

Chicago Teachers Union, Democrats push through 4-year deal by concealing coming cuts

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Are you a Chicago teacher? For more information on building a rank-and-file movement to fight the coming cuts and Trump's attack on public education, fill out the form at the end of this article.

The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) announced Monday morning that educators had approved the tentative agreement the union reached with school district officials and the Democratic administration of Mayor Brandon Johnson. CTU officials said 97 percent of the membership who voted approved the deal, with 85 percent participation in the vote.

CTU officials, including President Stacy Davis Gates, presented the vote as an “overwhelming” and “historic” endorsement of the deal brought by the union’s bargaining committee. A post on the union’s Facebook page boasted: “Our members approved the most popular contract in the CTU’s modern history.”

In fact, the agreement was pushed through on entirely false pretenses. It not only fails to meet teachers’ demands for substantial pay improvements to keep up with skyrocketing living expenses, increased staffing and smaller class sizes. It also leaves educators and students exposed to devastating cuts due to the budgetary crisis in the school district, the municipal government and Trump’s savage cuts to federal funding.

In fact, there is only funding for the first of the four years of the contract, which retroactively starts on June 30, 2024. These realities were deliberately concealed from rank-and-file educators by the CTU bureaucracy, the Johnson administration and the corporate news media—with CTU officials peddling the lie that the agreement would “Trump-proof” the district.

Among rank-and-file educators there was, and continues to be, widespread concern over the lack of funding and Trump’s drive to destroy public education.

CTU’s betrayals

The ratification vote was not a ringing endorsement of the deal, which is widely seen as completely inadequate. Instead, large sections of educators knew the CTU leaders would not fight for anything more, let alone lead a serious struggle against Trump.

From the beginning of the negotiating process, Gates and other officials refused to call a strike by the 28,000 members. Instead, they kept teachers on the job for 10 months without a contract and told

them that even if they rejected the contract, the union would not call a strike.

As the *Chicago Sun Times* noted approvingly, “There wasn’t a serious threat of a labor stoppage this time—and the CTU had a friendly mayor in office in Brandon Johnson,” himself a former CTU official on leave from the union. Johnson is notorious for his role in arresting anti-genocide protesters, including outside last year’s *Labor Notes* convention, where he was a main speaker.

Gates congratulated teachers for “their robust participation in our union’s democratic process,” declaring that the members had “voted on everything.” For the first time in 15 years, however, the CTU bureaucrats did not even hold a strike authorization vote, so afraid they were of encouraging the militancy of educators. Nor did the members vote to give up their right to strike. Instead, the CTU officials, working with Johnson, stripped the rank and file of that right, imposing a de facto strike ban on them.

Addressing those teachers who voted against the deal, Gates said, “The minority of people haven’t seen the results yet.” In 2019, she admitted, union officials agreed to a deal “without the class size limits we wanted” and “increased preparation time for our members in elementary schools.” But those issues were “platformed in this negotiation and we’ve gotten further,” she claimed, adding, “Transformation comes in waves.”

Gates mused on when the Civil Rights movement began decades after the Civil War and how long it took to achieve its aims. She said:

So, I’m saying all this to say, that all of this is cumulative and that if we didn’t get you the first time, we’re going to see about getting you the second time and continuing to build. So, I would tell them [unsatisfied teachers], give us a few more years.

The irony of telling teachers to “wait” in the context of the history of the Civil Rights movement must have escaped Gates. It was Martin Luther King, Jr., after all, who wrote in his 1963 Letter from a Birmingham Jail, “This ‘Wait’ has almost always meant ‘Never.’”

The contract will resolve nothing. It will soon be followed by demands for layoffs, school closures and program cuts due to the \$700 million-plus school deficit, which will only be increased due to proposed Republican cuts of 25 percent or more in aid to low-income, disabled and English learner students, along with cuts to free and

reduced school meals. Illinois is set to lose pre-school funding for 28,000 children due cuts in the Head Start program, according to a recent report.

