

# Vote “no” on the tentative teachers' contract! Form rank-and-file committees to defend public education in Chicago!

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With voting set to begin on the tentative agreement between the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and Chicago Public Schools (CPS), teachers and other educators are approaching a critical juncture in the fight to defend public education.

The WSWs *Teacher Newsletter* calls on Chicago teachers to vote no on this agreement and prepare a real fight to defend and expand public education.

Immediately after the CTU shut down the powerful 11-day strike of 25,000 teachers, the Democratic Party and the media moved to hail the agreement, as they have done in countless sellouts of teachers and other workers.

Despite Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders' claim that teachers “won a victory that will not only be for Chicago but be for the whole country,” an examination of the agreement exposes the treachery of the CTU and its allies.

The tentative agreement conforms to the initial austerity proposal put forward by Chicago's Democratic Party Mayor Lori Lightfoot, who insisted there was “no money” to meet teachers' demands for increased staffing, smaller class sizes and higher pay.

On the central demand of class sizes, teachers are being sold a bill of goods. CPS routinely violates its own existing class size limits, which specify 28 students for Kindergarten through third grade and up to 31 for fourth grade through high school. The new tentative agreement essentially enshrines the status quo, with new “enforceable” limits of 36 for lower grades, 39 for middle school and up to 45 for high school classes.

Moreover, enforcement of these new larger class size limits is given over to a new Joint Class Size Assessment Council. The decisions of this council are not only final and binding, they even supplant the CTU's normal grievance procedure.

Given that a mere \$35 million has been set aside for class size relief for the five-year agreement, CPS teachers will continue to struggle under impossible workloads while students are deprived of necessary individual attention.

The provision to hire 209 social workers and 250 nurses is contingent on there being “a sufficient number of qualified candidates,” an enormous loophole. Just 120 schools identified as having the highest need, out of over 500 regular district schools, are to be given the funding for a single position, with principals able to choose between a librarian, counselor or restorative justice coordinator.

However, as the tentative agreement states, the provision does not “guarantee” that any of those positions will be filled, it merely “makes it possible.” Principals may allocate this funding in a variety of ways so long as it advances “social emotional learning and trauma-informed practices, restorative justice, counseling and advising, or instruction (including library),” a list so broad it is meaningless.

From the supposed 16 percent raises being allocated to teachers, about 3 percent must be deducted due to lost wages from the strike, which will only be partially made up through additional school days added to the calendar. Another 0.75 percent will be subtracted due to the CTU's concession on health insurance costs. This means teachers will basically be trading water against inflation, with a raise amounting to less than 2.5 percent per year.

Not addressed in any way are the filthy conditions in schools, the overall growth of privatization, the absence of adequate instructional materials and supplies or the allocation of increased prep time for teachers.

Teachers must begin drawing the lessons of the strike and the whole preceding historical period.

Throughout, the CTU and its parent union, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), worked to prevent the strike from developing into a direct conflict with the Democratic Party. Initially, the union did not want a strike. When forced to call one due to the intense anger of teachers, the CTU attempted to isolate it and smother it as soon as possible.

In that task they were aided by the leadership of SEIU Local 73, to which CPS support staff belong. Having begun the strike alongside teachers, SEIU came to agreement with CPS and announced ratification on October 30.

This assisted the CTU in seizing the momentum that same day, when it rammed through a House of Delegates vote to accept the tentative agreement and shut down the strike before teachers had a chance to study it, let alone vote on it.

Far from fighting the Democrats and their attacks on education, the unions worked closely with Democratic Party presidential candidates, giving them photo opportunities on the picket line and a chance to talk “left,” a phenomenon which reached the pinnacle of cynicism with CTU President Jesse Sharkey’s appearance in an online ad for Democratic presidential candidate and former US Vice President Joe Biden.

Biden and the Democratic Party have been intimately involved in a bipartisan assault on public education nationwide. There has been an intimate connection between the local and national attack on public schools, with Barack Obama’s elevation of former CPS head Arne Duncan to US Secretary of Education in 2009. The Obama administration, building on the work of George W. Bush and Bill Clinton, championed the expansion of charter schools, merit pay, teacher evaluations and privatization.

A critical role in the shutdown of the Chicago teachers’ strike is being played by pseudo-left groups that operate in and around the union, especially the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and the former members of the International Socialist Organization (ISO), of which Sharkey was a member. The ISO dissolved earlier this year in order to facilitate the integration of its members into the Democratic Party.

These groups have been at the forefront of attempts to elevate issues of race and racism as explanations for the state of schools, when the attack on public education is in fact part of the offensive of the ruling class against the social rights of the entire working class.

The DSA and its allies have also worked to enforce the

line of the Democratic Party on militant teachers. Kenzo Shibata, media director for the Illinois Federation of Teachers and member of the executive boards of the CTU and of the Chicago DSA, recently announced on Twitter that calling for a “no” vote on the agreement was “sectarian” and amounted to interference in the union’s democratic process.

To counter the capitalist attack on education, teachers need a new strategy and new organizations.

The WSWS calls on teachers in Chicago and throughout the country to form rank-and-file committees in every school to organize a real fight to defend public education. Through strike committees, teachers will forge fighting links with autoworkers, municipal and state workers, students and parents.

The fight to defend education is a fight against the entire capitalist class and all its political representatives, including both major parties, the Democrats and Republicans. This fight cannot be won simply at the local level, or on the basis of futile appeals for reforms from the bribed mouthpieces of the corporations and banks.

A new political leadership must be built in the working class to arm the growing struggles of workers with an independent and socialist program. The trillions squandered on the greed of the super-rich must be expropriated and used to provide for the social needs of the population and the development of a society based on equality and workers’ democracy.

The *World Socialist Web Site*, the *WSWS Teacher Newsletter* and the Socialist Equality Party will do all in our power to assist teachers in building rank-and-file committees and urge all those who agree with our program to join the SEP.

*Sign up for the WSWS Teachers Newsletter and get involved today!*



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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