

CTU calls phony one-day “strike” to back Democrats

Kristina Betinis
1 April 2016

Chicago teachers are at a crossroads in the struggle to defend their livelihoods and the right to a quality public education.

Nearly four years after the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) betrayed the 2012 strike, the Emanuel administration is stepping up its attack on the jobs, health care and pensions of educators and pressing ahead with its corporate-backed “school reform” agenda. This is part of the assault on public education being spearheaded nationally by the Obama administration and both big business parties.

Now with the utmost cynicism the CTU and its leaders, Karen Lewis and Jesse Sharkey, are organizing a phony one-day “walkout.” This is not designed to mobilize teachers and their supporters to defend public education. Instead, this stunt—appropriately called on April Fools’ Day—is aimed at promoting the lie that Emanuel and the Democrats can be relied on to secure funding for education and social services in Illinois.

In the guise of fighting Republican Governor Bruce Rauner and demanding more revenue from Springfield, the CTU is in a de facto alliance with the very same forces that have shut scores of schools, laid off thousands of teachers and expanded for-profit charter schools. Lewis has gone so far as to ask Chicago Public Schools executives to join the CTU to “demand more revenue” from Rauner. Meanwhile, CPS CEO Forrest Claypool has threatened to take punitive action against teachers for an “illegal strike.”

Rank-and-file teachers are rightly suspicious of this action. Many have taken to social media to air their opposition, declaring that such a charade will not accomplish anything except getting teachers victimized. Others have been alienated by the pseudo-left politics of the CTU, including the promotion of the Black Lives Matter movement, which seeks to divide

teachers along racial lines, as its leaders pursue positions in the political establishment.

In order to force teachers to buy into this, Lewis, Sharkey & Co. are resorting to threats and bullying. Anyone who refuses to take part in this stunt, they have warned, could be charged with “strikebreaking” under the CTU constitution, stripped of the right to vote on the contract and forced to pay a fine to be reinstated in the union.

But why should anyone support this fraud? The real strikebreakers and scabs are not the teachers but the CTU leadership. For 10 months, they have blocked any real struggle by teachers, despite an overwhelming strike vote. In January, the CTU bureaucrats cut a deal behind teachers' backs to giveback on pensions and impose a de facto seven percent pay cut. They were only stopped from imposing this sellout—which Lewis called a “serious offer” with “enforceable protections of education quality and job security”—because rank-and-file teachers got a hold of the details of the deal and circulated them on social media. Facing a certain rebellion by teachers, the big bargaining team felt it was impossible to approve it.

After being exposed as front men for Emanuel and Claypool and still facing determined opposition, the CTU has called today’s sham protest. Behind the scenes, the CTU continues to negotiate with Emanuel to impose a new round of concessions, with Sharkey declaring that “everything” including pension pickup “is on the table.”

The CTU is not opposed to the further destruction of public education. Its sole concern is getting a share of the spoils in order to defend the income and institutional interests of the union apparatus. This includes expanding the franchise into the charter schools so the CTU can secure new sources of revenue,

even as public school teachers lose their jobs and pensions.

The differences between the Democrats and Republicans are entirely tactical. While the Republicans generally try to circumvent the unions to attack the working class, the Democrats understand the need to maintain the unions to suppress popular opposition to austerity and the diversion of public assets into the hands of the banks and corporations.

Allied with the Democratic Party, the CTU peddles the lie that there is no money for public education, even as the Obama administration funnels trillions to Wall Street and the Pentagon war machine.

There is a growing movement of teachers and students to defend the right to public education. Late last year, Detroit teachers organized sickouts to oppose deplorable school conditions and to demand the restorations of pay cuts and other concessions accepted by the Detroit Federation of Teachers. Teachers in the Los Angeles area also conducted sickouts and students have walked out in Boston, Chicago and Detroit to defend their teachers and oppose school cuts.

This is part of a growing resistance of workers throughout the United States and internationally to austerity. Eight years after the financial crash of 2008, which led to a historic transfer of wealth from the bottom to the criminals at the top who created the catastrophe, there is growing anti-capitalist sentiment among workers and youth, and a determination to fight.

This opposition, however, must be organized and guided by a new political strategy. The last four years have demonstrated without a doubt that the CTU does not speak for teachers but is a tool of the Emanuel administration and the worst enemies of public education. The entry into the CTU leadership of Jesse Sharkey, a leading member of the International Socialist Organization, and other pseudo-left figures from the CORE faction has not changed the anti-working class character of the CTU one iota. Moreover every one of the unions involved in the “walkout” has overseen deep cuts to the pay and benefits of its members.

The Socialist Equality Party calls on teachers to organize rank-and-file committees, independent of the CTU, to prepare a real struggle. These new forms of self-representation must be democratically controlled by teachers themselves and dedicated to the methods of

the class struggle, not class collaboration. Such committees must appeal to the broadest sections of parents, students and working class residents of Chicago and other cities to prepare a counter-offensive to defend public education.

Above all workers must organize themselves as an independent political force and break from the Democratic Party. Whoever wins the Democratic presidential nomination, Clinton or the self-proclaimed “democratic socialist” Bernie Sanders, will only escalate the attack on public education. That is why the fight to defend public education requires the political mobilization of the working class, of every race and nationality, in a common struggle to take the reins of political power into our own hands. Only in this way can the dictatorship of the corporate and financial elite be broken, the ill-gotten gains of the super-rich be seized, and the economy reorganized along socialist lines to provide the trillions of dollars needed to vastly improve public education and guarantee a future free of poverty, inequality and war for the next generation.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact