

Wall Street Journal demands Biden crack down on Chicago teachers

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The Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee is holding its next meeting at 7pm CST tonight, February 4, to discuss how to mobilize opposition to the deadly reopening of schools. Register now and share this link with your coworkers to build the committee!

In a statement by its editorial board Tuesday, the Wall Street Journal angrily criticized President Joe Biden for being too soft on Chicago teachers, who are defying Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot's order to resume in-person classes even as the pandemic continues to spread in the city of nearly 3 million residents. The newspaper complains that any vacillation by the Democratic president will only encourage educators across the country to resist his administration's plans to reopen schools by mid-April.

The angry broadside by the *Journal*, the mouthpiece of America's financial oligarchy, exposes the feigned concern about the educational and emotional needs of children as the motivation for reopening schools as so much hot air. The newspaper is filled with anxiety because the reopening of schools is seen as critical to reopening the economy and putting parents back to work, where they can continue pumping out profits for Wall Street and the major corporations.

While the *Journal* complains about the perceived timidity of the new administration, Biden, a capitalist politician with decades of experience, shares the same basic aim. He spelled this out in a news conference last week, during which he said opening schools would have the "added advantage" of "putting millions of people back to work. All those mothers and fathers that are home, taking care of their children rather than go to work, even when they can work. So, this is about generating economic growth overall as well."

The editorial board statement is headlined "Where's Biden on Opening Schools?" and includes the underline "So far he's buckling to the unions that won't return to classrooms." The newspaper, which was an early proponent of Trump's "herd immunity" policy and opponent of any lockdowns, writes: "Perhaps you've heard, a few thousand times, that the Biden Administration will listen to the science. Well, the science says schools can safely reopen, but the White House is still listening, make that bowing, to the non-scientists who run the teachers unions."

The assertion that "science says schools can safely open," has been repeated *ad nauseam* by the *New York Times*, *Washington*

Post and virtually every other corporate media outlet. On Wednesday, Biden's new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) director, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, told reporters, "There is increasing data to suggest that schools can safely reopen and that safe reopening does not suggest that teachers need to be vaccinated."

Only last week, as the *Journal* editorial board complained, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki "wobbled" about the results of the widely publicized study by CDC researchers, which was based on small rural Wisconsin districts where all children wore three-layered cloth masks and were supervised by researchers. The findings, Psaki admitted, were "not reflective of every school district and community in the country."

Scientific studies conducted in Canada, India and other countries prove schools are major vectors for the community transmission of the deadly disease and that the closing schools is one of the most effective means of mitigating the spread of the virus and saving lives. The push to schools in the country's third-largest school district is all the more criminal given the emergence of new, more virulent and lethal variants of the virus.

The *Journal* editorial continues, "Mr. Biden has set a goal of reopening schools in his first 100 days, and the current union standoff in Chicago is his first big test." "Elementary and middle school teachers there have refused to show up to classrooms as ordered," the editorial board declares, and as result the "district has postponed reopening schools for two days."

The editorial accuses Lightfoot of pandering to the teachers union, citing her comment, "We are practically begging [Chicago Teachers Union] to come to the table so we can get a deal done." The paper replies: "No kidding. The district has surrendered to most union demands, which include allowing 5,000 or so employees to work from home because they have underlying health conditions. It has also spent \$100 million on personal protective equipment, disinfectants, ventilation improvements, and portable air purifiers, and it will provide regular testing and contact tracing.

"Yet now the union wants the district to let other staff work remotely if they wish and vaccinate teachers before they return to classrooms. If Chicago agrees to that, other unions would howl."

Speaking for the most right-wing sections of the ruling class, the *Journal* no doubt would prefer teaching these disobedient teachers a lesson by firing them like Ronald Reagan did to the striking air traffic controllers in 1981, stripping them of their

teaching licenses or jailing them. Any further concessions by Lightfoot, the *Journal* warns, will only encourage teachers around the country to resist the reopening of schools.

