

Pseudo-left promotes CTU sellout contract as Democrats prepare austerity measures

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The recent leadership elections in the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) have revealed the union bureaucracy's deepening crisis of authority as its latest sellout contract paves the way for increased attacks on teachers, including hundreds of layoffs being prepared with more school closures on the horizon.

The ruling Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE), led by President Stacy Davis Gates and Vice President Jackson Potter, was reelected with just 64 percent of the vote—a revealing outcome that means roughly one in three teachers who voted rejected the sitting leadership.

The substantial oppositional vote was all the more significant given the all-out campaign by large sections of the media and political establishment, including the Democratic Socialists of America and other pseudo-left organizations, to portray the CTU leadership as "left-wing" and "militant" and its sellout contract as "transformative."

In addition, the CTU elections were carried out with minimal transparency, an apparently low turnout, and barriers to participation that effectively disenfranchised many rank-and-file teachers who could have voted against the CORE leadership.

The voting was held on a single school day for just a few hours and reportedly ended in the early afternoon while teachers were still on duty—a timeframe that excluded many teachers who could not arrive early due to childcare and other family responsibilities, not to mention any teachers who were delayed.

In a Facebook group for CTU members, numerous educators reported not getting a chance to vote. Some called for electronic voting in future elections. President Davis Gates dismissed such calls, claiming that turnout in electronic pension board elections had been low.

The truth is that CORE was elected by the bureaucracy not the rank and file. The low-turnout election was tailored to the needs of a privileged social layer in and around the union apparatus whose chief concern is its own institutional survival.

That is why, in the aftermath of ratification of the CTU's sellout contract, a coalition of pseudo-left organizations, liberal journalists and union bureaucrats rushed to fortify the position of the union leadership in the media. They presented the new four-year labor agreement as the "most comprehensive" in history, repeating the union's ludicrous claim that it would serve as a "force field" protecting schools from Trump's looming attacks on education budgets and other fascistic attacks. The efforts of the CTU bureaucracy and the Democratic administration of Mayor Brandon Johnson are aimed at suppressing the growing anger among educators and tying the working class ever more tightly to the Democratic Party's political apparatus.

In a cynical display, CTU Vice President Jackson Potter boasted that the new contract was the "best teachers contract ever," achieved "without a strike or even a strike vote." Among its supposed triumphs, he claimed,

were record pay increases, smaller class sizes and unprecedented contractual protections against the Trump administration's right-wing attacks.

These are outright fabrications. With funding secured for only one year out of the four-year deal, educators across the city are facing hundreds of looming layoffs. Class sizes will remain bloated. The "historic" pay raises have already been outpaced by years of inflation. Just days after the contract was ratified, Mayor Johnson floated devastating cuts to staffing, student services and transportation, saying "the situation had changed," referring to the budget crisis.

This is not a "force field." It is a smokescreen.

Potter claims:

The contract is more comprehensive and includes the biggest raises and step increases, since the advent of collective bargaining for Chicago teachers in 1967.

But real wages for educators will remain below pre-pandemic levels, and the growing threat of mass layoffs means these "increases" will be obtained by fewer teachers, working under more exploitative conditions.

Just as fraudulent is the claim that the contract "protects" schools from Trump. *In These Times* and other mouthpieces of the pseudo-left hail the contract for including "sanctuary language," academic freedom provisions and anti-censorship clauses.

In These Times' Kari Lydersen wrote:

The four-year contract represents a direct rebuke to the Trump administration's attacks on academic freedom and immigrants, enshrining protections that the union began fighting for months before President Trump was elected. The agreement is also a prime example of the labor strategy of bargaining for the ?"common good..."

Lydersen's article goes on to claim the contract will defend immigrant students and educators' right to teach "antiracist" curriculum—even as the federal government prepares massive cuts to Title I and IDEA funding, and the far right moves to ban entire subjects from public education.

The reality is that no contract clause will stop ICE from storming schools, nor will it block the courts or Republican state legislatures from outlawing curricula. The idea that the CTU can simply negotiate away fascism is not only a delusion—it is a political cover for inaction and submission.

