

Chicago Teachers Union keeps educators in the dark during talks to impose new sellout contract: “I can’t keep up with inflation”

Alexander Fangmann
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With just days to go before the present contract expires on June 30, the administration of Chicago mayor Brandon Johnson and the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) have kept teachers in the dark as to the real substance of the “negotiations” as they work out the best way to suppress teachers’ demands for higher wages and better working conditions.

More than anything, the CTU and Johnson hope to impose a tentative agreement on teachers well before the opening of the Democratic National Convention (DNC) on August 19. They hope to avoid at all costs the possibility of an acrimonious dispute with over 25,000 Chicago teachers in what it is already a highly politically unstable situation. Teachers are fed up with years of declining wages and working conditions, and are overwhelmingly opposed to the Israeli genocide in Gaza and its support by the Democrats, above all “Genocide Joe” Biden.

Johnson, a former CTU bureaucrat, has played a leading role in carrying out mass arrests against anti-genocide protesters and has already threatened a massive police response to protests at the DNC.

The reality is that Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is facing a deficit of \$391 million for the next fiscal year, with even higher deficits in years to come. During the campaign Johnson assured the ruling class, “There will be some tough decisions to be made when I am mayor of the city of Chicago, and there might be a point within negotiations that the Chicago Teachers Union quest and fight for more resources—we might not be able to do it. Who is better able to deliver bad news to a friend than a friend?”

Behind the veil of silence, the CPS administration is already carrying out hundreds of layoffs, which some have referred to as a “purge.”

In an interview with WTTW’s *Chicago Tonight*, CTU president Stacy Davis Gates cited Johnson being mayor as the reason for the less militant tone coming from the union. She said, “The voice that you don’t hear from the CTU is one that is confrontational because we don’t have a mayor being confrontational with us. In fact, we have the opposite. We have a mayor who’s encouraged both sides to work together to foment this transformation.”

Davis Gates refused to implicate Johnson in the layoffs, disingenuously blaming CPS CEO Pedro Martinez, despite the fact that Johnson maintains absolute control over the composition of the Board of Education. In line with long-term CTU policy of

blaming attacks on teachers and education as the product of racism, Davis Gates claimed that “he balanced the budget on the backs of Black and Brown women,” even though many of those laid off are not “Black or Brown.”

In one teachers’ Facebook group, a teacher said, “We lost one classroom teacher and two sped [special education] positions. Not to mention the TAs [teaching assistants].” Another commented, “The amount of sped positions lost is extremely concerning.” A third teacher added, “Music teacher and miscellaneous/SECA positions were cut at the school I am assigned to.”

Other teachers noted the layoffs appear to target tenured teachers and those with many years of experience. One teacher said, “I lost my position with 1 year to retirement because of budget cuts.” Asked if she could retire early, the teacher responded, “I am certified in every subject to make certain this [would] never happen to me. I can’t retire early. If I could, I would.”

One school librarian who was cut said those laying her off “blamed the budget.”

A different educator asked, “Doesn’t this happen every few years?” Another explained, “Yes, it’s a purge of the highest paid because they have been around the longest. You know, they are old, kids can’t relate to them. Get them out. Hire someone for one-third their salary. This happens every few years. THE PURGE!”

A third teacher responded, “Or we get bullied to leave with 34 years in—even if we are distinguished and love what we do. Time to push us out when the salary gets high. So move us into positions we would never want. It’s so sad.”

Even as CPS is laying off teachers, the district announced it would be bringing in new recruits through Teach for America, a program which brings in non-teachers to teach in schools at low pay after receiving just weeks of training. The teacher who posted the CPS announcement asked incredulously, “Teacher tourists? In this economy? With 600+ positions cuts less than a month ago? Seriously?”

CTU Digital Communications Specialist Nathan Goldbaum sought to palm off responsibility for this:

The TFA organization is a scam that CTU has been fighting for years. People shouldn’t look at one tweet from CPS bureaucracy and believe unfounded aspersions cast on

our union leadership. If you've been hoodwinked into thinking we aren't fighting layoffs, then take a few minutes and watch what our president said on Chicago Tonight yesterday.

The teacher who posted about the announcement responded, "Yeah, none of that [the Davis Gates interview] had anything to do with teachers being laid off and replaced by TFA teachers." She continued, "Allow layoffs, and since guest teachers are all dues-paying members, leadership isn't pressed because the money stream continues to flow. Have the teacher tourists fill those positions and soak up their dues too."

Another teacher said, "Love having those guys around while I'm under contract and laid off and can't get a call back from a school." Responding to him, another teacher said, "Just wait till the job fairs start happening. In the past they used to give them special wristbands and let them into the room ahead of the displaced teachers. And their information is supposedly sent ahead of time to principals. Because, supposedly they have to interview two displaced teachers for a position before they can make a hire. It is simply outrageous."

One teacher noted, "All this shows is that it really doesn't matter who the mayor is. Lots of dues/PAC money went to endorsing him. Teachers will continue to get mistreated. It will be interesting to see what happens with negotiations and our contract."

Aside from the outright layoffs, teachers have also lost summer school assignments many were counting on, apparently due to lower than expected enrollment. One teacher said,

I reached out to my field rep today, asking if the CTU was doing anything about the summer school mess up. Schools being given summer school classes, allotted teachers, and then being cut. Most at the last minute. He said he had not heard a lot of chatter from other members about this being a problem [facepalm]. Please reach out to your field reps and complain for all those people who were promised positions and then were cut due to the mishandling of the summer school placements. He asked me to give him a list of schools that I knew about and names of members that were displaced. If enough people complain, we may be able to get a grievance out of this.

Teachers have also been fed up with the CTU's claims about a "transformative" contract and the myriad contract proposals about "green schools" and housing, pointing to their need for raises that would address the massive inflation teachers have faced.

One teacher posted in the CTU members' Facebook group:

I'm just wondering, does anyone else have a problem with us fighting for having 'Green' schools? I haven't received a step raise in three years. I can't keep up with inflation. With how hard we work, we should not have to

get a second job in the summer to get by. This affects a lot of teachers and I haven't seen anything about this being an issue. Everything in this country has gone up, but my pay. Honestly, that should be a priority!

Another teacher responded, "Agreed. Would I like schools to be updated? Yes. Is it more important than paying my bills or feeding my family? No. Not right now."

One teacher said, "I'm not holding my breath for anything positive... been disappointed by the last 4-5 contracts. IMHO." Another responded, CPD [Chicago Police Department] got 5 percent... we should at least get that." A third said, "It will not be enough to keep up with rising property taxes, food, and fuel." A fourth added, "and rising daycare costs. My daughter's daycare went up from \$250 a week to \$325 a week."

A CTU blog post purporting to update teachers on the contract negotiations essentially admitted that, despite all the pie in the sky talk from the CTU about all the proposals and Johnson being mayor, nothing will improve for teachers. It states:

Though we have a willing partner who shares our vision and our values in City Hall, these contract negotiations won't be easy. We still have to grapple with a stubborn bureaucracy, inadequate state funding, and wealthy corporations funding Trump and the Illinois Policy Institute in order to pay fewer taxes and defund public education.

Chicago teachers face a struggle on two fronts, against the Democratic Party and the corrupt union bureaucracy, both of whom serve the interests of the ruling class. A fight for adequate raises and working conditions requires that teachers form rank-and-file committees to enforce their democratic control of their own struggle and override decisions by the union that violate their own will. These organizations will link up their struggle with the growing movement against war, and with other teachers facing massive attacks on public education.



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