Green light for Trump

The demobilization of educators by the CTU bureaucracy and the Democrats will only embolden the Trump administration. A strike by 28,000 educators in one of America's largest school districts would be a catalyst for educators in Philadelphia, New York City, Los Angeles and across the country to conduct a counteroffensive to defend the right to high quality public education.

But that is the last thing the Democratic Party wants. It fears nothing more than the mobilization of the working class against Trump because it could quickly escape their control and threaten the interests of the same corporate and financial oligarchy that the Democrats themselves defend.

Asked by a reporter if she was concerned with the impact of Trump's cuts, Gates responded with utter complacency. "I'm not worried. Let me tell you why I'm not worried. What DOGE and Elon Musk are doing to America is what Paul Vallas, Arnie Duncan and Rahm Emanuel already did in Chicago," she said, referring to district CEOs and the Chicago mayor, who implemented pro-business "school reforms" championed by the Clinton and Obama administrations.

Gates said:

Everything that we've been fighting—school closings, the privatization of schools—all those things we've survived, and this contract is a testament to the resilience, the leadership of this organization and the clarity of the people who are going to have to help push back and resist this moment.

She continued by promoting Johnson and other city government officials who have been provided a "left" cover by the Democratic Socialists of America.

Gates said:

So, I'm not worried about it, because Jitu Brown is on the school board, and he did that work already. I'm not worried about it because Brandon Johnson is on the 5th floor [mayor's office], and he did that work already. I'm not worried about it because Jeanette Taylor is in the City Council, and she's done that work already. See, we have set ourselves up for this moment ... and [our] assignment is to teach America how we fought DOGE and Arnie Duncan and Rahm Emanuel and Paul Vallas.

Such statements should be taken as a warning to educators in Chicago and across the country looking to fight Trump's historic attack on public education and democratic rights.

First, the CTU bureaucracy has sold out every struggle by educators for decades, including those against Vallas, Duncan and Emanuel, not

to mention Clinton, Obama and Biden. The results have been mass school closures and layoffs, the forced return of teachers and students into COVID-infected classrooms, and decades of eroding teaching and learning conditions.

Second, Trump is not just a replay of fights against Vallas, Duncan and Emanuel, as reactionary as these Democratic Party school privatizers were. Although such figures paved the way for Trump's attacks on public education and democratic rights, the current White House occupant is a fascist, who plans to destroy public education, illegalize all forms of opposition and establish a dictatorship.

Just a few minutes earlier, Gates had admitted this, pointing to a "world that is moving quickly to fascism." But the answer she gives to this is not the mobilization of the working class against the imminent danger but promotion of Johnson and other DSA-backed figures in city government as saviors of public education and democracy, along with supposedly anti-Trump billionaires, such as Illinois Democratic Governor JB Pritzker.

Gates declared:

Rich people who are not Donald Trump or Elon Musk are not our enemies. Only the ones who give them money and vote for them. We believe in coalition work.

Educators in Chicago and around the country must draw sharp lessons from the experience with the pseudo-left CORE (Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators) faction that has run the CTU for more than a decade. All its rhetoric about "social justice unionism" has been used to block any independent struggle against the Democratic Party and the capitalist system it defends. Long pursuing its treasured "seat at the table," the CTU bureaucracy has been elevated into the mayor's office and put in charge of imposing Trump's savage austerity measures.

While the CTU bureaucracy has been increasingly discredited by these betrayals, it is necessary for educators to free themselves of the union apparatus, its pro-Democratic Party politics and subordination to the profit system. Instead, educators should build new organizations of struggle, rank-and-file committees, in every school to prepare the coming struggles in defense of jobs and public education.

This fight is inseparable from a struggle against the capitalist system, the expropriation of the oligarchs, and socialism. Only in this way can social resources can be redirected to end poverty, raise the educational and cultural level of the population and establish social equality.

For more information on building rank-and-file committees, fill out the form below.



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