Chicago teachers strike for fair contract, 2012

• local community or neighborhood-level campaign [1]

Timing
10 September 2012
to:
18 September 2012

Location and Goals
Country: United States
Location City/State/Province: Chicago, Illinois
View Location on Map
Goals:
To settle a contract between the Chicago Teacher's Union and the Chicago Public School district. The teachers were calling for increased benefits and compensation, smaller class sizes, ending school closures, and ending teaching evaluation based on student test scores.

Methods
Methods in 1st segment:

• 001. Public speeches
• 016. Picketing
• 038. Marches
• 104. Professional strike › by teachers

Methods in 2nd segment:

• 001. Public speeches
• 002. Letters of opposition or support › by parents and students
• 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
• 015. Group lobbying
• 016. Picketing
• 038. Marches
• 042. Motorcades
• 104. Professional strike › by teachers

Methods in 3rd segment:
- 001. Public speeches
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 104. Professional strike  by teachers

Methods in 4th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 104. Professional strike  by teachers

Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 104. Professional strike  by teachers

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 104. Professional strike  by teachers

Segment Length:
Approximately 1 day

**Classifications**

Classification:
Change
Defense
Cluster:
Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- Primarily teachers

**Leaders, partners, allies, elites**

Leaders:
Karen Lewis, leader of the Chicago Teacher's Union

Partners:
Chicago Teachers Union affiliations include the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL), the Illinois State Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (ISFL-CIO), the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), the Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT), and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT); students' parents

External allies:
Solidarity campaigns in other cities
Involvement of social elites:
Not known

**Joining/exiting order of social groups**

Groups in 1st Segment:
Groups in 2nd Segment:
Groups in 3rd Segment:
Groups in 4th Segment:
Groups in 5th Segment:
Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:
Groups were working together in solidarity for the entire campaign.

**Segment Length:**
Approximately 1 day

**Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence**

Opponents:
Mayor of Chicago, Rahm Emanuel; Chicago School Board, led by CEO Jean-Claude Brizard

Nonviolent responses of opponent:
Not known

Campaigner violence:
Not known

Repressive Violence:
Not known

**Success Outcome**

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:
5 points out of 6 points

Survival:
1 point out of 1 points

Growth:
3 points out of 3 points

Total points:
9 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:
It is difficult to draw a conclusion about the extent to which the Chicago Teachers Union achieved their campaign goals. Most columnists put victory on the side of the teachers, who compromised less than the City of Chicago, although some sources emphasize the points where the City stood their ground, especially with regard to evaluating teachers and staff.
After 10 months of negotiations with Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the Chicago Board of Education, the Chicago Teachers Union declared a strike on Sunday night, September 9, 2012, that would go into effect that Monday morning. Chicago was home to the third largest public school system in the United States, teaching 350,000 students. Points of contention in the negotiation process included compensation, benefits, evaluation practices, standardized testing, job security, class size, resource allocation, school privatization, insufficient classroom materials, and special education support staff.

Prior to the strike, Chicago teachers had re-organized into a stronger and more assertive union, especially after the city announced plans to close around 100 schools imminently. In 2010, the Caucus of Rank and File Educators established themselves as a caucus within the Chicago Public School District and rose to leadership of the Chicago Teachers Union. In June of 2011, Mayor Emanuel extended the school day and simultaneously removed raises that the teachers had been contractually promised.

In response, Karen Lewis, the new CTU leader, suggested that teachers could only assert their collective bargaining rights with the threat of a strike. Even before the contract negotiations became tense enough to approach the looming strike, the CTU members had voted 98% in favor of using a strike as a potential tactic. Chicago law only required 75% agreement; the 75% requirement was higher than in most cities, instituted shortly after Emanuel won his mayoral campaign as a result of his Senate Bill 7.

The strike began on September 10 with the participation of 26,000 teachers. Teachers held marches and pickets in the city, while the school board and Mayor Emanuel implemented their contingency plan and opened 144 schools with a schedule of partial day activities run by non-unionized temporary staff. Negotiations continued, as did marches and pickets on a daily basis in various strategic locations around the city.

Parents organized a solidarity group and held concurrent events, also participating in CTU pickets, rallies and marches. These parents also coordinated a letter-writing effort, and delivered around 1,000 signed postcards to the Board of Education on the morning of Tuesday, September 11. Chicago Public Schools CEO Jean-Claude Brizard refused to engage with the community members. Instead, the security guards at the building collected the letters.

Later on Tuesday evening, a caravan of Chicago teachers and community members headed off to Washington, D.C., on a “Journey for Justice” where they joined with motorcades from Boston, Detroit, New York, Kansas City and New Orleans. They reached Washington, D.C., by Thursday and held a press conference and march from the D.C. Public School office to the U.S. Department of Education building. During the rest of the week, negotiations continued and both sides expected to reach an agreement so that school could be back in session on Friday or Monday.

But on Sunday the 16th, Karen Lewis announced on behalf of the 800-member representative body, the House of Delegates, that the CTU would be extending the strike longer than they had expected because they needed more time to review the Emmanuel’s contract proposal. In response, Emmanuel threatened to sue the union by filing a court injunction legally requiring the teachers to return to work, claiming that refusing to approve the contract endangered the safety of students. The judge delayed in processing the injunction request.

On Tuesday the 18th, the CTU House of Delegates voted 98% to 2% to accept the most recent contract draft and suspend the strike. The 26,000 union members then needed to vote for the passage of the contract, which happened over the course of the fall. On October 2, with a vote of 80% in favor, the contract officially passed.

Most news sources described the resulting contract as a mixed victory. Both Mayor Emanuel and CTU leader Lewis were satisfied, but suggested that “more work needs to be done.” The CTU released a list of their
victories. Monica Davies, writing for the New York Times, probably summarized the results best when she wrote, “The terms, which appeared to provide some victories for both sides, would give annual raises to teachers, lengthen the school day and allow teachers to be evaluated, in part, with student test scores. The school system would also aim to guide laid-off teachers with strong ratings into at least half of any new job openings in the schools. While a halt to the teachers’ strike, this city’s first in a quarter century, may end the immediate, local contract fight over pay, working conditions and job security, the episode brought to the forefront larger questions, still unanswered, about the philosophical direction of public schools here, a national agenda for educational change and the potency of unions.”

Research Notes
Influences:

Chicago Teachers were influenced by past teacher's strikes (1).

Sources:


Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:
Samantha Shain, 13/10/2012

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