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TEACHERS ON STRIKE

Lessons from Chicago on How to Fight Back

By Ethan Young

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What the Chicago Teachers Proved

When newly elected President Ronald Reagan fired more than 11,000 striking air traffic controllers in 1981, he was also firing the first shots in a new offensive against workers in the United States. The new logic of neoliberalism, with its insatiable appetite for low wages and powerless workers, has since guided a series of attacks against U.S. labor unions. As a result, rates of unionization have shrunk dramatically, especially in the private sector, where a paltry seven percent of workers now belong to unions. Over this same period, real wages have stagnated and the income share of the bottom 80 percent of the U.S. population has fallen, while the top one percent's average income has multiplied.

Far from being satisfied by this upward transfer of wealth, Big Capital appears emboldened, and attacks against unions grow more frequent and brazen. In 2011 Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker pushed through austere anti-union legislation over the protests of hundreds of thousands of his state's residents, chronicled by John Nichols in his piece "To Begin the World Over Again" (www.rosalux-nyc.org). More recently, in December 2012 Michigan became the 24th state to approve "right-to-work" legislation, which severely curtails the ability of unions to grow membership and collect dues. This blow to the labor movement, landed in the heart of the U.S. auto industry and the home of the powerful and emblematic United Auto Workers, would appear a discouraging harbinger for American workers.

But all is not doom and gloom. In the midst of this onslaught, the Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU) has struck back with one of labor's biggest victories in recent decades. The CTU strike of September 2012 brought together 26,000 workers to successfully fight a proposal by Mayor Rahm Emanuel to lengthen the school day by two hours with no pay raise, plus other measures intended to weaken the job security and voice of the city's teachers.

In the context of the so-called educational "reform" movement—a subterfuge by conservative and neoliberal forces intended to weaken the institution of public education—the CTU's victory could prove crucial. In the larger war against public unions—the last major bastion of U.S. labor and only political player capable of challenging corporate dominance in the game of campaign finance—the labor movement has finally struck back.

In the following study, writer and activist Ethan Young dissects the CTU's victory and draws lessons for the labor movement, and indeed the U.S. Left, on how to fight back and how to look forward.

*Stefanie Ehmsen and Albert Scharenberg
Co-Directors of New York Office, December 2012*

Teachers on Strike

Lessons from Chicago on How to Fight Back

By Ethan Young

In 2012 the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) struck the Chicago Public Schools system. It was no ordinary strike, and no ordinary union. The strike appears at a historic moment and brings a wide range of political questions to the fore. It simultaneously confronts the crisis of the labor movement; the legacies of neoliberalism; the attack on the public sector, including the social safety net; education policy; the relation of service workers to the “served”; social solidarity as an alternative to xenophobia and alienation; and more.

The strike can be viewed, from a broad perspective, as labor’s response—after thirty years—to neoliberalism’s first anti-union coup in the U.S.: the breaking of PATCO. Ronald Reagan’s 1981 firing of striking air traffic controllers began a dual war on public sector workers and the labor movement as a whole. It broke the fundamental labor-management contract forged under Franklin D. Roosevelt and set a new standard of aggressive rule over government employees.¹ Reagan targeted a high-end, highly skilled sector of the workforce, destroying the controllers’ union without even a blink of acknowledgement of their traditionally protected status. The AFL-CIO’s inability to budge the White House revealed how labor’s dominant model, “business unionism,” had become ineffective at best.

The labor movement, amidst ongoing stagnation and decline, has been wriggling on a hook

under successive presidencies. Over the years, countless power struggles broke out, internally and between unions, and leadership was contested by democratic reformers in locals. Strikes declined but sporadically broke out, mobilizing workers who were suffering a consistent lowering of living standards and benefits under “give-back” contracts.

The significance of the 2010 CTU strike is its breakaway from a long period of inertia that kept major unions sluggish and docile. It was a mass strike, involving 26,000 teachers and other workers, and the membership was actively involved in promoting it and putting pressure on City Hall. One difference from previous “corporate campaigns” of this type was the role of members, as opposed to outside “marketers,” in planning and execution.

The CTU represents nearly 30,000 teachers, paraprofessionals, nurses, social workers, and clinicians. The union called for improved wages, hours, and benefits, but linked these to issues of concern to students and parents. The CTU, Chicago local of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), went farther than its national leadership or the National Education Association (NEA), the rival teachers’ union, in standing against school privatization.