These illusions are being deliberately fostered by those who are

politically responsible for the attacks now underway. The same forces promoting the contract—Democratic Socialists of America, *Labor Notes*, *In These Times*—have for years glorified the CTU as a model of “social justice unionism.” They have also played a central role in the elevation and defense of United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain and Teamsters President Sean O’Brien, both of whom now openly align themselves with Donald Trump and the trade union bureaucracy’s nationalist, pro-capitalist agenda.

This fraud—the idea that class antagonisms can be reconciled through “progressive unionism”—is being torn apart by the reality of Trump’s impending austerity, which will be enforced with the full collaboration of the Democratic Party if allowed to do so.

What did the CTU leadership over the last decade produce? Mass school closures. Rampant privatization. The spread of charters. Every “victory” celebrated by the CTU leadership ended in a deeper compromise, a worse betrayal, a more cynical sellout. These were not defeats for the CTU bureaucracy—They were the logical outcome of a union leadership that has always sought not to challenge capitalism but to try to manage it.

Seat at the table

The CTU’s main project over the last decade has been to gain “a seat at the table” where austerity is being planned and imposed. The mayoral campaign of former CTU lobbyist Johnson—funded, staffed and organized by CTU and its parent union the American Federation of Teachers—was the culmination of this effort. Now, with layoffs imminent, services slashed, and class sizes barely contained, educators are being told this contract is “transformative” because it reflects years of “community-labor collaboration.”

CTU President Davis Gates admitted the contract “still lacks so much more that we need.” She calls it an “inflection point.” She is right but not in the way she means. It is a point of inflection downward, a sharp turning point in the deepening integration of the union bureaucracy with the capitalist state.

The political bankruptcy of the CTU was revealed in the recent statement by Davis Gates on Trump’s attacks on public education via the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). Rather than sounding the alarm about the unprecedented threats posed to tens of thousands of educators and millions of students across the country, Davis Gates responded with complacency and self-congratulation.

She declared:

DOGE already happened in Chicago. Our public school system was ravaged by the types of policies that are being implemented at the federal level right now. ... We’ve survived all of that. This contract is a testament to that survival.

This is a grotesque distortion of history and a political cover for the CTU’s collaboration at every stage of the capitalist assault on public education. The destruction Davis Gates recounts—the mass firings of educators, the mass closure of schools under Rahm Emanuel, the gutting of seniority and tenure protections—was not prevented by the CTU bureaucracy but facilitated by it. The union’s response was never to mobilize its members against these attacks, let alone call for a general strike of city workers or a break from the Democratic Party that led those attacks but to form “coalitions” with the very forces responsible for the

devastation, including the Democratic mayors, corporate-funded NGOs and a rotating cast of self-appointed “community leaders” tied to the Democratic Party establishment.

What Davis Gates celebrates as “survival” is, in fact, the securing of the union apparatus’ institutional and financial interests, and it traded away jobs, schools and wages of educators in exchange for political influence and access to the halls of power. The so-called “expansion of democracy” is a fraud: It means the integration of the union apparatus into the political machinery of austerity, not the political empowerment of working class educators.

Even now, with Title I and IDEA funding on the chopping block and thousands of layoffs looming in Chicago, Davis Gates does not call for a fight but urges organizers elsewhere to follow the CTU’s path of “resistance” by accommodation and retreat. The reality is that Chicago has not been a bulwark against the attacks on public education. It has been a test site for implementing these attacks under the guise of progressive politics with the CTU functioning as its key partner.

The deeper significance of the identity politics promoted by the CTU and its allies lies here. While Trump’s right-wing attacks on academic freedom and school curriculum must be opposed, the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and other identity politics-based programs hailed by the CTU are aimed at dividing the working class along racial lines and disarming it in the face of Trump’s attacks. Such politics articulate the social interests not of working class but an upper middle class layer, who use race and gender issues to gain positions in the corporate and political establishment.

Thus, the CTU and its pseudo-left apologists celebrate the “victory” of secure DEI language in the contract but are silent on the devastating job cuts, school closures and other attacks which will follow this sellout. These token clauses are meant not to protect students and educators but to offer a “moral” justification for disarming opposition to the Democratic Party’s austerity agenda.

