

Australian teachers and students speak in solidarity with Chicago educators

The Committee for Public Education (Australia)
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Teachers and students in Australia have signalled their support for educators in Chicago, who are resisting the drive of the Biden administration and city authorities to reopen schools amid the raging COVID-19 pandemic in the United States.

The educators and pupils have not been informed of the courageous struggle of the Chicago teachers by the Australian education unions. Like their counterparts in the US, the unions function as a police force of governments and school managements, enforcing cuts to conditions and working to prevent any struggle by teachers and students against the systematic assault on public education.

The Committee for Public Education (CFPE), a group of rank-and-file teachers, school staff and academics, organised independently of the unions, has been alerting Australian educators of the stand being taken in Chicago. Below are responses from several teachers and students.

Susan, a primary school teacher in Melbourne: I want to offer my absolute support to the courageous teachers in Chicago for standing up for the safety of teachers and students. I am once again disgusted with the union's response. They are supporting the government's homicidal policy to open schools, blatantly ignoring the fact that not only are students spreading COVID-19, but some are also getting sick and dying from it. It is imperative that teachers and workers unite. Our lives cannot be seen as expendable.

The WSWS and CFPE are the only source of this important information in Australia. People need to understand this struggle as a global struggle that requires an international response. The fight for educator rank-and-file safety committees is urgent and the only way forward.

Many teachers here have warned about the role of the

Democratic Party and the teacher unions, based on similar bitter experiences in Australia.

Jack, a university student from regional Victoria: As a student and worker from Australia, I stand in support of the teachers and educators of Chicago fighting against the homicidal program of reopening schools and universities amid the out-of-control pandemic. Scientific evidence shows that schools are a major source of transmission of the virus. Your determined struggle against the Democratic Party and the Chicago Teachers Union for the safety of teachers, students and the broader public, is highly commendable and must be made known to the broader international working class.

A secondary teacher in Melbourne: The directive issued by the US Democratic Party and Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) to reopen schools in the middle of a deadly pandemic must be recognised and opposed by educators around the world. COVID-19 and its variants continue to wreak havoc globally, while politicians and health officials make decisions that put teachers, students and communities at risk. The health of ALL Chicagoans is taking second place to other corporate, financial and political interests.

Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot should be condemned by educators world-wide for her attempt to remove access to online learning platforms, placing teachers in an option-less and dangerous situation. All educators, regardless of political affiliation, should stand against this potentially deadly decision made by the US Democrats and CTU. We need to raise the volume of our collective questioning of authorities, who continue to put secondary interests above the health of the people in the midst of a global health crisis.

Martin, a retired teacher: The Chicago teachers are

literally fighting for their lives and the lives of their students. Mayor Lightfoot, the Biden administration and the Chicago Teachers Union are fighting for the “pandemic profiteers” of Wall Street and the corporate oligarchs! Rank and file teachers are on the front line of what will prove to be a decisive battle for the future of the right to a safe and beneficial education for all working-class children in the US.

That this battle takes place on the 41st anniversary of the betrayal of the PATCO air-traffic controllers’ strike of 1981 is of particular significance to me. Twelve months earlier, in August 1980, after a six-week lockout of myself and twenty-one other teachers in Australia, we were betrayed by our union in such a blatant manner as would make Judas blush! Therefore, put not one ounce of trust in the teacher unions in the US. They will betray you! Instead, form rank-and-file committees in schools, at the suburban and city-wide level. Build this strike as part of a campaign for a nation-wide general strike to defeat the pro-pandemic campaign of the merchants of death who confront you!

Steve, a retired secondary teacher from New South Wales: It is utterly astonishing that in a country where 2.7 million children have contracted COVID-19, teachers are being asked to return to work. It is even more astonishing, but not surprising, that the teachers unions are effectively supporting the government calls to return to work. Chicago teachers will soon experience the confounding negligence of their union’s inaction. Lives will be lost, morale will continue to decline and teachers will further experience the direct trauma of state neglect. Lives must be put before economics, health before hubris and ethics before efficiency.

A secondary teacher from a regional town in Queensland: Educators in the US have had to live through a lot in the last 12 months. The Chicago teachers’ current stance against the profit-before-people policies of the new Biden administration should be held on a pedestal for the working class to witness the power of workers and the need for rank-and-file committees. Their action displays the revolutionary character of the working class and brings into light the true inadequacies and contradictions of the trade unions and capitalist governments. Stick together, organise together, stay safe together, and bring about change for us all. We are with you.

Sofia, a student from Monash University in Melbourne: Chicago authorities, by their own admission, know that reopening other parts of the city would be unsafe given that there are over 2,000 new cases of coronavirus every day in Illinois. Yet they are insisting that teachers and students return to school campuses across the city. In doing so, they are attempting to force teachers to risk their own lives in the classroom, as well as the lives of their families, their students and the community around them.

We only have to look at international precedent to see the consequences. In May, Israel re-opened schools against the advice of epidemiologists. One month later, nearly 1,000 pupils and teachers had contracted the coronavirus. The US is in a far worse position than Israel was in May. Israel had fewer than 100 new daily infections on a country-wide basis, the US is now averaging more than 110,000 new cases per day.

It is inevitable that if schools return to in-person learning, cases will spread. People will die, or else may be left with long-term health effects. The situation in Chicago is more evidence that authorities do not care about the wellbeing of workers, and further reveals the heartlessness of capitalism that the pandemic has put on full display. Me and many other Australians stand on the side of teachers, that is, the side of science, students and the working class.

Rick, a retired teacher: As a former teacher I congratulate the Chicago teacher’s willingness to fight against the terrible situation that the city authorities and their co-conspirators in the union have forced on you and your community. Your strength and determination are inspiring, not just to me, but to all workers who are informed about your struggle. The union will attempt to divide and isolate you. I urge teachers to join rank-and-file committees to take control of the struggle and make connections with workers in other industries, where you will find massive support, and begin the fight for a socialist society.



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