

Chicago teachers docked pay, CTU still collects dues

Kristina Betinis
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Since the end of their 10-day strike last month, Chicago teachers and other education workers are reporting reduced paychecks and worse conditions in the schools. Some teachers received no pay at all. Yet the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), which did not extend strike benefits to the teachers, is still deducting full dues from their paychecks, teachers have told the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Last week Chicago public school teachers ratified a concessions contract pushed by CTU officials. According to the CTU, 79 percent of teachers who participated in the ballot voted in favor of the contract.

Union officials, who are closely linked to the Democratic Party—which dominates city hall and the public school administration— had argued that the concessions deal was the best possible, in spite of strong support for the strike among teachers and in Chicago’s working class.

The new contract gives principals the right to hire and fire teachers, makes standardized testing a significant component of teacher evaluation, and extends the length of the school day without any additional compensation for teachers.

On October 5, payday, teachers were issued shorted paychecks. Many teachers got little or no pay. Even so, the CTU still deducted full dues. The same day the union issued a statement to teachers:

“CTU members who took part in this year’s inspiring strike will pay a temporary penalty this week, as their paychecks will be significantly smaller and may even be reduced to no pay for the current pay period. However, as members know, the new CPS calendar disrupts student and educator plans for the year in order to make up all the extra days that Mayor Emanuel vowed to pile on in extending the school year. **CTU members will eventually receive their entire yearly**

salary [emphasis in the original]. For now, however, they will continue their sacrifice in defense of quality public education, as they draw from the savings they set aside in preparation for the strike.

“Those CTU members who find CPS’ payroll policy has thrown them into temporary financial turmoil may be eligible to receive personal loans on an expedited basis from the United Credit Union.”

During the strike, teachers were not offered strike pay from the CTU’s parent union, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Instead they were offered low-interest loans. The CTU is pushing loans once again for teachers who have received smaller checks or no pay at all.

While it extended no money to Chicago teachers who were making a courageous stand for public education, the AFT and its rival, the National Education Association (NEA), are funneling tens of millions of dollars to the Democratic Party. Last year, before the current election cycle, the AFT spent \$31 million on electoral campaigns, with the lion’s share going to Democratic politicians.

Democrats, no less than Republicans, seek the conversion of the public school system into a class-based system of education. In Chicago the attack is orchestrated from the office of Mayor Rahm Emanuel, one of Barack Obama’s closest advisers. At the national level, Obama’s “Race to the Top” initiative, spearheaded by former Chicago Public Schools CEO Arne Duncan, pits school districts and states against each other for scant funding. The program rewards those who go the furthest in instituting charter schools and tearing up work rules for teachers.

Several teachers spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* about having their pay docked, as well as the conditions they confront back at work since the

conclusion of the strike. They spoke of insufficient support staff, overcrowded classrooms, and the burden of the longer school day.

A special education teacher, Katie, was surprised that her pay was docked so severely. “If your salary is low enough that your deductions from insurance and dues is equal to it,” she said, “then you didn’t get paid for the work you did last week.”

Natasha, also a special education teacher, said, “They did tell us about it, but they still took out full union dues. That I don’t understand at all. It’s a lot.”

Katie also commented on the mood back at work: “We [teachers] do talk, but it was a shock to the system being back at work after the strike, like it’s just business as usual. A lot of us didn’t want to go back.”

Teachers expressed concern that some tragedy will occur and it will be through that that parents and the community at large will become aware of the conditions in the schools.

Natasha said, “If parents knew what it was like in schools, and got out into the streets, things might change. Parents don’t know that there isn’t a nurse at the school, unless or until something goes wrong. Certain clerks or teachers get a certification, and then they’re the one person that the kids go to for their shots and asthma. It’s going to get worse, so something is bound to happen. It could get crazy.”

Natasha described the classroom conditions at her school, which is newer and better funded than the schools where she’s worked at in the past, “Our school is considered a model. They have other teachers come in and observe our instruction. I have between 24 and 28 students in my room. Legally, I should only have 8 without an aide, and 13 with an aide. If I have two aides, I should still have no more than 13.”

“CPS says special education teachers don’t have high expectations. I spent \$7,000 last year on my classroom. I’ve spent over \$2,000 already this year. Every [special ed] teacher does this for math curriculum, science supplies and art supplies, because all the funding goes to the general education students.”

All the teachers speaking to the WSWS mentioned the difficulties imposed by the longer school day and year.

Katie said, “Teachers, especially parents, are really struggling with the longer school day and longer school year. Their family plans are messed up. They’re not

able to get home when their kids do, and they have to find care for them. Then, when teachers don’t get done until four, they don’t have time to prep.”

She continued, “I don’t know how long the longer school day will continue to be tolerated. They’re having a real hard time with their families.”

An English teacher in the Logan Square neighborhood said he noticed that the longer day was negatively affecting student attendance at his school. “I have had students miss school, due to the longer school day,” he said. “Parents who are teachers can’t get home as they once did, older kids are watching the younger ones, more so now than last year.”

He also expressed his disappointment in the conduct of the strike, “It was really unfortunate. I thought the union leadership was going to fight for us.”

Prior to the strike, the CTU concluded an interim agreement with the school board, conceding to Emanuel’s demand for a longer school day.



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