

“We need to band together and say, ‘No’ to brick-and-mortar schooling”

## Educators and other workers across US express support for Chicago teachers

**Our reporters**  
**3 February 2021**

The courageous stand taken by Chicago teachers against Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot’s threats of retaliation for defying her back-to-work order has won widespread support among educators and other sections of workers across the United States and internationally.

Last weekend, teachers voted overwhelmingly to continue remote-only teaching as the pandemic continues and to strike if the mayor attempted to lock teachers out of their computer accounts. Lightfoot, who is in constant contact with the Biden administration, was forced to retreat and announce a 48-hour “cooling off” period, which allows teachers to work from home without any retaliation until the end of today.

The mayor is engaged in intense negotiations with the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) to reach a deal to send teachers back. Both Lightfoot and the CTU, however, face intense opposition from rank-and-file teachers who are fighting not just for themselves but to stop the spread of the deadly virus in the working class communities they serve.

“Chicago teachers should be proud of their united effort in prioritizing staff and student safety,” a Texas teacher told the WSW. “Politicians making decisions for educators value money over human lives. They have the blood on their hands of bus drivers, teachers, principals, cafeteria workers, custodians and family members who have died because of school exposure and spread.

“We lost our first district staff member that I am aware of (Mansfield ISD, Mansfield, Texas) to COVID over the weekend, and while ‘counselors are available,’ who will answer for this preventable loss?”

Michael Hull, the administrator of Teachers Against Dying, said, “We stand in solidarity with Chicago teachers, but be wary of capitulation by your union. Don’t accept anything less than fully remote learning until health department guidelines are met. Use your labor power to leverage demands, such as an adequately funded online learning experience, a reprieve from standardized tests, and financial support for working families. Don’t allow your union or the Democratic Party to break your solidarity or hinder your cause. Your determination has the potential to reverberate throughout the exploited working classes and ignite a broader

resistance. Don’t underestimate the power you have and the gravity of your choices.”

A group of Tennessee teachers who have formed a rank-and-file safety committee independent of the unions wrote, “The Tennessee Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee stands in solidarity with our sister and brother educators in the Chicago Public Schools. CPS rank-and-file educators are currently fighting for their lives on three fronts: they are fighting for their lives against a deadly pandemic that has already claimed over 450,000 American lives in 10 months; they are fighting for their lives against an exploitative political and economic system that is willing to distort science and obfuscate facts in order to send teachers back into classrooms for profits; and they are fighting for their lives against their own union, the CTU, which agrees with the Democratic Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot that schools should reopen during a pandemic without community-wide inoculation against COVID-19, instead of upholding the demands and protecting the lives of their own rank-and-file members.

“As you stand together, arm in arm in the fight for your lives, know that Tennessee teachers are banding together in a rank-and-file committee to stand against our delusional governor, degenerate legislators and spineless local administrators as they coerce educators back into classrooms. As you bravely countenance the homicidal threats to your livelihoods, professionalism and well-being from your leaders, know that educators and workers in cities across the country and throughout the world are coming together in rank-and-file committees to fight against injustice in their workplaces. As you turn your backs on your dissembling union, the CTU, know that you, the rank and file, are entreating every teacher, every health care worker, every service industry worker, every worker who is being sacrificed by the insatiable oligarchs for their profits, to form rank-and-file committees independent of their feckless unions.”

Also expressing support was a teacher in New York City where the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) agreed to a back-to-work deal with Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio. After American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten recently tweeted, “If NYC can figure out in-person learning, so can Chicago,” she was met with a torrent of denunciations

pointing out that there have been thousands of infections since New York City schools reopened.

A New York teacher expressed solidarity with the Chicago teachers but warned, “Their union is turning on them like ours. I’ve been using a cab every day. I go in costing me large amounts of money because I refuse to take the three modes of transportation I have to. Have we made it too hard to get rid of all this bad leadership in schools, everywhere?”