Perhaps most importantly, the union won—that is, it forced Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel to give ground on key demands. The school board, for instance, agreed to move away from “differentiated compensation,” which would

¹ See Sean Sweeney. 2012. *The State of the Unions in the United States*. www.rosalux-nyc.org.

have allowed the school system to pay different sets of teachers at different levels, based on unknown criteria. Teacher evaluation practices based on test scores are now limited to the legal minimum for Illinois, and teachers can now file grievances over evaluations.

Victory is always critical, especially in a period when labor is on the defensive. But the significance here goes beyond the deal. The union beat one of the most powerful politicians in the country. Emanuel is a major player in Washington, D.C., and at the highest level of the Democratic Party. He has a hand in shaping electoral races in the Midwest, and he is considered the man behind Obama's rise to the White House. Beating Emanuel is not small potatoes.

Emanuel's good friend Obama is considered "left" by much of the political establishment, despite his constant efforts to claim the mantle of "Center"—that is, the keeper of consensus, of common sense, usually tacking to the right to prove his bipartisanship. The real Left, fragmented and marginalized, does not appear in this equation, except in rare circumstances. In general, Obama supporters support teachers. Republicans demonize Obama and teachers in the same breath.

In this instance, the Center lost, but not to the Right. The victory went to teachers, their supporters, and their union, all of whom are part of something political that is neither Obama Center nor Republican Right. This is the U.S. Left coming back into its own.

Attacking Public Sector Workers

The teachers' strike marked a radical turn for the working class after decades on the defensive. The rise of neoliberalism shaped the trajectory of labor and the lives of workers in profoundly negative ways. The demand for cutbacks, austerity, and surrender of workers' rights has been pursued relentlessly by the powerful. This is the context in which the CTU began to push against labor's prevailing trend of concessions and collapse.

The decline of domestic industry and small manufacturing and the outsourcing of jobs to foreign labor markets have led to a crisis of unemployment and a drastic shrinkage of private sector unions. In contrast, the workforce in the public sector grew steadily up until the recession. This is reflected in the relative stability and growth of public sector unions, particularly in healthcare and education.

Public sector unions are the only part of the labor movement whose financial contributions to political campaigns come close to those of corporations and corporate-backed political action committees. Right-wing, pro-corporate groups, such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (along with the centrist Emanuel), have put a lot of time and money into casting public sector unions as usurpers who victimize small businesses and taxpayers to benefit themselves and their "undeserving" members.

Public service workers, teachers in particular, have been a favorite scapegoat of the Right for years. The success of this ploy is based on a number of myths created in response to growing insecurity for workers in general, and private sector workers in particular.

Government workers are charged with being overpaid, with benefits that surpass those of

private sector workers. The simple fact that relative job stability was won through strong union contracts is deflected by the argument that, because public workers' pay and benefits come from tax revenues, they gain at the expense of suffering private sector workers. The attacks on public workers' bargaining rights in Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan, and elsewhere are also based on the specious claim that state budgets are drained by public workers' supposed overcompensation. To date private sector unions and their centrist allies have offered only tentative challenges to this anti-labor offensive.

But public sector workers are suffering as well, even with relatively stronger, more organized representation. Researchers at the Economic Policy Institute find that,

When state and local government employees are compared to private-sector workers with similar characteristics—particularly when workers are matched by age and education—state and local workers actually earn 4% less, on average, than their private-sector counterparts.²

By the 2008 elections, vilification of public employees had become an important part of the right-wing case against “big government.” By crying wolf, one group of workers is pitted against another, while blaming the public health and education systems (“bureaucracies”) for the declining life quality of the middle class—that middle-income, mostly white sector where skilled workers, lower management, small business owners, and professionals overlap.

Attacking public sector workers is an all-purpose tactic for the Right. It isolates a constituency that stands in opposition to slashing services, is the last bastion of union growth, and is a non-corporate source of political funding—for the Democrats, that is. This tactic keeps the clas-

sic working-class “front” divided along a fault line defined by racism, regionalism, and xenophobia. (Government agencies were among the first employers to hire across racial and gender lines.) It utilizes and spreads right-wing populist themes of individual advancement and “producerism”³ against tax-financed services run by government and dispensed by “non-producing” creatures of bureaucracy.

Teachers, however, are a special target for several important reasons. The Right (and some Centrists) cast them as a privileged sector, supposedly enjoying short hours and ample vacation time. Seniority is viewed as unearned protection for teachers who “fail” at their jobs and who would presumably be fired from a private sector job. A cultural undertone of class resentment also runs through teacher-bashing, traceable to backlash against social degradation of people lacking college backgrounds, anti-intellectualism, and fear of outside influence over children.

Exploitation of this tension constructs a hard division between teaching and quality of education and promotes management-driven teaching schemes. Further, it isolates schools from the communities they purportedly serve, minimizing and inhibiting the democratizing elements of public education.

Hostility toward teachers, and especially their unions, has given rise to a school “reform” movement that has been pushed by both Republican and Democratic administrations. Semi-private “charter” spinoffs from the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) system have been promoted as a godsend by anti-union “reformers” and conservatives. Ending the influence of teachers' unions has become an end in itself, but the witch hunt has political underpinnings.

2 Jeffery H. Keefe. “Debunking the Myth of the Over-Compensated Public Employee.” *Economic Policy Institute*, September 15, 2012.

3 See “What Is Populist Producerism?” *Political Research Associates*. www.publiceye.org/tooclose/producerism.html.

War on Unions

The attack on public school teachers includes demonizing and breaking their unions. After Tea Party candidates won big in the midterm elections of 2010, Republican state legislators tried to push through anti-union laws in a number of states. These laws came from the corporate Frankenstein's lab of the American Legislative Executive Council (ALEC). Their common theme was to eliminate public sector unions' collective bargaining power.⁴

Corporate power brokers have been battling unions from the beginning, and have been particularly successful in beating back private sector unions through promotion and passage of "right to work" laws in many states. These laws prohibit the requirement that all employees in a given workplace join the union representing that workforce. With that requirement, unions can undercut management's power to divide workers. Without it, unions are plucked like weeds.

Once-powerful unions in private industries were devastated. Today only one in thirteen private sector workers belongs to a union. This is down from one in four in 1973.

The attack was ideological as well, playing on experiences with union corruption and persistent, unquestioned stereotyping of leadership as "Big Labor." The Pew Research Center reported in 2010 that "41% say they have a favorable opinion of labor unions while about as many (42%) express an unfavorable opinion. In January 2007, a clear majority (58%) had a favorable view of unions while just 31% had an unfavorable impression."

Union membership among public sector workers, meanwhile, grew from one in four in 1973 to one in three today.

Even this modest growth was viewed as a threat by corporate strategists. They turned their attention to public sector unions, several of which still wield real power in shaping government budgets, which are major generators of profit for the private sector.

A great deal of money and media influence went into creating an "enemy within:" teachers' unions. A well-financed website devoted to this effort, called Teachers Union Exposed, declares on its front page:

America's teachers unions—particularly the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers—are the most organized and powerful voices in education politics. These unions continue to block reforms needed to improve our nation's schools by putting their focus on teachers rather than on the students they teach. Our education system is in desperate need of reform and it's time we stop letting teachers unions stand in the way.

In other words, greedy and privileged teachers are bad for schools and kids, obstructing school voucher and charter school "reforms" aimed at privatizing education and opening smaller, higher-tier, non-unionized schools. The AFT, of which the CTU is a local branch, and the NEA have at times put up strong fights against education cutbacks and have used their political clout—organizational and financial—to oppose the Right.

The NEA is the largest union in the United States. The AFT has longstanding ties to the AFL-CIO and represents two of the largest concentrations of public school teachers, New York City and Chicago. The two unions have missed chances to merge in the past but maintain cooperative relations, negotiate as partners in some school districts, and have a common view of the role of unions in public education.

⁴ Julie Underwood. "ALEC Exposed." *The Nation*. July 12, 2011.

Public Education's Crisis

The George W. Bush era education “No Child Left Behind” legislation pushed standardized tests for gauging student development and teacher effectiveness. Education Professor Ken Jones notes that the standards do not actually serve to measure progress; rather, they are “set up to show the failure of public schools so that the funding for them could be diverted to charter schools, vouchers, and other privatization schemes.”

