

Chicago teachers discuss political issues in their strike

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Striking teachers in Chicago were out in force in downtown Chicago on the second day of their strike. The police estimated that 10,000 marched, while the Chicago Teachers Union put the number at 50,000.

Timothy, a social studies teacher said, “Working people don’t have a party anymore. The difference between the Democrats and the Republicans is Cocoa Puffs and Cocoa Crispies. It is the same cereal in a different box.

“At Roosevelt High School they spent \$24 million dollars. You know that they are planning a turnaround when they spend that type of money. Noble Street Charter Network is the one underwriting the renovating and then running the schools. They put connections for air conditioners in every room.

“Penny Pritzker is the chairman of the board for Capital Funds, Noble Street, AUSL, Teach for America, and the Renaissance Project. In the 1990s she owned Superior Bank and packaged bad mortgages. This led to the banking collapse in 2008.

“Education is a safe place to invest. Thanks to Clinton, the wealthy get a 39 percent tax credit for ‘investing’ in education. What’s safer than a taxpayer bailout?

“Something else that you need to know is that at Noble Street charters, students are fined. They have financial penalties for behaviors. They are pricing the students with the lowest test scores out of the schools.

“There is a case going on in the courts involving a student with multiple disabilities who had \$400 in fines. She met all of the academic requirements, but she couldn’t graduate. The school made her work at the minimum wage to pay off her debt. I call that indentured servitude.”

Another worker said, “Where are the Democrats? Rahm isn’t here. Obama isn’t here. The Democrats are

supposed to be with us, with the working people, but they’ve abandoned us.”

Todd commented on Mayor Rahm Emanuel’s policies. “All of the people in the Chicago establishment are such a bunch of hypocrites,” he said. “Rahm pushed for ‘Stand for Children’ to castrate the union. Now we need a 75 percent strike vote. When we heard about that, we gave Emanuel the proverbial you know what.”

He also spoke about the undemocratic nature of the voting system in the United States. “The election process has become so corrupt,” he said. “It’s not democratic at all. We don’t have the United States of America but the United States of Corporations. It’s a perpetual lie that when we vote it actually matters.”

Teachers also discussed the impact of standardized testing on the schools.

David said, “They want to evaluate us based on test scores. Other things should be used as criteria to judge teachers.”

A nearby teacher agreed. “2010 was when they pushed charter schools in Chicago, based on standardized tests,” he said. “Now they are expanding faster than ever, even though the same tests show that the charter schools do generally worse than public schools. All they do is take money from public education and give it to the corporations running charters.”

Diana spoke on the impact of standardized tests on students. “We know what’s good for students, and it’s not tests. They aren’t based on real intelligence. There is no emotional analysis of a child. Part of my job isn’t just teaching history, but enabling my students to have confidence in themselves.”



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