

Trump names opponent of public schools to head Department of Education

Eric London
26 November 2016

President-elect Donald Trump's cabinet of billionaires, religious fundamentalists and militarists is emerging as the most right-wing in US history. His nominee for secretary of education, long-time Republican fundraiser Betsy DeVos, is no exception.

Politically and personally, DeVos personifies the oligarchic and rapacious American ruling class.

For 10 years, DeVos led an organization that calls for the reinstatement of child labor. From 1995 to 2005, she sat on the Board of Directors for the Acton Institute and has given \$1.28 million to support the organization since 2000.

A November 3, 2016 blog post by the Acton Institute is titled: "Work is a gift our kids can handle." The blog argues that turn of the 20th century photographs of young children with their faces covered in coal dust from mining "represent the faces of those who are actively building enterprises and cities, using their gifts to serve their communities, and setting the foundation of a flourishing nation, in turn."

The article quotes another recent pro-child labor article noting that being a child coal miner is "an exciting life" and that "if kids were allowed to work and compulsory school attendance was abolished, the jobs of choice would be at Chick-Fil-A and Walmart. And they would be fantastic jobs too ..."

For decades, DeVos has been involved in a conspiracy to abolish public education and turn it into a cash cow for her billionaire private school and charter school profiteer friends. She has established a network of shadow groups whose purpose is to lobby for transferring billions of dollars from public education into the pockets of the ultra-wealthy.

In 1993, DeVos led the Education Freedom Fund, an organization aimed at spreading propaganda advocating replacing public schools with private, religious and for-

profit schools. "We are very strong proponents of fundamentally changing the way we approach education," DeVos told a Christian radio station in 2001.

In 2003, DeVos founded "All Children Matter," which has spent millions of dollars buying politicians' support for privatizing public schools. In 2004, DeVos helped launch the "Alliance for School Choice," and in 2010 she founded another privatization group, the "American Federation for Children."

DeVos's record parallels Trump's campaign promise to divert tens of billions of dollars from Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which go exclusively to schools in impoverished areas, to vouchers that would provide a cash windfall for for-profit charter corporations.

DeVos's political orientation reflects the anti-social interests of the aristocratic milieu on whose behalf she speaks.

She is the heiress of her billionaire industrialist father Edgar Prince's fortune. Her brother, Erik Prince, is the founder of Blackwater USA (since renamed as Academi), the mercenary firm that murdered 17 Iraqi civilians at Nisour Square, Baghdad in 2007. Her husband, Richard DeVos, is the billionaire heir of the Amway corporation fortune who spent tens of millions of dollars of personal wealth running a failed campaign for Governor of Michigan in 2006.

Both Betsy and Richard DeVos's parents belong to a class of religious zealots who have donated vast sums of money to oppose same-sex marriage and abortion rights.

In the book *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*, author Jane Mayer described the role of the DeVos family: "Starting in 1970, they began to direct at least

\$200 million into virtually every branch of the New Right's infrastructure, from think tanks like the Heritage Foundation to academic organizations such as the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, which funded conservative publications on college campuses."

In 1997, Betsy DeVos penned a column in the Washington DC publication *Roll Call* which defended the aristocratic privilege of the wealthy to dominate government:

"I know a little something about soft money," DeVos wrote, "as my family is the largest single contributor of soft money to the national Republican Party. I have decided, however, to stop taking offense at the suggestion that we are buying influence. Now I simply concede the point. They are right. We do expect things in return."

DeVos is worth billions of dollars and owns several mansions located throughout the United States. She owns a 22,000 square foot palace on Lake Macatawa in Holland, Michigan, which has 13 porches, 10 bedrooms, eight dishwashers, and three garages.

The family owns two other mansions in the Western Michigan towns of Grand Rapids and Ada. In 2011, DeVos purchased two more mansions in Florida, where she keeps her 164-foot Westport Yacht. A society pages article from a Vero Beach newspaper notes that "Busy Betsy's" yacht "has six staterooms made of the finest cabinetry, stone and leathers, and a salon which opens to a large covered aft deck with lounge, wet bar and conversation areas for entertaining."

This is the individual who has been appointed to run the department charged with overseeing the schooling of over 70 million children enrolled in public schools.

Despite the fact that Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton defeated Trump in the popular vote by over 2 million, the Democratic establishment has been relatively mum on DeVos's appointment. The *New York Times* wrote that the nomination of DeVos "could blunt criticism that his early picks came from a homogeneous bloc of older, white men." *Times* columnist David Leonhardt wrote Thursday: "For anyone who still has an open mind about the politics of education, though, I'd urge a nuanced, wait-and-see reaction."

Such is the response of the semi-official Democratic Party press to a billionaire aristocrat who may dismantle the 150-year-old public education system,

abolish compulsory school attendance, and force the children of tens of millions of workers to spend their childhoods toiling as their great-great grandparents did over a century ago.

It underscores the fact that, while a Trump administration will vastly escalate the attack on schools, "public education reform" has been a hallmark of the Democratic Party, with the Obama administration overseeing the dismantling of public schools, the expansion of for-profit charters and the elimination of hundreds of thousands of education jobs.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact