 percent raise over five years and increases in healthcare costs. The offers on staffing, class sizes and prep time are utterly inadequate. The staffing increase of 209 additional social workers and 250 additional nurses by the end of the contract is the same as CPS' tentative agreement circulated Tuesday.

Teachers, other than some at the kindergarten level, will not see any increased preparation time.

The agreement also enshrines the district's worthless "aspirations" to observe class size limits, which the CPS routinely exceeds, in violation of state law. Classes will qualify for relief only after they are 4-8 students above different caps for different grade levels.

The response from teachers to the announced agreement was overwhelmingly hostile, as expressed in comments on the livestream of the CTU's press conference last night. "Flashback 2012. We caved too early," one teacher wrote. "All that hoopla for nada," another wrote.

One teacher wrote about how the terms of the agreement were being publicized among teachers yesterday morning: "We were given a piece of paper to read in the rain and cold under a canopy outside with 50 other people, and told it wasn't the tentative agreement. No other person enters a 5 year commitment under those conditions!!!"

Many complained their stewards did not poll them Wednesday before the delegates met.

The teachers' struggle has mass support in the city and beyond. Teachers are fighting for lower class sizes, increased support staff in the schools, increased preparation time, improved classroom funding, and a decent income.

Overcrowded classrooms and too few staff have resulted in intolerable teaching and learning conditions, compounded by aging, poorly maintained school

buildings and under-resourced classrooms.

The events of the last week come seven years after the CTU betrayed the powerful 2012 strike of 30,000 Chicago Public School teachers, paving the way for the closure of 49 schools, the laying off of thousands of teachers and the expansion of privately run networks of charter schools.

Throughout the current strike, the CTU has again worked to shut it down and impose an agreement on terms dictated by the city. Yesterday's announcement was a culmination of this process. If it is pushed through, it will pave the way for a further attack on public education.

Teachers should reject the agreement and oppose any effort to end the strike without a ratification by teachers, who should have a full week to review and discuss it.

To organize opposition to the agreement, teachers must form rank-and-file committees in every school to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the CTU.

These committees should forge links with autoworkers, educators regionally and nationally, municipal and state workers, students and parents, and the entire working class. The strike of Chicago teachers must be expanded to other sections of the working class, with the aim of shutting down the city in a general strike and appealing for support from workers in the US and internationally.

A new political leadership must be built in the working class to arm the growing struggles of workers with a socialist program. The fight for the most basic social rights of the working class, including education, requires a struggle for workers' power and the transformation of the banks and major corporations into publicly owned and democratically controlled utilities.

The *World Socialist Web Site*, the WSWS Teacher Newsletter and the Socialist Equality Party are building this new leadership. We will do all in our power to assist teachers in building rank-and-file committees to expand the fight for the right to public education.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact