

Chicago Teachers Union preparing the betrayal of teachers' strike

A WSWS reporting team
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Classes remain canceled on Wednesday, the 10th day of the strike of about 25,000 teachers in Chicago, the third-largest school district in the US.

The central issues in the strike for teachers are significantly reducing class sizes and substantially increasing staffing at all levels to relieve overwork and overcrowding. Conditions in the schools have reached a crisis point, with classrooms of upwards of 45 children, crumbling and filthy buildings, and lack of basic resources.

The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) House of Delegates met at CTU Headquarters Tuesday evening to hear an update on negotiations with Chicago Public Schools (CPS). The delegates meeting was called after CTU President Jesse Sharkey met with Mayor Lori Lightfoot for 45 minutes Tuesday afternoon. Despite conflicting press reports, no tentative agreement was announced at the meeting, though the CTU is clearly preparing to announce a sellout agreement as early as today.

At an evening press conference, CTU Vice President Stacy Davis Gates said, "The things that were discussed at the table are not concretely on paper." Sharkey added, "If we can achieve a tentative agreement [Wednesday] morning, we would bring our delegates in in the afternoon."

CPS released a one-page summary of a five-year tentative agreement on Tuesday night that fails to commit to even the most basic demands of teachers. The city offers paltry staffing increases of 250 nurses and 209 social workers over five years. No class size limits are indicated. Instead, the lowering of class sizes is to be "phased in," in partnership with the CTU.

These are promises teachers have heard before. CPS is also offering a 16 percent pay increase over five years, which has been repeatedly used by CPS and the

corporate media to try to portray the teachers as "greedy" and discredit their fight for the most basic resources in schools.

The Democratic leadership in Chicago is staking out an aggressive position, imposing austerity that has been its policy for decades. While insisting there is no more than \$500 million for schools before and during the teachers strike, Lightfoot's 2020 budget proposal increases spending for police by 7 percent, or \$100 million.

Lightfoot and CPS are giving the CTU nothing that they can try to sell to teachers to force through an agreement. This is why the CTU has not moved to shut down the strike quickly, as it pledged to do before it began.

The Democratic administration is applying financial pressure to teachers to try to force an end to the strike. On November 1, teachers may lose their health insurance for the duration of the strike and be shifted onto the federal COBRA insurance, known for its high cost.

For its part, the CTU is not paying teachers any strike pay, contributing to the financial pressure on educators to end the strike.

According to the CTU, the negotiations have come down to three issues: additional elementary school teacher preparation time, and two items of legislation, one for an elected school board and another for expanding the number of issues that the union can bargain over.

Even if these demands were met, they would do nothing to resolve the basic issues teachers are striking over.

Over the weekend, the CTU declared that it was only \$38 million away from striking a deal with CPS. The school board claims that the CTU's demands are closer

to \$100 million. Both figures are grossly inadequate to fund the city's public schools, amounting to less than one-half of a percent of the school district's \$7.7 billion operating budget.

As vice president of the CTU during the 2012 Chicago teachers strike, Sharkey was instrumental in negotiating the concessions deal with then Mayor Rahm Emanuel that eroded tenure and enforced standardized testing for teacher evaluations. The shutdown of the strike paved the way for the closure of 49 public schools, thousands of teacher layoffs and the expansion of several networks of privately run charter schools.

The CTU has engaged in political theatre throughout the strike, posturing as an opponent of Lightfoot's proposals while simultaneously working out a deal with the mayor.

Teachers and school staff face the threat of a repeat of the 2012 betrayal, in which they will be forced to swallow a concessions contract branded as a "victory" without adequate time to read and discuss it before voting.

To defend public education, teachers must expand the strike and break through the isolation imposed by CTU, which is aimed at pressuring teachers to accept the concessions demanded by CPS.

Teachers are determined to fight back against any concessions that the city attempts to impose with the aid of the CTU.

One teacher outside of the House of Delegates meeting told the *World Socialist Web Site* Teachers Newsletter: "I am willing to fight for as long as it takes. I definitely think this strike needs to be expanded. The whole city should be on strike."

Addressing the CTU's betrayal of the 2012 teachers' strike, the teacher continued: "It did nothing. Today we're fighting for the same things we were fighting for then."

Several thousand teachers, students and supporters marched in the city early Tuesday morning, targeting the city's planned Lincoln Yards development, a former industrial corridor that the city has committed public funds to transform into a luxury business district. Nine teachers were arrested occupying a lobby of a company receiving public funds for private development. They were later released.

The WSWS calls on teachers and school staff to vote

"no" to any concessions contract imposed by the CTU and to take the initiative for their struggle into their own hands by forming rank-and-file committees to discuss and democratically decide on their own demands.

These committees must link up with hotel workers, logistics workers, autoworkers, and others across the city to prepare for a general strike and expand the fight to defend the right of public education to the working class worldwide in a global offense against the capitalist system.



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