

Outpouring of international support for Chicago educators' fight to save lives

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The WSWS will continue to compile and publish statements of support for Chicago educators, and we urge our readers to send your statements here.

On Monday evening, the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) House of Delegates voted by a margin of 85 percent to approve the deadly agreement reached with Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot to reopen schools in the third largest school district in the US. The tentative agreement now goes before the full membership, which has until midnight Tuesday to vote on the plan.

The deal is deeply unpopular, and the union is increasingly discredited in the eyes of rank-and-file members. In an effort to stultify teachers' opposition and browbeat them into accepting the reopening of schools, the CTU is promoting the lie that Chicago educators are isolated, and that a strike would not make a difference.

CTU President Jesse Sharkey set the tone for this abject surrender by stating Sunday, "If we reject [the deal], we look down the other path. That looks like us being locked out and going on strike. ... We should be clear there's risk down that path. It's a pandemic. It's cold. This wouldn't be an easy strike. This would be a strike in which the board would be calling people to work remotely. So, we need you to know people could cross a picket line by going home and logging onto their computer."

Seeking to bully teachers into submission, Sharkey warned, "We very likely might face legal repercussions. In which case, if the strike was declared illegal, people could not make up the pay, and the board could levy fines against both individual teachers and the union."

The opposition to this miserable sellout is being spearheaded by the Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, which is fighting to unite Chicago educators with their class brothers and sisters across district, state and national lines. In a statement published Monday, the committee noted, "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."

From Pennsylvania to Sri Lanka, Finland, China, Brazil, Germany, Australia and all around the globe, teachers, workers and youth have been galvanized by the Chicago teachers' actions. Not only are they inspired by what is happening in Chicago, but they have sent dozens of statements of support to the *World Socialist Web Site* to share with our global readership.

In a powerful expression of solidarity across state lines, on Monday evening multiple Philadelphia educators sent statements of support for Chicago educators to the WSWS after defying the dictates of the city's Democratic Mayor Jim Kenney that they return to classrooms.

Julianna wrote, "Know that we are with you and are sharing widely with our family and friends. We support you and thank you for being leaders in the fight for safe schools! We have followed your example today and moved the needle ever so slightly in the right direction for Philly students and teachers. I sincerely hope you see good results soon! We will be watching and supporting! Much love, in solidarity!"

Joan, another Philadelphia teacher, wrote, "Virtual learning allows all to remain free from the threat of COVID infection. Return to in-person learning only when it's safe." Barb commented, "We are with you and support you!" Beth wrote, "I stand with you. Thank you for all that you are doing."

Michael, a worker in New Jersey, wrote, "Thank you for standing up for the health and safety of teachers. We are behind you."

Wanda, a worker from Connecticut, stated, "I'm in full support of the Chicago teachers and families. Lives have to become more important than corporate profits. Teachers, children and staff can't be replaced within their families. During a global pandemic where 400k plus have lost their lives to a deadly virus, SAFE working conditions have to be PRIORITY!"

"In the 21st century, why is learning remotely an issue? Provide the schools with the resources and safety precautions NEEDED to ensure they're not risking their lives during this pandemic. Humanity before profits!"

A tech worker from Seattle wrote, "The Chicago teachers are taking a courageous stand to defend not just their lives and those of their students. The action of the teachers is a lightning rod that spurs the working class as a whole to mass strike action. The teachers are showing the path forward to the entire working class that to save lives, a full frontal assault on the anti-science and barely covered lies peddled by the ruling class is needed.

"Teachers face the vilest form of treachery from 'their' unions, and they must resolutely break from them. The state, the courts are not their friends, but their bitterest enemies. It is the working class—facing a catastrophe of biblical proportions—that teachers must turn to. I have every confidence that Chicago teachers will prevail."

After the initial outbreak of infections in Wuhan, China, the pandemic was quickly brought under control there through aggressive lockdowns, testing and contact tracing. A worker from Tianjin City, China, wrote to the WSWS, "Based on our experience in China there is simply no way other than keeping schools closed to protect yourselves, your students and the wider community from COVID-19.

"It's precisely because our schools and non-essential businesses were closed until the epidemic here was ended that we are now alive, healthy and able to lead normal lives."

