

An answer to the Washington Teachers' Union

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On January 24, the Washington Teachers' Union (WTU) posted an entry on its *WTU Teachers Lounge* blog, entitled, "WTU addresses 'World Socialist Web Site' article's false claims." In the blog, the WTU accuses the WSWS of posting an article that "completely misrepresented" the union's position on School Chancellor Kaya Henderson's school closing plan.

The article that has drawn the ire of the WTU is "One in ten Washington, DC public schools to be closed," written by WSWS writers Adam Sagitov and Nick Barrickman and posted on January 23.

"According to Sagitov and Barrickman," the WTU writes, "the Washington Teachers' Union appears to have 'embraced the decisions' to close the 20 traditional public schools initially proposed by Henderson and that 'we acknowledge DC Public Schools' responsibility to efficiently manage public school facilities and resources.'"

In all fairness, the union "appearing" to embrace the closures was not a part of our analysis. What the authors actually wrote was that WTU President Nathan Saunders "embraced the decisions, with the small caveat that qualified teachers be rehired elsewhere in the aftermath of the closures."

Nothing the WTU writes contradicts this. As the WSWS wrote, the WTU fully accepts the closures and will do nothing to fight them.

In an effort to sidestep this fact, the WTU writes, "what the authors conveniently omit in the very next sentence is the Union's 'responsibility to advocate for families, including students and good teachers who will ultimately be displaced—through no fault of their own—but as a result of fiscal challenges and changes in school needs.'"

But this only proves our point. While thousands of parents, teachers and students want to fight the school closures, layoffs and the further attack on the right to public education, the WTU declares that its job is to be

the advocate for those who "will ultimately be displaced"!

Moreover, as the reference to "fiscal challenges" makes clear, the WTU accepts without question the lie peddled by Henderson and DC Mayor Vincent Gray that school closures and teacher layoffs are necessary because there is just not enough money. This under conditions in which corporate profits and the stock markets are hitting record levels, Obama has squandered trillions to bail out Wall Street and fund unending wars, and city officials have diverted vitally needed resources from the public schools to for-profit charter companies.

The shutdown of DCPS schools, like the shutdown of schools in Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia and other cities is part of a deliberate plan to dismantle public education, which is being spearheaded by the Obama administration and his education secretary, Arne Duncan. Public schools are starved of funds, teachers subjected to punitive testing and fired, schools closed and charters expanded. This results in an inevitable fall in student enrollment, which is then used to justify more cuts, closings, charters, etc.

In a further effort to refute the WSWS, the WTU writes, "We have called for a serious dialogue about the effects of market-driven education reform that looks beyond the more immediate challenges presented by school closings and even insisted upon all stakeholders—including the Mayor, City Council and the Chancellor—to renew their commitment to support public education as the primary source for educating the District's children."

What has this produced?

According to the pro-charter web site DCSchoolReform.org, Saunders has been involved in the formation of a task force designed to press city charters to open their doors to students displaced by closures. On the committee, aside from Saunders himself, were Chancellor Henderson and DC public charter school board chairman Brian Jones. The committee released a document asking

charters to help “ease the transition for students, families and communities impacted by these closures.”

Far from opposing the looting of the public schools by charter school profiteers, the WTU is intimately involved in the process. The main concern of the upper middle class functionaries in the WTU is to make sure they can continue to collect unions dues from the teachers in the charter schools no matter how little they are paid or how bad their conditions. Moreover, the sister unions of the WTU in Los Angeles, New York and elsewhere have gone directly into the charter business.

The American Federation of Teachers—to which the WTU is affiliated—and the National Education Association (NEA) were among the first to endorse Obama during last year’s election. They are partners in the reactionary Race to the Top scheme, which, just like Bush’s No Child Left Behind, is aimed at victimizing teachers, shutting schools and privatizing public education.

That is why the fight against school closings must be organized independently of the WTU, the Democratic Party and the corporate interests they serve.

The Socialist Equality Party is calling on teachers, parents and students to form action committees to oppose all school closings, layoffs, budget cuts, and privatization schemes.

Because public education is based on the fundamentally egalitarian and democratic principle that everyone should have access to quality education, it is incompatible with an economic system whose fundamental premise is inequality.

Therefore, the defense of education is bound up with the development of a political struggle by the working class for socialism and the reorganization of economic life to serve the needs of society, not profit of a few.



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