The function of identity politics in this moment is to dress up betrayal in the language of “social justice.” It is used to block the mobilization of educators and workers as a class—to stop them from recognizing that their interests are irreconcilably opposed to those of the Democratic Party, including its so-called “progressive” wing.

In reality, these forces are hostile to any independent mobilization of the working class. They fear that such a movement would break through their ideological stranglehold and reveal the naked class content of their politics.

That is why the WSW’s analysis is being vindicated in real time. Within weeks of ratifying the contract, CPS (Chicago Public Schools) announced potential layoffs of over 1,600 staff members. The mayor has convened a “working group” of business and labor leaders to recommend budget cuts across the city. And Trump’s sweeping federal education cuts have yet to even take full effect.

CTU officials hail the new pope

Perhaps nothing more grotesquely reveals the political bankruptcy of the Chicago Teachers Union than its official statement on the selection of the new pope, Cardinal Robert Prevost, a Chicago native elevated to the papacy as Pope Leo XIV. In a fawning declaration, the CTU hailed the pope as a product of “Chicago’s working-class spirit,” comparing him to Leo XIII, the so-called “Pope of workers,” and celebrating his South Side roots as a kind of sacrament of social justice.

The statement is drenched in moralistic platitudes about “dignity,” “service,” and “everyday people,” wrapping the CTU’s alliance with

corporate-backed politicians like Mayor Johnson and their austerity agenda in the incense smoke of religious piety. The union speaks as if the elevation of a new pope is an event of revolutionary importance for workers, writing: “Pope Leo XIV’s election offers an opportunity to recenter the world on the lived realities of educators, service workers, and public servants.”

This is a theological expression of class collaboration. Rather than exposing the role of the Catholic Church as a bulwark of capitalist ideology and imperialist oppression—an institution dripping in wealth and complicit in centuries of repression—the CTU celebrates it as a moral ally of labor. This is a deliberate effort to redirect teachers’ attention away from the need for struggle and toward appeals for spiritual guidance and reformist consolation.

What the CTU praises in Pope Leo XIII—whose 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* defended private property and denounced socialism—is precisely what they aspire to replicate: a “labor movement” subordinated to the state and the church, one that channels discontent into harmless petitions for fairer treatment under capitalism. The legacy of *Rerum Novarum* was not workers’ liberation but the institutionalization of pro-capitalist “social Catholicism,” and the CTU seeks a similar role for itself today: to moralize and contain the anger of workers as conditions deteriorate.

Moreover, the CTU’s use of the pope’s personal identity—his being a dual citizen, born at a now-defunded hospital, raised by a librarian and educator—as a stand-in for a political characterization is emblematic of the function of identity politics in general. It substitutes biography for analysis, and personal virtue for class struggle. The implication is that Pope Leo’s Chicago roots will somehow translate into progressive policy, in the same way they claimed Brandon Johnson’s CTU background would translate into a pro-worker administration. The results of that illusion are already plain: layoffs, increased attacks on immigrants, budget cuts and even more school closures on the horizon.

This is a symptom of the entire ideological framework of the CTU bureaucracy and its allies on the pseudo-left. While they trade in radical phrases about “equity” and “justice,” they consistently work to divide, disarm and demobilize the working class.

To defend education and public services, what is needed is not a blessing from above but a rebellion from below. Teachers, workers and youth must reject the religious mysticism and “social justice” cover offered by the CTU and its political allies. The fight for dignity and equality cannot be won through appeals to popes or Democratic mayors, but only through a mass, international movement of the working class against capitalism itself.

To defend public education, educators must organize independently of the CTU bureaucracy and the Democratic Party. Rank-and-file committees must be formed in every school and neighborhood—not to petition the powers-that-be but to fight all layoffs, school closures and budget cuts. These committees will unite Chicago educators with their counterparts in New York City, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, San Francisco and other districts where teachers are facing massive budgets cuts or upcoming contract battles. What is needed is an industrial and political counteroffensive to defend the right to high-quality public education against Trump’s drive to destroy public schooling.

Such a struggle must unite educators and the broader working class, transit workers, city workers, immigrant communities, youth and students, in a common fight against capitalist austerity, repression and war. It must be guided not by the bankrupt framework of capitalist “lesser evilism” but by the fight for socialism and workers’ power.

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