The competition among students and between teachers that result from “teaching to the test” remains the theme in Obama’s Race to the Top program. This, Jones says, has brought,

continued well-documented casualties, in terms of real students and teachers as well as democratic values—the increasing numbers of dropouts, the narrowed curriculum, the focus on test-taking instead of thinking and problem solving, the deprofessionalization and demoralizing of teachers, the regimentation of following externally prescribed texts and tests.⁵

Race to the Top drew on the experience of Education Secretary Arne Duncan, former Chicago schools CEO. Duncan’s reputation relies on claims of improving student learning skills based on test scores. He has a reputation for replacing experienced teachers with younger, lower-waged rookies and for imposing a heavy disciplinary hand that would never be acceptable in well-off suburban schools.

Duncan’s work in Chicago left behind a school system in disarray. Duncan, a champion of charter schools, was recruited to the highest education position in the country, in Washington, D.C. That city’s own former schools chief

is Michelle Rhee, founder of StudentsFirst. Her well-financed group has brought charter schools to the national stage as the best vehicle for parents to “save” their children’s education from union-protected teachers. Their strategy has been to undermine community support for public schools, teachers, and teachers’ unions by appealing to inner city families’ yearnings for their kids to escape poverty.⁶ Her Chicago counterpart is an Emanuel ally, Jonah Edelman, CEO of the pro-charter group Stand for Children, a purveyor of anti-CTU hype.⁷

Jones summarizes the situation:

Having the choice to take the public money and use it to put one’s child into a private school or privately managed charter school can be a relief from a public system being systematically destroyed. [...] Those who are able to opt into privatized schools will do so. Those who are left behind in the public schools will be further abandoned and relegated to the kind of rote schooling suitable for the lower class—essentially preparing those students to be compliant low-level workers or soldiers, perhaps prisoners.

By the end of the 2000s, the Right and Center were coalescing to tip the balance of public opinion towards “correcting” public education by gradually privatizing it. The recession required cuts, and public education was on the butcher block. Teaching increasingly became just another alienating, alienated drill. Teachers’ job security was viewed as the problem itself.

This was the setting for the transformation of the Chicago Teachers Union.

5 Ken Jones. “The War on Public Schools.” *ZNet*. September 20, 2012.

6 Daniel Denvir. “Michelle Rhee’s Right Turn.” *Salon*. November 17, 2012.

7 Paul Blumenthal and Joy Resmovits. “Chicago Teachers Strike.” *Huffington Post*. September 14, 2012.

A Dissident Caucus Takes Over

CTU elections in 2010 turned out the decades-old leadership group, United Progressive Caucus (UPC). The winners came from the relatively new Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE), with backing from an older dissident caucus, ProActive Chicago Teachers (PACT).

A handful of teachers formed CORE in 2008, at a moment of crisis for the CTU and of ongoing emergency in the school system. The leadership of UPC was split over a \$2 million budget deficit. The union had lost more than 18% of its membership to firings resulting from then-ayor Richard M. Daley's sweeping privatization plan. Daley put low-rated schools in "turnaround," firing all staff and replacing them with selected newcomers.

The CORE founders first acquainted themselves with the neoliberal campaign as a whole, studying critical studies and analyses like Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine*. They then targeted the demand for job security and the impact of standardized testing. As they took on new members, they set up committees with an eye toward expansion and public debate on Daley and Duncan's plans for public education:

- ⇒ The *Communication* committee presented research findings on the system's failures on its website and newsletter and prepared special material for CTU delegates' meeting.
- ⇒ *Outreach* organized meetings with teachers around the city to discuss the issue of class size. CPS critics have long argued that average classrooms are overstuffed and nearly useless for teaching purposes.
- ⇒ A committee focusing on the union's *House of Delegates* planned interventions in the meetings of CTU school reps.
- ⇒ *Advocacy* planned special educational and agitational events.

CORE worked hard to share skills and information with new members, to help them get to the roots of the system's failure in Daley's policies. At the same time, they outlined key workforce issues: paid and pensionable family leave; use of scripted "learning" and high stakes testing; contractual rights to file grievances over class size; school closings; charter proliferation; and so-called merit pay, aimed at tossing out teachers in "problem" schools. They also included quality of education issues, such as lack of school libraries and air conditioning.

Chicago's tradition of community organizing was a boon to the caucus. From the start, CORE sought allies at the community level. In August 2008, their first public panel discussion on education issues included speakers from the well-established community groups Blocks Together, Parents United for Responsible Education, The Pilsen Alliance, South West Youth Collaborative, Access Living, Clergy Committed to Community, and Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization. This was the start of an ongoing interaction, helping ground CTU members in broader community concerns, while putting education higher among those concerns for organizers in various "working class-based" social movements.