The *Journal* goes on to complain, “Large school districts in California including Los Angeles, San Francisco and Fresno have surrendered and are resisting Gov. Gavin Newsom’s exhortations to reopen.” It approvingly quotes California’s Democratic governor, who told the Association of California School Administrators last week: “If we wait for the perfect, we might as well just pack it up. If everybody has to be vaccinated, we might as well just tell people the truth: There will be no in-person instruction in the state of California.”

The editorial concludes by asserting that Biden’s position is: “If Republicans want to reopen schools in their towns, fine. But we’re not going to ask unions in big urban school districts to do so.”

If Lightfoot—who has been in constant discussions with the Biden administration—has put off a direct conflict with Chicago teachers, it is only because the Democrats realize that taking retaliatory action could provoke a powerful response not only by teachers across the country, but broader sections of the working class opposed to the deadly back-to-school and back-to-work policies.

Biden, whose wife hosted the presidents of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) for a White House meeting on the very first day of the new administration, prefers to rely on the unions to suppress resistance and force through a return to classes without a social explosion.

The two-day “cooling off” period in Chicago has been used for intense discussions on what the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) needs to sell a back-to-work deal to its members, as well as the barrage of media and CDC pronouncements about a “safe return” to wear down the resistance of teachers and parents.

The *Journal* falsely identifies the rank-and-file teachers in Chicago and around the country with the “teachers unions.” The fact is the CTU gave the green light for the “phased-in” reopening of schools on January 6 and stood by idly as Lightfoot docked the pay of teachers who refused to return and locked them out of their school computer accounts, preventing them from teaching remotely.

The CTU only called for a membership vote on collective action three weeks after, as anger and demands for strike action grew. The union has repeatedly offered to send teachers back if only Lightfoot issues worthless promises about vaccinating teachers, excuses those with health issues and establishes some type of infection threshold.

AFT President Randi Weingarten recently tweeted, “If NYC can figure out in-person learning, so can Chicago,” pointing to the treacherous deal signed by the union’s New York City affiliate with Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio to reopen the nation’s largest school district, with catastrophic results.

Democratic state and local officials, working with the unions, have been just as adamant about reopening schools as their Republican counterparts. Having handed over trillions of dollars to Wall Street and major corporations in the bipartisan CARES Act, passed last year, both parties have pushed to reopen the schools to

get the parents of schoolchildren back into factories and other workplaces to produce the profits to pay for the massive government bailout.

While offering the velvet glove of “working together” with the unions, the Democrats are reserving the iron fist of state repression against teachers if they refuse to risk their lives and those their students and communities. On Monday, the Democratic administration of Mayor Muriel Bowser filed an emergency motion against the Washington Teachers Union seeking a temporary restraining order to prevent teachers “from participating in a strike or other work stoppage” or even discussing a strike against school reopenings.

The *Wall Street Journal*, which carried several editorials and articles in the early months of the pandemic supporting the Swedish model of letting the deadly virus rip through the population without the slightest public health measures to stop it, speaks for those sections of the ruling class whose hatred towards the working class is not as veiled as those generally aligned with the Democrats. But the actions of Biden and Lightfoot demonstrate that they all agree that lives must be sacrificed for corporate profit.

For educators throughout the world, saving lives is a non-negotiable issue. That is why teachers in Chicago, New York City, Los Angeles and in many states and cities across the US and the world have formed rank-and-file safety committees, independent of the unions, to fight for schools to be kept closed until vaccines are widely available and the pandemic is contained. These committees are reaching out to workers in every industry to prepare a general strike to close schools and halt non-essential production and guarantee full income to workers and small businesses.

At the same time, vast resources must be reallocated from the government bailout of the rich and through the expropriation of the private fortunes of the pandemic profiteers to provide high-quality remote learning, assistance to parents and students, a massive expansion of the production and distribution of vaccines, and other measures needed to eradicate the pandemic and secure the livelihoods of workers.



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