An Oklahoma teacher, who was part of the 2018 statewide strike, indicated the explosive nature of the reopening of schools, “Every single student has been invited BACK to school in our rural community as we’ve had an A/B schedule (alphabetically split population) since approximately late September-October. That schedule allowed approximately 7-10 kids per room—sized 25’x25’. A wave of unrest is coming in relation to the ‘Back to School’ announcement from our superintendent. I fully support Chicago teachers because this is where we all need to be. In Oklahoma it is naked herd immunity and mass murder. In Chicago it’s being done by the Democrats. Same game, different party name.”

Autoworkers in Chicago, Indiana and Michigan also expressed their support, calling for a general strike to close schools and nonessential production and demand full compensation to all workers.

A supporter of the Rank-and-File Safety Committee at the Faurecia Gladstone plant in Columbus, Indiana said, “Democratic Party Mayor Lori Lightfoot and Janice Jackson CEO of the Chicago Public Schools don’t know what they’re talking about, which is a polite way of saying it. Everybody already knows that the capitalists are not going to do what’s good for the working class. The only way for the teachers to do their jobs safely is with remote learning. Bring up the statistics for COVID-19 infections in the Chicago area and base your policy on that.

“We need to band together—teachers, parents and students, and just say, ‘No’ to brick-and-mortar schooling. They don’t have enough jails to hold us all. The educators have spoken. The Rank-and-File Safety Committee for the autoworkers at Faurecia Gladstone in Columbus, Indiana stands with the educators, parents and students. Workers all over the country support them.

“We say: Stop the madness. Stop the pandemic. Shut down the schools. Shut down nonessential businesses. And compensate all workers that are affected.

“That is the only way that we can do it safely until the vaccines can get a foothold. They can teach remotely. The Democrats running the city do not want them teaching remotely. That is the conflict that is shaping up across the country. We are building the Rank-and-File Safety Committee Network to prepare a political general strike.”

A veteran worker at Ford Chicago Assembly Plant said, “Stopping the virus should be first. Safety is first for everyone, teachers and students and anyone in a school building. Students can still learn [from home] if the parents get involved.

“It’s messed up, this whole situation with the virus,” he continued. “The government, the unions, the mayor, the big companies, the auto industry—it’s all about money. Not kids, not autoworkers’ safety, not people’s health.”

A worker from the Ford Kansas City Assembly Plant added, “I’m glad they’re doing this. I’m with them because this is a matter of life and death.”

A veteran worker at the Stellantis (former FCA) Sterling Heights Assembly Plant in metropolitan Detroit said, “We don’t need kids to go back to class if they can do it virtually. Kids have enough difficulty social distancing as it is. They push and prod each other all day, that is what they do.

“When this first hit, if we had got a hold of this thing and rapidly tested and then vaccinated, we could have controlled it. Instead I’ve been hearing more and more about ‘herd immunity.’ I know what is more important to the capitalist, it’s money. They don’t care about the kids. They just want the parents back to work.”

The worker compared Lightfoot’s threats to President Ronald Reagan’s firing of the striking air traffic controllers in 1981 and the smashing of their union, PATCO. “This is just like PATCO. When Reagan made those threats, the AFL-CIO should have called a nationwide strike the same day and shut down every airport and corporation in the country. They didn’t do that. Now the unions have stock in all of these companies.

“They need to leave the schools closed right now and give the districts the money they need. They need to shut down production and pay people to stay home. This is a pandemic.

“The corporations always cry, and the government runs to bail them out. But when it comes to helping the average person, they have a problem with it. I think everyone in Wall Street should lose their money. What the Bolsheviks did, when they took the oligarchs’ money in Russia, that’s what needs to happen here.

“There is no war right now for them to profit off of, so the pandemic is another way to get the capitalists more money. They are using this to get richer. They don’t care about 450,000 people dead. This is about money. How much is enough? You have people working two jobs, but Jeff Bezos is worth \$200 billion. Amazon is getting bigger, and he is so rich he is stepping down.”



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