This is far from standard procedure for a big union. Without fanfare, CORE set a course that would move CTU from traditional "business unionism" to the (still mostly speculative) model proposed by some progressives, "social movement unionism." It's a big leap from strict collective bargaining to incorporating the concerns of other social movements. For many unions, it's a leap just to acknowledge that labor is a movement among other movements.

Within two years of rapid growth, CORE defeated the old guard UPC with 60 percent of the

vote. It was a vote of no confidence in UPC in anticipation of contract negotiations, with the city demanding more wage, benefits, and influence givebacks. The new CTU president, Karen Lewis, said of CORE strategy after its win: “We will still be mobilizing.”

She was as good as her word. Labor activists Micah Uetricht and Jasson Perez described the direction taken by the new leadership:

CORE immediately began restructuring the union. Leadership broadened the rights and responsibilities of members in the governing House of Delegates. Fourteen member-led committees, from political action to media, were tasked with central roles in the union’s day-to-day functioning. A new training program prepared delegates and members for union organizing and governance. At schools, committees of teachers, parents and students were organized to facilitate activism independent of union leadership. Quickly, educators began to take control of their union. “We turned our members into organizers, then we cut them loose,” says CTU staffer Matt Luskin.

A student wrote online about experiencing this in the midst of strike activity:

During my time on the picket line with my teachers, I witnessed the discussion of issues between teachers, the delivery of teachers’ questions to the CTU about the proposed contract and the in-person answering of these questions by an actual human representative from the CTU. Serious teamwork. Serious support. Serious investment. [...] I realized that I was witnessing democracy unfold from the inside out for the very first time. It seems democracy isn’t all that difficult to master, if you’re willing, and the CTU has shown us they are not only willing, but able and excited to fight for what the students and teachers require. I am truly grateful for this experience.

The Strike

The new CTU leadership was given a free hand by the AFT central office. This was partly the

The introduction of democracy was embraced with enthusiasm by union members. A culture of activism began to take root in a demoralized workforce. This was a particularly radical development in Chicago, where teachers stand out for their racial and gender diversity—and their conscious acceptance of that mix—in a historically racially polarized city. The movement that formed around the CTU was defined not just by the members’ trade or union identity but by their rejection of racism and sexism.

Social solidarity does not spring up automatically, despite sentimental notions of class unity held by some on the Left. Racism and sexism do exist in teaching staffs and school environments. But two factors (at least) distinguish public education in this regard. First, the vestiges of segregation—racial and gender—are shrinking within the school workforce (though not in the student bodies). Teaching and school administration positions are no longer restrictive by race or gender in most cities. This comes from decades of struggle in a mostly female profession, in the public sector where equality in hiring was more strictly enforced.

The other distinguishing factor is that teachers are by definition engaged in public service, and public school teachers work in a setting where social contradictions are exploding. The past, present, and future of working-class children converge in the classroom. Not all teachers choose to come to grips with the enormous problems this poses; not all are equipped to deal with them. Even so, the CTU has successfully mobilized members by appealing to their commitment to serve the community, in addition to their personal security and fulfillment.

result of CORE’s overwhelming vote. It also indicated a growing shift by the national union’s

dynasty, away from its traditional conservatism and stronghold mentality in the emerging labor-management arrangement.

Contract negotiations stalled in early 2012, and mediation failed in May. Mayor Emanuel was pushing to gut the contract of non-financial language, stripping teachers of the right to use contract language to make educational decisions. The school board wanted a 20 percent longer school day with no pay raise, raises based on “merit” and not experience, and higher health premiums. The union demanded that reduced class size and other issues of educational quality be negotiated, including increased school resources.

Both sides were standing fast, and the union began preparing for the strike. Contract action committees were set up in every school, with the goal of one CTU member volunteering for every five staff, with responsibility to provide information on the issues and new developments. Committee members reported to the union, and the word from the base was shared with teachers at nearby schools. They were able to coordinate action from the bottom up.

