

Chicago teachers: Reject the CTU sellout agreement and mobilize against Trump's war on public education!

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Chicago Public Schools (CPS) teachers must begin organizing now to reject the sellout tentative agreement (TA) the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) is bringing to members.

The proposed contract not only fails to meet the needs of teachers and students. To put it bluntly, it is not worth the paper it is written on. CTU President Stacy Davis Gates has admitted that three years of the four-year contract are not funded.

The Trump administration, with the collaboration of the Democrats, is engaged in a scorched-earth campaign against public education, looting school funding in order to enrich the financial oligarchy. These attacks are part of a turn by the capitalist class all around the world toward dictatorship, as it shreds social programs and democratic rights and prepares for world war.

The CTU's demobilization of Chicago educators only emboldens the fascist Trump administration to go further. If the ruling class gets its way, thousands more Chicago teachers will be laid off, countless schools closed, and educators and students further impoverished in the months immediately ahead.

The CTU bureaucracy is engaged in a cynical cover-up of the disastrous implications of its deal. They have promised "force fields," pretending the Trump administration's attack on public education, including significant funding cuts, will have no impact on the CPS and the new contract terms.

CTU officials are trying to force rank-and-file educators to surrender without a fight at a moment when public education and all the democratic and social rights of the working class face a mortal threat.

But teachers are furious at the attacks on the right to public education and on immigrant students and their families, who are being snatched off the street by ICE. On Saturday, over 1 million people across the country protested against the fascistic policies of the Trump administration and oligarchic rule, including tens of thousands in Chicago alone. There is a growing sense among millions that mass action is needed to stop the drive towards dictatorship and global war.

Chicago teachers can and must spearhead a counteroffensive to defend public education and democratic rights nationally. But this requires that educators seize the initiative and work to mobilize the full strength of the working class.

First, the contract must be rejected on principle later this week, since it has been brought back on false pretenses. Why should educators vote for a deal that will only pave the way to massive budget cuts and

savage new attacks?

Second, the Educators Rank-and-File Committee urges teachers to form rank-and-file committees in every Chicago school, made up of the most class-conscious, trusted and militant educators. These committees will provide teachers the means to unite with educators, and broader sections of workers throughout the region and across the US, to lay the groundwork for a political struggle to defend public education and all the democratic and social rights of the working class.

Even the contract's ostensible terms fail to meet educators' needs:

- There are no protections against furloughs and layoffs as the district faces historic budget shortfalls.

- Annual raises are capped at 4 percent in the first year and 4-5 percent thereafter, under conditions in which inflation is set to surge from Trump's tariffs.

- So-called "enforceable" class-size limits rely on a Joint Class Size Assessment Council with limited authority, prioritizing schools based on an "Opportunity Index," leaving widespread class size issues unresolved.

- Only 90 new librarians will be hired over four years, with additional training provided for 160 educators to work in libraries—still leaving hundreds of schools without libraries or proper library staff.

- The agreement's clinician workload limits promise gradual compliance with state standards by the contract's end, doing little to immediately address chronic violations of federal guidelines.

- The proposed workload plans for special education teachers remain inadequate, with the nominal protections almost certain to be ignored by administrators.

- A side letter states the 400 new teaching assistant roles "shall not be subject to the grievance process, annual projections of class size staffing needs, or any other challenge"—effectively rendering the commitment meaningless.

But the reality is that any agreement that is signed will be subject to revision or renegotiation once Mayor Brandon Johnson and school officials announce a "financial emergency." Teachers in Detroit and other cities across the country have seen their jobs, wages and benefits slashed by bankruptcy courts and financial managers installed by Democratic and Republican politicians.

School funding: Myth vs reality

The district is currently facing an estimated \$700 million shortfall, in addition to the loss of \$500 million due to President Biden cutting off pandemic emergency funding. Education Secretary Linda McMahon has even cancelled COVID-19 relief money already spent by cash-strapped districts. On top of this, the Education Department is being shut down, Trump and the Republican-controlled Congress plan to slash federal funding for low-income, disabled and English-language learners (ELL) by 25 percent or more, and free and reduced meal programs are being cut.

At the March meeting of the Illinois Education Association, Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker noted that the state “cannot replace” billions in federal education funding were it to be cut by the Trump administration. In the current school year, fully 16 percent of CPS funding came from the federal government.

Asked about the lack of funding for the life of the contract, CTU President Stacy Davis Gates told the *Sun Times*, “I’m not worried. You can hear it in my voice, I’m not worried.” It is easy for Davis Gates to say this since she does not stand to lose a penny from her combined CTU and IFT salary of more than \$270,000 a year.

It is entirely another matter for teachers facing the loss of their jobs and livelihoods and the hundreds of thousands of working-class students and parents whose underfunded and overcrowded schools will be cut to the bone, consolidated or closed.

In a Chicago teachers Facebook group, an educator asked where in the agreement “it says we won’t be furloughed.” CTU staffer Nora Flanagan admitted there was no such provision. She admitted:

There is no contract anywhere in AFT (now or previously) that makes any such guarantee. ... While the bargaining team discussed it at length at the table, there just wasn’t precedent for language on this, especially with what’s happening at the federal level.

In other words, the CTU bureaucracy is fully aware of what is coming and they are lying to rank-and-file educators when they talk about “force fields” and “Trump proofing” schools. To add insult to injury, the current proposal, like earlier agreements, gives CPS wide latitude to take “economic actions,” including layoffs, furloughs, reduction of hours and increases in class sizes, due to “lack of funds.”

But a secure job, fully funded public education, smaller class sizes, libraries and the services that meet student needs are precisely what educators want and need. If the CTU bureaucrats won’t fight for it, then the rank and file must take the control of this struggle into their own hands.

The main concern of the CTU, its parent union, the American Federation of Teachers, Mayor Johnson and the Democrats from day one has been to prevent a walkout by Chicago educators. This is not due to any lack of public support for such a struggle. On the contrary, the union bureaucracy and the Democrats fear that such a struggle would win massive support and quickly escape their control. They are far more terrified of a movement challenging the corporate and financial interests both parties defend than the prospects of a fascist dictatorship.

But such a struggle is exactly what is needed.

For a teachers strike to spearhead the fight to defend education and democracy

The overwhelming rejection of this sellout must be the beginning of a powerful counteroffensive against the Trump administration. In every school and neighborhood, educators should form rank-and-file committees to win support and prepare for a city-wide strike. But this battle cannot be limited to Chicago.

Teachers must demand the holding of mass meetings and a full accounting of the financial implications of Trump’s funding cuts, which CTU officials have already discussed with district officials and the Johnson administration behind closed doors.

Rank-and-file educators should demand not only inflation-beating wage increases but large increases in staffing, smaller class sizes and other local demands. They should add to their demands the rescinding of all Trump’s cuts to federal spending and attacks on public education. They should call for a nationwide teachers strike to defend the right to high quality public education for all young people regardless of immigration status.

At the same time, educators must champion the defense of all democratic rights, including an end to the witchhunting and deportation of immigrants, the kidnapping and detention of anti-genocide protesters like Mahmoud Khalil, Trump’s war on public health, science and culture, and the plans for world war.

In other words, Chicago educators must spearhead a political struggle against Trump, his Democratic Party enablers and the bankrupt capitalist system they defend. They must unite with the growing resistance of the working class against austerity and war spreading worldwide, from mass protests in Greece, Turkey and Argentina, to teacher strikes in Belgium, Tunisia and the Philippines.

The aim of such a movement must be the expropriation of the ill-gotten fortunes of Musk, Bezos and the other mega-billionaires and the replacement of the government of, by and for the oligarchs with a government of, by and for the working class. The hundreds of billions of dollars that are being allocated by the Trump administration and the Republican Party toward tax cuts, weapons systems, immigration enforcement and the construction of a police state must be redirected to public education, housing, healthcare and other social needs.

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