

Mounting opposition from Chicago teachers to CTU sellout, as contract voting continues

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Are you a Chicago educator? Fill out the form at the bottom of the article, to build a rank-and-file movement to defend public education.

There is widespread opposition among rank-and-file teachers and school support staff to the tentative agreement for a new four-year contract signed by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and the Democratic Party-controlled school district and city government. Voting on the deal began Thursday and will end Friday, with teachers casting ballots in their school buildings.

The deal not only fails to address teachers' demands for substantial pay raises to compensate for the high cost of living, it also does not deliver on badly needed staffing and smaller class sizes. Most critically, it leaves educators and their students exposed to devastating budget cuts at the district level, which will only be exacerbated by Trump's massive cuts to federal funding.

District officials admit they only have funding to cover the cost of the first year of the four-year contract, which is retroactive to July 1, 2024. The current budget deficit for Chicago Public Schools (CPS) will only worsen with federal cuts of 25 percent or more for low-income, disabled, English learner and other vulnerable students being proposed by the Republican-controlled Congress. Teachers were quick to dismiss the CTU's claims that the deal will "Trump proof" the district.

"I am very concerned about how this [contract] is going to be funded," a teacher with more than two decades in the school district told the *World Socialist Web Site* on her way into Carl Schurz High School on the city's northwest side Thursday morning. "With Trump's cuts we could face a financial emergency and that could mean layoffs and other things. I've seen a lot in my years and been through a lot of strikes but this time it's worse than ever."

Another teacher expressed her anger over years of givebacks by the CTU bureaucracy. "We've been told before that we won this or that 'victory,' only to see more layoffs and cutbacks." Another teacher rushing in before the morning bell said, "I'm voting against this contract."

A school bus driver said, "I'm in a different union but we have a contract negotiations too and all we get are some email updates now and then. I think all the workers in the school district should be fighting together. We've never seen anything like Trump. I tell people he's like Adolf Hitler and wants a dictatorship."

Several educators stopped to speak to supporters of the WSWs Educators Newsletter who were distributing an article calling for a no vote and for Chicago teachers to spearhead a fight by educators across the country against Trump's drive to destroy public education.

One educator complained that the contract process had been dragged out since June 2024, when the last agreement expired. A WSWs

supporter replied, "Yes, they were trying to wear down your resistance. Now the CTU officials are telling you this contract will protect the district from Trump's cuts. This is a brazen lie. They don't even have funding to cover the next three years of the contract. The CTU is working with the Johnson administration to impose huge cutbacks."

The teacher replied, "Does that mean we have to strike?" expressing her concern about the outcome of strikes in 2012 and 2019, which the CTU bureaucracy betrayed, leading to mass school closures and layoffs. "This time, the rank and file has to take control," the WSWs supporter replied. "And an appeal has to be made to educators in New York, Los Angeles and across the country to launch a counter-offensive to defend the right to public education from the Trump administration."

CTU bureaucrats attempt to shut down opposition on membership Facebook group

In recent days teachers have been posing sharp questions to union leaders on the CTU Members Only Facebook group on potential furloughs, layoffs and other potential consequences of the agreement.

Union officials have tried to intimidate and silence members and at the same time attack the *World Socialist Web Site*, which is being widely read by rank-and-file educators. One teacher was told to "get her facts straight" and to "stop copying and pasting from websites."

Another teacher wrote:

If we don't have provisions in our contract to prevent furlough days, it is almost certain that CPS will use their "last resort" to take back at least 2% of our raises. If not this year, most likely during this contract. I will be voting no on this contract.

Saying, "I found these interesting points," she cites excerpts from the WSWs article analyzing the content of the sellout deal and urging educators to reject it.

These included no protections against furloughs and layoffs amid historic budget shortfalls, annual raises failing to cover cost of living as Trump policies result in surging inflation, unenforceable class-size

limits applied unevenly across the district, inadequate clinician and special ed workload reductions, and a crippling lack of libraries and librarians.

CTU staffer Nora Flanagan, who made \$116,867 last year as a CTU “Project Organizer,” replied, “What a fabulous pile of cynicism and disinformation this post is.” Flanagan’s boss, CTU President Stacy Davis Gates, pocketed \$187,530 from CTU and another \$78,150 from the Illinois Federation of Teachers in 2024, according to the union’s latest financial filing with the Department of Labor. Neither stand to be laid off, furloughed or face work reduction next year.