The committees were not controlled by the CTU leadership. Theresa Moran reported in Labor Notes:

In April, contract committees at several schools decided on their own to hold practice strike votes to gauge support—which they found in spades. Next, the union polled the entire membership, to test the structure’s ability to coordinate logistics on a large scale. Ninety percent backed a strike in the informal poll. Shortly after, 4,000 members filled an auditorium to capacity for a rally, before joining thousands of supporters for a march on Chicago’s Mercantile Exchange, where they protested the \$77 million a year subsidy the derivatives marketplace receives from the state.[...] Over the summer, the union brought in several dozen teacher and paraprofessional members to work as organizers, making sure their colleagues stayed connected to the union and up to date on bargaining through the break. When a third of the schools opened

their doors in mid-August, the union held informational pickets to educate parents and give members a sense of what a picket line might feel like.⁸

The CTU also organized public events to acquaint members with past strikes, featuring a specially prepared video and talks by veterans of the last walkout in 1987.

By June the CTU called for a strike authorization vote by the entire membership, to give the House of Delegates the authority to call a strike at the beginning of the school year, when they are legally allowed to do so after a ten-day warning period. Shortly the union announced that the vote had passed the strike authorization threshold. The minimum required was 75 percent; 98 percent voted yes.

At the start of the school year in August, the CTU had already begun printing picket signs. By the end of the month the strike date was set for September 10. Picket lines were set up at 675 schools around Chicago. They were joined by parents and students in unprecedented displays of community strike support, despite enormous efforts by the city and mainstream media to portray the strikers as spoiled, selfish parasites.

Mayor Emanuel was counting on, and expected, a boost in public support for taking on the strikers. In fact, a poll conducted by We Ask America shows some 66 percent of parents supported the strike, with less than a third, 31 percent, disapproving. Among people with no school-age children, 51 percent approved of the job action, while 44 percent disapproved. A majority blamed management for the strike: 34 percent blamed Emanuel, 19 percent the school board, and 29 percent the union. A very strong 63 percent of African-Americans and 65 percent of Latinos expressed approval. Women and men almost equally approved of the strike: 55 percent of women and 56 percent of men.

⁸ Theresa Moran “Behind the Chicago Teachers Strike.” *Labor Notes*. September 10, 2012.

Community support was well-organized. A support committee, the Chicago Teachers Solidarity Campaign (CTSC), formed in late June, before the strike. It was not organized by CTU or CORE but by the Occupy Chicago labor outreach working group. It brought together parents, students, community activists, and members of other unions. Occupy's social media network pushed the CTU message through the major media's wall of anti-union hype. They made the strike a rallying point for thousands of Chicagoans, congregating in mass marches and participation on picket lines.

Four days into the strike, the Mayor's dreams of a big political score went up in smoke. That weekend marked a crescendo: on September 15 an outpouring of teachers and supporters in red t-shirts with the slogan "The schools Chicago's students deserve" marched from the west to the south side—going directly through working-class neighborhoods.

The next day, CTU leadership presented to the House of Delegates a 23-page outline of an agreement between the union and the school board. To the amazement of old political hands, the delegates voted not to suspend the strike but to allow two more days to take the information back to the picket lines and hold discussions with the membership. The city was taken aback. Talk of democracy is all well and good, but negotiations are supposed to be settled by leaders behind closed doors.

Karen Lewis disagreed. "This union is a democratic institution, which values the opportunity for all members to make decisions together. The officers of this union follow the lead of our members," she said.

The issues raised in this contract were too important, had consequences too profound for the future of our public education system and for educational fairness for our students, parents and members for us to simply take a quick vote based on a short discussion. Therefore, a clear majority

voted to take this time and we are unified in this decision.

This was a very risky move in a critical situation, where the public had to take sides and a fall from grace would cost teachers for years to come. But as the poll cited above showed, support did not shift to the mayor. He tried to sue the teachers back to work, but a county judge balked. Two days later the agreement was ratified.

The new contract would meet the following union demands:

- ⇒ *Secure Raises and Ensure Fair Compensation:* The CTU won a three-year contract with a 3% raise in the first year, 2% raise in the second, and 2% raise in the third, with the option to extend to a 4th year by mutual agreement at another 3% raise. The board had sought a two-year contract with one raise.
- ⇒ *End Merit Pay.*
- ⇒ *Preserve Steps and Lanes:* The new contract will preserve the full value of teachers' and paraprofessionals' career ladder (steps) and will increase the value of the highest steps.
- ⇒ *Provide a Better School Day:* The board will hire 600+ teachers in art, music, physical education, world languages, and other classes, to ensure students receive a better school day, a demand thousands of parents have called for since last year.
- ⇒ *Ensure Job Security:* A "CPS Hiring Pool" will secure one-half of all of CPS hires for displaced (laid-off) members.
- ⇒ *An Anti-Bullying Provision:* No more bullying by principals and managerial personnel. The new language will curtail some of the abusive practices that have run rampant in many neighborhood schools.
- ⇒ *Prep Time for Paraprofessionals and Clinicians.*
- ⇒ *Racial Diversity:* The CTU continues to fight the District on its lay-off policies that have

led to a record number of African American educators being laid off and eventually terminated by the District. The new contract will ensure that CPS recruits a racially diverse teaching force.

