

Vote “No” on the CTU-CPS plan to reopen Chicago schools! Saving lives is non-negotiable!

Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
8 February 2021

The Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee is holding a meeting at 7pm CST Tuesday night, Feb. 9, to discuss the TA and mobilize opposition to the deadly reopening of schools. Register now and share this link with your coworkers to build the committee!

The tentative agreement that Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) leaders reached over the weekend with Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) officials, and which the House of Delegates approved at a Monday night meeting, is an abject surrender that must be rejected.

The Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee demands an immediate extension of the all-membership voting time period for at least 48 hours, so that all CTU members have time to review and discuss the agreement.

This reopening plan is a deliberate decision to place the lives of teachers, students and their families at risk. CTU President Jesse Sharkey and the entire leadership are functioning as accomplices in a policy of social murder. They have made this decision as the death toll in the US moves towards half a million, with more infectious and more lethal variants of the virus spreading rapidly throughout the country.

The CTU leaders are not asking teachers to ratify a contract, they're asking teachers to sign their own death warrants. They have lost all credibility and forfeited any claim on the loyalty of teachers. This proposal should never have been negotiated, let alone presented to the membership for ratification.

Chicago educators have taken a stand to save the lives of our students and families, and for educators and working people across the US and internationally, and we cannot abandon the fight now.

It is absurd to think that one can negotiate with a pandemic. The fact is that a return to in-person learning will only lead to more death and tragedy.

The deal would return tens of thousands of pre-K through 8th grade students and staff to school buildings by March 8, with pre-K and special education cluster programs starting on February 11. At the all-member meeting Sunday, CTU President Jesse Sharkey said the district would not budge on its demands to return to in-person learning. He insisted a strike would be "difficult," claiming teachers would scab remotely, and that we would face legal action, including punishing fines and the further docking of pay, if we struck.

To be perfectly blunt, the CTU leadership is doing the dirty work of Mayor Lightfoot and the Biden administration, who insist that teachers imperil their lives and the lives of their students and families for one reason: to send parents back to work making profits for big

business. The truth is we have the support of millions of parents, students, educators and workers—here in Chicago, across the US and around the world—who oppose the sacrifice of human lives for corporate profits.

What is our crime? Protecting ourselves, our students, CPS families and the health of the region?

If we are threatened with lawsuits, injunctions and attacks on our jobs and pay, we can rally popular opposition from workers throughout the city and beyond. A recent study found that 85 percent of workers at food manufacturing, distribution and logistics facilities in Chicagoland say their employer either did not respond to complaints about COVID-19, retaliated against those who spoke up or refused to take any actions to improve the situation.

Across the country, teachers in Philadelphia, San Francisco, Detroit, Los Angeles and many other cities are fighting for the same thing. Educators around the world are taking a stand too. In Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazilian teachers are fighting the back-to-school orders of the Bolsonaro government, with tens of thousands of São Paulo teachers beginning a strike Monday in the largest school district in the Americas. Educators across Europe, Asia and Africa are also opposing the deadly policy.

Continuing remote learning is non-negotiable. The research is clear: closing schools is one of the two most effective mitigations, right behind canceling large gatherings. The mayor correctly told people not to gather for Super Bowl parties and in the same breath told teachers, support staff and students to gather in schools in the coming weeks.

A recent editorial in the *British Medical Journal* correctly describes the response of the world's governments to the pandemic as "social murder." Anyone who would force us back, under conditions of the spread of new and more lethal variants, is truly guilty of a crime.

The CTU does not have a mandate to send us back during the pandemic. In fact, it is just the opposite. If it had not been for our determined resistance, defying the "phased-in" back-to-work order, the CTU would have had us back in the classrooms long ago, getting sick and dying, sickening our families, with our schools spreading disease throughout the region.

The Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, formed last month, calls on teachers to defeat the CPS-CTU plan to resume in-person schooling. We must reach out to workers throughout the city, the region, the country and beyond to stand with us in solidarity and oppose any and all efforts by Lightfoot to use legal action to intimidate us.

Our fight is for the life and health of all

The novel coronavirus does not respect districts, city, state or international borders. The very nature of the pandemic demands a global strategy of mitigation to stop the spread and vaccinate the population. It requires massive investment of resources in health and medical care, household and small business support, improved remote learning, and many, many other basic needs.

But none of this is being implemented because big business and the financial markets deem the costs of saving lives unacceptable. Instead, all of human life is being subordinated to the profit interests of a tiny ruling elite.

Mayor Lightfoot, and CTU and AFT leaders, portray our fight as simply a “local” or a “Chicago” issue. Nothing could be further from the truth. This is a fight being waged by educators internationally. If we stand firm, this will encourage educators and workers across the US and world and build up the momentum for joint struggles across borders.

The implications are well understood by educators, parents and students and by many workers around the world.

The following statements of support for Chicago teachers have been issued from the global network of rank-and-file committees fighting to close schools and nonessential workplaces in order to contain the pandemic:

- Sri Lankan educators’ safety committee salutes Chicago teachers
- Pennsylvania rank-and-file committee stands with Chicago teachers
- Committee for Public Education in Australia supports the struggle of Chicago teachers
- Michigan educators call for unity with Chicago educators in fight to close schools
- New York City educators call for unity with Chicago educators in fight to close schools
- European educators support the struggle of Chicago teachers against the unsafe opening of schools

“Herd immunity,” the Democratic Party and the AFT

Last week we warned of the coming lethal compromise. We explained that the CTU, and its parent union the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), as well as the National Education Association (NEA) and its locals, are the political and organizational instruments for the imposition of a lethal compromise of our lives and communities in the interests of a rapacious ruling class whose pandemic policy has already killed more than 470,000 Americans and over 2.2 million worldwide.

The Biden administration, having been in office just a few short weeks, has already made it clear that the Democrats’ policy differs only slightly in form from that of Trump and the Republicans, but not at all in content. In Chicago, Lightfoot is leading the charge nationally to reopen schools and get parents back to work. Unlike Trump and the

Republicans, the Democrats rely on the unions to be the “velvet glove” over the iron fist, the profit motive of Wall Street and the major corporations driving the murderous herd immunity policy. A wave of official propaganda was unleashed last week to try to counteract the enormous popular support for our fight to keep learning remote until the pandemic is stamped out.

The CTU, the AFT leadership and the Democratic Party at the highest levels—in direct coordination with the Biden administration—are working to quash our struggle to stay remote just as Los Angeles officials press to reopen schools, as Philadelphia teachers refuse to return for in-person learning Monday, and as San Francisco sues its school district to force reopening of classrooms. Last week, Washington DC officials filed for a temporary restraining order to compel DC teachers to stop planning and discussion of strike action. Democratic Party governments in Baltimore and Detroit are similarly pressing for schools to reopen.

With each passing week, it grows clearer that the central function of the CTU and its parent AFT is to isolate and suppress teachers’ struggles in one area before another one erupts, so that a strike wave does not emerge and teachers and other sections of workers do not link up their fights. This is what was done in 2018 and 2019, after West Virginia and Oklahoma teachers struck in defiance of unions in those states.

The isolation and defeat of our fight to keep learning remote will result in preventable illness and deaths. We cannot let that happen and we are determined to stop it! We remain committed to delivering excellent remote instruction, which requires investment—not threats, lockouts and wage theft!

Lead the fight for life and health! Expand the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee

In direct contrast to the CTU and AFT, the Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee is the political and organizational embodiment of the social and health interests of educators and the entire community. We are scientifically informed, politically educated teachers who understand that our fight is for everyone. Therefore, we are unmoved in our determination to keep learning remote until the pandemic is under control.

Our committee, as part of a network of rank-and file-safety committees formed across the US and globally, is preparing a general strike to shut schools and nonessential industries and demand full compensation for all workers and the resources needed to vaccinate the population, address the critical social needs of students and parents, and provide high-quality remote learning until the pandemic is under control.

We encourage all educators, students, parents and all workers across Chicagoland and northwest Indiana to join us, take up these demands and promote them in your school, neighborhood and workplace.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact