

Billionaire Michael Bloomberg vents his spleen at Chicago teachers: “Suck it up and go to work”

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On Wednesday, cable news network MSNBC aired an interview with Michael Bloomberg, the billionaire former mayor of New York City. The world’s 14th richest human used the occasion to angrily denounce Chicago teachers for resisting unsafe reopenings and demand President Joe Biden crack down on their opposition.

Bloomberg arrogantly dismissed teachers’ concerns of being infected with COVID-19 and dying as selfish: “The teachers say, ‘Well, I don’t want to go back because it’s dangerous.’ We have a lot of city and state and federal employees who run risks. That’s part of the job. You run risks to help America, to help your state, to help your city, to help your family. And there’s just no reason not to have the schools open, the virtual classes are a joke, they’re worse than a joke.” He concluded, “The teachers are just going to have to suck it up, stand up and provide an education.”

Bloomberg was being given space by MSNBC as a representative of the financial aristocracy. His rant against teachers makes clear that the reopening of schools is not being done in the interest of students but of the corporate oligarchy, who see a return to classrooms, no matter the cost in human lives, as critical for sending parents back to work so that they continue pumping out profits. The fact that this class standpoint is the only one which is allowed to be expressed in the corporate press is made all the more secure by the control of the news media by super-wealthy individuals like Bloomberg himself, Jeff Bezos and others.

The 12-minute interview was part of the all-out propaganda blitz in the press, including both Democratic- and Republican-aligned outlets, falsely claiming that school openings are safe. Many publications have seized upon a limited study sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in rural Wisconsin to

falsely claim that “science proves” schools are safe, while ignoring the overwhelming body of evidence that schools are one of the main centers of transmission for the virus.

While Bloomberg denounced Biden for his perceived timidity, the newly inaugurated president shares the same aim of overriding workers’ opposition and reopening schools and the economy as quickly as possible. Biden has declared that opening the nation’s schools by April is one of his top priorities. While he has rescinded a large number of Donald Trump’s executive orders, he has kept in place his use of the Defense Production Act to force meatpacking plants to remain open. More than 56,000 meatpacking workers have contracted the disease in the US and 270 have died.

Viewers might have been wondering why MSNBC thought the public would be particularly interested in what Bloomberg had to say. After all, his Democratic presidential campaign last year, in which he attempted virtually to buy the presidency through limitless infusions of his personal cash, went down in flames as primary voters rejected the smug aristocrat, who made no attempt to conceal his contempt for the working class in his debate appearances, by a wide margin.

His MSNBC interview had all of the “charm” of his election campaign. Bloomberg referred to all public students as “poor people” who could not afford internet-connected devices and included “shoe shiners and cleaners” among those people who would benefit by being “patronized” by reopening businesses. Before his most inflammatory remarks about school teachers needing to “suck it up,” Bloomberg stumbled and referred to students as “our most important things—ah, our most important players.”

Nevertheless, the news network bent over backward to present him in the most favorable possible light. The

interview, which was heavily edited, began by interviewer Stephanie Ruhle absurdly presenting him as a public health expert on the grounds that Johns Hopkins University's school of public health, which has published detailed daily statistics on the spread of the pandemic, bears his name because he is a major donor to the school. For good measure, MSNBC had Bloomberg appear with World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus, who participated via satellite. Dr. Tedros barely spoke in the aired version of the interview, and he and Bloomberg did not interact at all, indicating that the only purpose of including him was to lend credibility to Bloomberg.

"I think what we're doing to poor kids is a disgrace," Bloomberg claimed. "They are not in school, they will never recover from this, and they had a bad education experience anyways," as though this were not the result of the monopolization of society's wealth by figures such as Bloomberg himself. Bloomberg has been a major financial backer of school privatization schemes around the country, and during his time as New York City mayor he opened a record number of for-profit charter schools.

The threadbare lie, repeatedly endlessly by figures such as Democratic mayor of Chicago Lori Lightfoot, that their push to reopen schools is solely motivated by concern for the welfare of children is reduced to absurdity coming from the mouth of Bloomberg. In a racist rant to fellow oligarchs at the Aspen Institute in 2015, Bloomberg described the same poor, mostly minority youth he claims now to be concerned with as the main cause of crime, and declared that police should "throw 'em against the wall and frisk 'em." The revelation of his comments early last year played a major role in torpedoing his bid to win the Democratic Party presidential nomination.

The former mayor of New York City was allowed to give a lying account of the initial stages of the pandemic, claiming that "no one knew" how bad the virus had the potential to be. In fact, Trump had been briefed early in January on the danger of coronavirus, and the WHO declared the outbreak to be a pandemic on January 30.

The conversation then turned to the rollout of the vaccine, which has been disastrous, with the total number of vaccines delivered a tiny fraction of the benchmarks set by the federal government last year. When MSNBC reporter Ruhle asked Bloomberg how resources to fight the pandemic could be distributed equitably if the process were controlled by private companies, Bloomberg became far more animated than when he was discussing a disease which has killed 2 million people. "Stephanie, you out of

anybody should understand [that] capitalism really does work!" he interjected. "Our health and hospital system is based on capitalism. We charge, and better hospitals get donations, and they improve their healthcare—what's wrong with having experts who know how to distribute stuff?"

The question elicited such a strong response because, in fact, the entire capitalist system has been thoroughly exposed by the pandemic. Time and again, the primary barrier to all rational, scientifically grounded responses to the pandemic has been blocked by the profit motive.

Now, even after 450,000 people in the United States have died, the ruling class is demanding that teachers and students return to classrooms. They are doing so as the pandemic enters a new and more deadly stage, with more virulent and lethal variants of the virus becoming more dominant. But the ruling class could not care less as long as share values on Wall Street continue to rise. This is why such widespread opposition is now erupting among teachers and other sections of workers and taking on a more and more explicitly anti-capitalist orientation.

Bloomberg, in spite of callous indifference toward the "little people," is highly sensitive to the danger of a socialist movement in the working class, denunciations of which came to dominate his presidential campaign. It demonstrates, moreover, that Trump's justification for his coup attempt on the grounds that he was the last line of defense against socialism in America was not just hot air from a madman. It expressed that the overriding fear of the ruling class is the growth of revolutionary opposition within the working class.



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