- ⇒ *New Recall Rights and Tackling School Closings:* Acknowledging that the CTU will continue its ongoing legal and legislative fight for a moratorium on all school closings, turnarounds, and phase-outs, the new contract requires teachers to “follow their students” in all school actions. This will reduce instability among students and educators. The contract will also have ten months of “true recall” to the same school if a position opens, a first.
- ⇒ *Fairer Evaluation Procedures:* The new contract will only allow 30 percent of evaluations based on test scores and will secure that there will be “no harmful consequences” for tenured teachers. (The board had demanded, and lost, that 40 percent of evaluations be based on test scores.) It also secures the right to appeal a rating.
- ⇒ *Reimbursement for School Supplies:* The District will be required to reimburse educators for the purchase of school supplies up to \$250.
- ⇒ *Additional Wrap-Around Services:* The Board agrees to commit to hire nurses, social workers, and school counselors if it gets new revenue. Over the past several months, the CTU has identified several sources of new revenue, including the Tax Increment Financing program.
- ⇒ *Books on Day One:* For the first time, the new contract will guarantee all CPS students and educators have textbooks on day one

and will not have to wait up to six weeks for learning materials.

- ⇒ *Unified School Calendar:* The new contract will improve language on a unified calendar. All students and teaching personnel will begin on the same schedule.
- ⇒ *Reduced Paperwork:* The new contract ensures the new paperwork requirements are balanced against reduction of previous requirements.

The contract still includes some significant take-aways. Teachers who rank low in principals’ evaluations are not protected from layoffs on the basis of seniority. Severance pay after lay-offs has been reduced from a year to six months. A previous provision suggesting capping class size at 35 went untouched, against both sides’ wishes—the mayor wanted more freedom to pack classrooms, while the CTU wanted to enforce a stricter limit. Schools flout the cap (and may now continue to) by allowing 40+ kids in a class. A panel that monitors class size will receive more funding and will now include a parent.

Lewis announced the end of the strike and drove a crucial point home:

This Union has proven the Chicago labor movement is neither dormant nor dead. Our members are on the line because we all believe there is an assault on our profession and public education in general. We will always do what is in the best interest of our students and our own children, many of whom attend these schools. We showed our solidarity and our strength, and with this new contract we have solidified our political power and captured the imagination of the nation. No one will ever look upon a teacher and think of him or her as a passive person to be bullied and walked on ever again.

Aftermath

Mayor Emanuel, known as a prickly character, did not end his verbal assault on teachers. He

continued to run expensive television ads with help from pro-charter groups, now vainly trying

to claim some kind of victory. The CTU did not waste a minute in launching its next campaign, against the expected call for multiple school closures. They continue to base their work on coalition building, sharing information, and political discussion, in group settings and one-on-one.

The fight frames the dilemma of one percenters, strangers to democracy, when they are confronted by a democratic movement. The illusion of absolute power in money, influence, and law enforcement was undermined to a degree that few believed possible up to the union's win. We also have here a new model of "best practices" for reviving the Left. Much of what took place in Chicago happened because of Chicago's own unique history and political culture. Decade after decade of ferment, repression, mass organizing, strikes, and uprisings—all too often bloody—and bitter scrambles for power have shaped the city. Yet we can find in this strike a useful, adaptable, systematic approach to politics that contrasts sharply with the games

of patty-cake that tend to pass for activism in the U.S.

The CTU has established itself not just as a fighting movement but as a political force. Organization is key but so is solidarity, working democracy, political education and discussion, and a level of sophistication grounded in life apart from the fantasy world of power brokers.

That sophistication, and with it a great deal of maturity, is shown in the union's recognition that it is not out for itself, not for its leaders or even for its members. It is part of a class struggle in which an endangered, divided population works against huge difficulties, starting with its own fragmentation. Every fragment has emancipatory capacities that can only be realized in a united front.

This is not quite the talk that the CTU talks. But the teachers are showing us how to walk the walk.

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