

Detroit teacher: “Children are made into dollar signs”

Our reporters
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Teachers in Detroit Public Schools spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* at the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT) emergency meeting on Thursday. They expressed a deep concern for the future of the Detroit Public Schools (DPS) and frustration with the union, which has collaborated in the attacks on teachers and public education. A number of teachers emphasized that they felt the sickouts had represented a step forward, but have been stymied ever since.

A young teacher explained first of all why she did not want to be identified. “I should have the right to say what I think, but [former emergency manager] Darnell Earley drew up a warning saying that if anyone says anything, it has to be reported back to DPS. I feel that must still be in effect and people can lose their jobs.” Earley had, in fact, used public statements by educators to file a legal complaint against 23 rank-and-file teachers for allegedly violating the state’s law prohibiting strikes by public employees.

Explaining the events of the meeting, she referred to the “enabling resolution” of the DFT, which called for a march on the state capitol in support of the legislation proposed by Michigan Governor Rick Snyder. “The union presented a document on proposals for action, but it was voted down. We should have had the right to see it beforehand. How can we know if we are for it if we haven’t studied it?”

“I believe the situation in Detroit has been in the works for a long time. Now it’s at the end. They are all bad plans. It’s ‘lose-lose.’ One might have a few better points, but that’s it, the ‘lesser of two evils.’”

“[Judge Steven] Rhodes is just another emergency manager with a different title. He’s there to finish the job that Earley couldn’t do. There’s a lot of secrecy, just like the water situation in Flint. Politicians are getting their pockets padded. No one is coming to the

teachers and asking what they can do to help us, they’re just putting more money in their pockets.”

Another teacher said, “[DFT interim president Ivy] Bailey wanted an enabling resolution passed, but it didn’t. Others wanted a strike vote, but that didn’t happen. I left the meeting part way through because of all the bickering. I wanted to know what would happen between the House and Senate bills. I was surprised that the legislature is going on vacation on March 24. That leaves just two weeks. That concerns me.

“Honestly I think something will happen. They were so ‘upset’ about our five days of sickouts, it wouldn’t look too good for them to leave 47,000 children in the streets.

“Members felt that the DFT was not doing enough to be proactive. We need to get the word out as to what the state did to us—how we ended up at this point. I think the general public needs to get an understanding. Parents are not aware of what is going on.

“I don’t know much about Judge Rhodes, but I don’t trust too many people. They tell us what they want us to hear. They go through the motions, but already have a political agenda in place.

“Children have the right to an education, an equal education, and they’re not getting it. Its being destroyed at the expense of corporate greed, people at the top. It’s not fair. They deserve better.”

Her colleague added, “And they don’t value teachers at all. Everything is our fault.” Her friend agreed, “We are treated as third-class citizens. We are not respected, and education is the hardest job.

“There is such a bigger picture that they aren’t taking into account. It’s the kids that are hurting at the end. That’s what really, really makes me angry. They didn’t choose this. They were born into poverty. They were born into the situation.”

Her friend added, “How can they justify paying the EMs so much money? How many have we had so far? And our situation is getting worse and worse, because of their corruption, especially this last one [Darnell Earley].”

“And he got rid of so many people,” her colleague continued. “[Michigan Governor Rick] Snyder’s plans concern me a lot. It’s about businesses in the end. Children are made into dollar signs, that’s all they are.”

“What is at stake here in Detroit is huge,” said another experienced teacher. “What they are doing, they are preying on the ignorance of the community. The community is waking up and saying, ‘we don’t want charter schools here.’ Look at the test scores. Only a few are successful, outperforming the public schools.

“I believe the DPS will use their \$50 million, the legislature will go on vacation, and when they come back, they will hash out a version. The House version is so ridiculous. I wondered if it was a bargaining chip.

“The whole structure is messed up. In DPS we have more than 16,000 kids in special education. We receive \$10,000-\$14,000 to educate them, but it costs \$26,000.

“The lobbyists already have bought the Senators and Representatives. It makes it extremely hard to get something done. The community needs to wake up.”



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