

”Why did they bring in the judge now? Because he is bought”

Judge Rhodes appointed “transitional manager” over Detroit public schools

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On Monday, February 29, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder officially named Judge Steven Rhodes the leader of the “transition team” for the Detroit Public Schools (DPS), tasked with “balancing the books” and “ushering in reforms.”

“Judge Rhodes was a natural choice,” Snyder said in a statement. “He is highly respected in the city and was invaluable in leading Detroit out of bankruptcy. Detroit needs strong public schools for the city’s economic comeback to continue through its neighborhoods.”

Judge Rhodes was, in fact, “invaluable” during the bankruptcy, lending a cover of legal authority and “neutrality” to a massive transfer of wealth from the working class to the accounts of the banks and debt bondholders. The judge was particularly invaluable for his role of vacating the Michigan state constitution and carrying through the destruction of long-held workers’ pension rights.

“We need honesty, integrity and trustworthiness—and we get another liar,” one teacher who spoke to *World Socialist Web Site* said of Rhodes’ appointment. “He’s not even an educator.

“Why do they bring in a judge now? Because he is bought. It’s like the people running for president, they don’t care about the little people. We should start chopping at the top. We are speaking about the rights of children and their education.”

Tuesday was the last day on the job for DPS emergency manager (EM) Darnell Earley, who faced intense public outrage and became a political liability due to his previous role in the lead poisoning of Flint children. As a result of the criminality widely associated with the term “emergency manager,” Rhodes asked to be known as DPS’s “transition” manager. He will, however, assume all the dictatorial powers of the EM, plus the same

\$12,000 monthly salary.

Rhodes said his immediate priority is meeting with all the “stakeholders” in the Detroit Public Schools. He vowed to get “input from teachers, parents, principals and others” before selecting a district superintendent. Last week he met twice with teachers and principals, and was warmly welcomed by the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT) who sponsored a meeting so he could address DPS workers.

On Monday DFT interim president Ivy Bailey indicated the union’s willingness—even enthusiasm—to work with Rhodes. She emphasized that the union’s main concern is a “locally elected and empowered school board.” Rhodes has signaled his support for local control, Bailey said.

The DFT leader went on to salute Rhodes’ “willingness to listen to and work with educators, parents and the community.” She contrasted this to the actions of Earley, which included “filing lawsuits against educators, banning health inspectors from hazardous public school buildings, and racking up a school debt of a half-billion dollars with no accountability.”

She urged Rhodes to name an additional member to the transition team, someone “from the school district who is known and respected by educators, school employees, parents and the community”, e.g. someone either from the union or in alliance with it.

So far only Tonya Allen, president and CEO of the Skillman Foundation, has been asked to serve on the team. Allen is co-chair of the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren, working closely with the national American Federation of Teachers and local Democratic politicians. Allen refused to accept the position as DPS superintendent, but says she will continue to serve as a consultant in the reorganization process.

The AFT and its local Detroit affiliate have been

working overtime since January to suppress the independent actions of rank-and-file teachers and to divert their militancy behind the Democratic Party and the demand for restoring “local control” through the reestablishment of an elected school board. This has nothing to do with giving working people in Detroit any greater say-so over the allocation of public resources and school policy. On the contrary, it is aimed at expanding the influence and business opportunities of local Democratic politicians, union functionaries and their corporate connections.

In fact, the union is supporting the pending legislation, sponsored by Republican Governor Rick Snyder, for the reorganization of the school district, which will open the door to much greater privatization, attack if not destroy DPS pensions and health care, and criminalize teacher protests, among other “reforms” in the interest of “balancing the books.” The only interest of the DFT officials is to have a “seat at the table” so it can share in the spoils from the dismantling of public education.

A long-term Detroit educator who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* said, “Those who went to the DFT meeting where he [Rhodes] spoke said it was horrible and they couldn’t voice their opinion anyway. So what is the next step for us?”

“I just read through the Michigan House bill to reorganize DPS. It never addresses our retirement. They are taking away our rights to collectively bargain and we don’t know if we’ll have our retirement. But it’s almost amusing because they repeatedly address the work stoppages—in several parts of the bill! What are they so worried about?”

“They are taking away our First Amendment rights—criminalizing them,” she said, adding, “There’s a lot they are doing in Michigan which is unconstitutional.

“So Rhodes is in charge of the “transition”—transition to what? They say the Great Lakes Education Project, the DeVos family, is just waiting to take over DPS. It’s very scary.”

Reflecting on the nature of the political challenges ahead in the fight to defend public education, she said, “This is so massive, we have no idea how to change it. Rhodes already seems to know what’s happening. The conspirators are already planning, and we don’t have a plan.”

She continued, “Detroit is being used as a model for everywhere else. I feel Washington is backing this. They are seeing how to run this, how to get it through deceitfully. People don’t know. It is so scary; they are

deceiving the public.”

Another veteran teacher said, “Privatization is just crap. Are they going to bring in quality schools? We’ve got kids that can’t read and write. The conditions are abominable. The buildings are old and dilapidated. It’s a capitalistic society and they have knocked out the middle class. The balance is gone.

“People ask me how I know that this is statewide, national. Well, we have some 28 billionaires who control half of the wealth of the US. They are getting richer and richer. The word needs to be passed on. We need to seek out more information and become more politically aware,” she emphasized.

Asked about the role of the Detroit Federation of Teachers in opposing the sickouts and now supporting Rhodes, she said, “The unions—it’s becoming more apparent. It’s been going on for years and years. But people are now beginning to realize that our union is not helping us. I’ve always been union. My parents were both teachers. I always believed that the union was supposed to back us, but once [former DFT president] Keith Johnson came in, I knew that was not how it worked.”

“The sickouts were the best things to do, but it should have been everybody out there. We don’t have enough teachers. We have kindergartens with 40 children—and they’re supposed to learn something?”

Referring to the role of the now retired DPS Emergency Manager Darnell Earley, who had previously been the EM in Flint, she emphasized his criminal role in the lead poisoning of the city’s children. “How is Earley walking around scot-free? He just walks away? He should be in a cell. That man cost people’s lives. People in Flint died. He and Snyder took their lives. Why don’t they have to pay for that?”



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