

Letter to WSWS from Todd Kelly, AFSCME Local 1259 President

2 November 2011

First of all, I have no recollection of speaking to the author of this article. However, somehow he has found it appropriate to quote me regarding the Union's stance on library closures. Your story should have given credit to the Detroit News reporter whom I actually spoke with. Secondly, to describe my stance as "despicable" indicated a lack of understanding of the issue. I'm nobody's tool. I came in as my own man and will be my own man as long as I'm president of AFSCME Local 1259. I just know what is best and realistic even if it is parallel to the employer. At this time it does the staff no good to maintain 23 branches when the employer is under a hiring freeze that has resulted in shortages in every department of the system.

I'm tired of my members being shuffled all over town to fill vacancies created by these recent layoffs. No one wants to come to work only to be told midway through the day that they are needed way across town play substitute teacher. Especially when they may have to pick up kids from daycare at a certain time. Or get to class by 6:30pm or something similar. When staffs are short, people don't get lunch hours. When staff are short people work out of class. Thus robbing the public of adequate service, particularly all important computer assistance. The revenues to the employer will not allow additional workers to be hired. Therefore, current employees are caught in a storm of uncertainty. We want that storm to subside and give us our lives back. Of course, we want to serve our public, but at what expense is the public willing to understand our plight. We know no one wants their library closed. It creates another abandoned building in their neighborhood. But let's be real.

Neighborhoods have endured school closures, grocery chains leaving for suburbs, and numerous businesses taking flight over the years. Why all of a

sudden is the library such a death knell? If closing 4 libraries destroys and neighborhood and causes kids to "go to prison" then there wasn't much to maintain the area anyway. As for the gentleman with the prison remark, if closing a library means your son is going to prison he was probably going there anyway. So the bottom line is the revenues aren't the available to maintain the branches as they are. I suggest that you retract your statement about my comments being "despicable" and learn the facts of what is actually going on and how workers are at their wits' end. When was the last time the author attended a commission or committee meeting? I suggest he do so and abandon this policy of second handed yellow-bellied journalism. I know and you know that WSWS is better than resorting to hyperbolic statements just to play on the emotions of uninformed local activists who want or need this issue to rally around.

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