An educator challenged Flanagan’s right to moderate the Facebook group, which is supposed to be a forum for democratic discussion, when she is a “paid staff person” in the CTU apparatus.

Another teacher also challenged the CTU officials who were trying to sell the deal. “For those pushing back against... ‘There are no protections against furloughs and layoffs as the district faces historical shortfalls,’ anyone have any tangible rebuttals? The mayor had to move mountains to patch a \$830 million city budget shortfall and as far as I am aware, we as a city have yet to address the question of the \$175 million pension payment which was the focus of a union wide webinar a few weeks ago before it was miraculously removed from the Board of Education agenda on that fateful Thursday just before spring break. The mayor has failed in every effort to enact any sort of progressive tax policies. I know it is easy to discredit the *World Socialist Web Site*,” they said, about the union officials’ almost hysterical campaign against the growing influence of the WSW.

“Just posting as someone who was laid off after the last transformative contract in the 2019-20 SY,” they concluded, sarcastically referring to the phrase CTU leaders are using to push the current sellout agreement.

The CTU and its parent union, the American Federation of Teachers, have been working diligently with Mayor Johnson and the Democratic Party-political establishment to prevent a strike in America’s fourth largest school district. For the first time in 15 years, the CTU did not even hold a strike authorization vote.

CTU President Stacy Davis Gates said to the *Sun Times* recently that strikes are no longer necessary because the CTU has a “seat at the table” in city government through Mayor Johnson, a former CTU lobbyist “on leave”. What this means is that the CTU apparatus has been integrated into the corporate-controlled political structure for the purpose of enforcing the brutal austerity demanded by the city’s business and financial elite and the Trump administration.

In addition to the CPS deficit of at least \$700 million, Johnson’s Budget Office has forecast budget shortfalls for city government of \$1.12 billion in 2026 and \$1.32 billion in 2027. Johnson has declared that “the conversation cannot start off with cuts,” but cuts to mass transit, streets and sanitation and other public services are being discussed behind the scenes and in the corporate media.

The mayor claimed he would find “progressive revenue,” a catchword for raising business taxes or getting additional state funding that the CTU bureaucracy also promotes. Fully aware of the growing concern and opposition among teachers over the implications of an unfunded contract, CTU officials have suddenly announced plans for an April 15 protest to demand “progressive revenue” from the state legislature.

This is just another cynical effort to chloroform teachers. Any increases in corporate taxes or additional state funding to bail out Chicago public schools have already been rejected out of hand by Illinois Democratic governor, the billionaire JB Pritzker.

The bipartisan attacks on public education are setting the stage for a united struggle of educators, students and families across the US. New York City educators are also facing deep cuts as need is rising. Democratic Governor Kathy Hochul is working to push through cuts to the state budget and changes to the school funding formula that will result in a loss of \$350 million for New York City schools alone. At the federal level, a single Department of Agriculture cut will deprive the New York City school district of \$8.4 million for free and reduced school meals beginning next year, according to a recent *Chalkbeat* report.

In New York schools about 5 percent of the budget comes from federal funding and goes to supporting the most vulnerable students. In Chicago, **16 percent** of the schools budget last year came from federal funding.

The rejection of the CTU-CPS contract is only the first step. CTU Vice President Jackson Potter has already said that even if teachers defeat the deal, the CTU will not call a strike but only “return to the bargaining table.” But the CTU will not bring back anything better. In every school, rank-and-file committees should be formed. The bargaining committee should be thrown out and replaced with a committee of the most trusted, class conscious and militant educators.

Preparations for strike action must be made that include breaking down the sectional divisions between teachers, paraprofessionals, school bus drivers, maintenance and other school staff, reaching out to public transit and other city workers who face similar attacks and preparing a citywide strike.

Rank-and file-committees of Chicago educators can lead a nationwide counter-offensive to defend the right to public education from Trump and his Democratic Party enforcers. For this, teachers need to join and expand the network of educators rank-and-file committees across the US, which are affiliated with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).



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