He added, "China experienced a total of 85,000 infections and about

4,900 deaths until our epidemic ended, while the US with open schools and workplaces has 90,000 infections every three or four days, and over 3,000 deaths per day! School closures were a key reason that we survived and lived to tell the tale. Don't let the capitalist media or capitalist politicians fool you! They know how China conquered the virus. It's money, not your lives or your students, that they are concerned about."

Raimo, a worker from Finland, wrote to the WSW, "The pandemic is not under control, and schools are shown to show a role in the spread of the virus through communities. Safety, backed with science, takes precedence over 'return to normalcy.' The school staff in Chicago have my full support."

Workers spoke not only to the fact that Chicago educators have science on their side, but that going to school under these conditions will not allow students the socializing they need. A security worker at CPS schools noted, "School will now be run as a juvenile detention center. The students will not have any interaction with each other, they won't be able to casually talk and will have to line up against the wall walking down the hallway. Lunches will be in the classroom, where students must sit all day, with a window open, and they won't have any gym break. Why risk the students' lives? With remote learning, everyone is safe."

Speaking to the potential that properly funded remote learning could offer, Leonor said, "I have believed for a long time that children shouldn't be exposed to COVID and that online education should be expanded, including recreational/social interaction opportunities with other children to make up for direct contact. More resources should be allocated to schools, particularly public ones for this purpose. Our children are our future, and we must take all possible care to give them the best opportunities for their good development."

The ruling class is doing everything it can to shut down the possibility of a strike in Chicago because they are fully aware it could be the spark that sets the rest of the working class into motion.

Graeme, a government employee in Australia, commented on this crucial aspect of the Chicago struggle. "Chicago teachers are showing the way. The fight against COVID-19 is not an industrial fight, it is a political fight for the interests of the entire working class. Fight to expand the strike beyond teachers to all US workers and workers internationally. Fight for a general strike to close down the schools and non-essential production with full living wages for all displaced workers!"

Another worker, Toby, wrote, "As Frontline HEROES caring for the brains of our future, you are an inspiration to all! Stand strong, shoulder to shoulder, and know that you have worldwide worker support. Thank you for your service and gathered voices!!"

Chicago teachers have enormous support both internationally and in their own city. If the Tentative Agreement is rejected Tuesday and CPS moves to punish educators, they must proceed knowing they have the backing of the powerful working class in the third largest metro region in the US.

A Special Education Classroom Assistant (SECA) in the CPS schools wrote forcefully, "Let's fight this to the end."

Alison, a Chicago resident, pledged to lend aid directly to teachers should they strike. "I'm a Chicago resident, but I don't have children, and I have had the privilege of working remotely since the start of the pandemic. I fully support the actions teachers and workers in Chicago are taking to protect their health and safety and their lives. I was wondering if the committee would be setting up a mutual aid network in case teachers' and workers' paychecks continue to be withheld? If

so, I'd like to show my support by contributing food, supplies or such cash as I am able."

Justine, a former high school teacher, echoed the sentiments of many, reminding Chicago educators who truly holds the power. "As the foot soldiers of education, the rank and file of teachers are the elemental troops pushing corrupt officers (union leaders and politicians) out of their positions of power—so that regular teachers can then swiftly institute a sane humane policy of bringing viral load down to zero by applying the precautionary principle via remote learning.

"Rather than allowing education managers to martyr mentors and mentees alike with their measly mitigation (justified only by money), the teachers' rubric for ending endemic illness is instead the ONLY compassionate and effective means to overcome COVID-19. I applaud, toast and dance without reservation for my fellow fighters of informed action: School the system, my educated peers. This is their final test, and it is pass/fail."

Elizabeth Castillo is from Lakewood, California. "Dear Chicago teachers, I'm a registered nurse in California and urge all Chicago teachers to stand your ground and not allow the Chicago political leaders and union bosses to force you back to school during a dangerous raging pandemic.

"As a nurse who is well aware of the dangers of being infected by COVID-19, teachers will not be safe until the virus is brought completely under control and herd immunity is reached by vaccinating at least 50-90 percent of the population, including children. The Democratic Party and unions are complicit in this social murder of the working class in the name of profits, but know that nurses are with you and will stand with you in this fight. In solidarity."

Every effort must be made to broaden the struggle in Chicago throughout the US and internationally. This is the spearhead of a powerful movement in defense of lives over profits. The WSW will continue to publish statements of support for Chicago educators, and we urge our readers to send your statements here.



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