

Before releasing contract vote results, Chicago Teachers Union officials defend record of betrayal

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The Chicago Teachers Union will hold a press conference Monday morning to announce the results of the vote by 28,000 educators on the tentative agreement the CTU reached with the Chicago Public Schools.

Teachers voted last Thursday and Friday on the new four-year agreement, with ballots being counted over the weekend.

The deal between the CTU bureaucracy and the Democratic Party-controlled school district and city government fails to deliver on teachers' demands for pay raises to address rising cost of living, or on badly needed staffing and smaller class sizes.

Most critically, however, it leaves educators and students exposed to savage budget cuts being planned by district officials, which will only be worsened by Trump's massive cuts to federal funding. The district is already facing an unprecedented budget crisis and the Republican-controlled US Congress proposes cuts of 25 percent or more for low-income, disabled, English learner and other vulnerable students.

In announcing a press conference on the outcome of the vote, the CTU bureaucracy issued a press release on the supposed "transformative" character of the agreement. Officials maintained their guilty silence over the fact that the district and the city only have funding to cover the first year of the four-year deal, retroactive to July 1, 2024. Although massive cuts are inevitable, union officials have been forced to admit the deal contains no protections against layoffs, furloughs or reduction in hours.

Supporters of the Educators Rank-and-File Committee speaking with teachers and school staff across the city ahead of and during the voting heard teachers express grave concern over funding. Teachers also voiced frustration over previous agreements that were also lauded as

"transformative," only to be followed by cuts and layoffs.

Many teachers said they would vote no on the deal and expressed their determination to fight Trump's attack on public education. At the same time, they have little or no confidence that the CTU apparatus will lead any real fight. Union officials last week rejected any strike action even if workers vote down the deal.

The union's press release boasts that CTU officials have kept teachers in schools for more than 10 months since their contract expired on June 30, 2024.

After more than 11 months of bargaining, working without a contract throughout the entire school year, and for the first time in more than 15 years of doing so without a strike or strike vote, the Chicago Teachers Union announced their big bargaining team made up of rank-and-file members approved a tentative agreement with Chicago Public Schools.

Even though CTU bureaucrats prevented rank-and-file educators from using their collective power, the CTU would have them believe that the district, and the corporate and financial powers behind it, capitulated without any fight.

If accepted, [the contract] will represent a major leap forward in the transformation of a district that is still recovering from the gutting and financial irresponsibility carried out by Trump's Project 2025-style efforts under Rahm Emanuel, Arne Duncan, Paul Vallas, and other privatization forces that closed over 200 public schools between 2002 and 2018.

The deal, moreover, “builds upon the past several contracts won by CTU in 2012, 2016 and 2019,” the press release claims.

This only demonstrates the contempt the CTU bureaucracy has for the intelligence of the rank and file. If the CTU “won” struggles in 2012, 2016 and 2019, how is it possible those resulted in the district closing “over 200 public schools between 2002 and 2018?” Forty-nine of those schools were closed in 2013 alone.

In fact, the 2012, 2016 and 2019 contracts, all negotiated by the same Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE) faction that still runs the union, were miserable betrayals just like the current deal.

In 2012, teachers waged a powerful nine-day strike against Democratic Mayor Rahm Emanuel, challenging President Obama’s “Race to the Top” scheme which diverted Title I federal funding for low-income students to districts that introduced merit pay, expanded charter schools and held teachers “accountable” for educational problems caused by decades of bipartisan defunding and school privatization.

After the sellout of the strike by Karen Lewis and the CTU bureaucracy, Mayor Emanuel carried out the largest single closure of schools in US history.

In 2016, the CTU signed a last minute deal, which bowed to Emanuel’s main demand for a two-tier pension system, with new hires paying an additional seven percent of their salaries for retirement benefits.

In 2019, the CTU shut down an 11-day strike and agreed to a deal that maintained bloated class sizes, provided no additional prep time and increased out-of-pocket healthcare costs.

The strike occurred amid a two-year wave of teacher walkouts, including wildcat strikes in West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona during the first Trump administration. During the strike, CTU President Jesse Sharkey participated in a campaign ad for Joe Biden, who played a leading role in the Obama administration’s war on public education and the historic transfer of wealth to the Wall Street banks and Pentagon war machine.

In 2021 and 2022, the CTU sabotaged a powerful movement for strike action against the Biden administration’s back-to-school policy, which led to mass infection of the population with COVID-19.

This is the background to the current sellout.

In recent comments to a *Chicago Sun Times* reporter, CTU President Stacy Davis Gates said, “teachers have proved their equity in education” in three previous strikes and now “have a seat at the table” in city government. This is in reference to the April 2023 election of Democratic mayor Brandon Johnson, a former CTU lobbyist who is on leave

from the union.

During his campaign, Johnson assured the corporate and financial leaders who control Chicago, “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?”

But the Democratic mayor did not have to make any tough decisions, which would have exposed his role as a stooge of big business. Instead, Gates and the CTU bureaucracy did the dirty work for him, and, in reality, for Trump as well.

By essentially stripping educators of the right to strike—without so much as a vote—the CTU and the Democratic Party are emboldening Trump to accelerate his destruction of public education and democratic rights.

Opposition to Trump is growing everywhere. On April 5, millions in the US gathered to oppose his administration’s victimization of immigrants, repression of free speech, dismantling areas of federal government responsible for social services and public welfare, and his escalating trade war. These protests were underreported in the corporate media for fear of broad unrest in the face of an all-encompassing economic and political crisis that the ruling class wants to make working families pay for.

Teachers are well aware that Chicago is the proving ground for major policy shifts in public education. Districts across the US, from Philadelphia to Los Angeles, face the same struggles as Chicago educators do.

Rank-and file-committees of Chicago educators can lead a nationwide counter-offensive to defend the right to public education from Trump and his Democratic Party enforcers. For this, teachers need to join and expand the network of educators rank-and-file committees across the US, which are affiliated with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

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