

Michigan teachers defend immigrants, oppose Democratic Party collusion in Trump's attacks on education and social rights

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At a board meeting of the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) February 11 a leading member of the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Committee (MERFC), spoke out in defense of immigrant workers and against the ongoing assault on funding for public education.

Phyllis, a middle school teacher, urged educators attending the meeting to join the committee and help mobilize the powerful Detroit-area working class against mass deportations of immigrant students and their families, xenophobia, and plans to destroy public education.

“This government has already begun shipping undocumented workers to Guantanamo,” the teacher told the crowd. “We have in this school system parents, children, and teachers of all races and colors, from dozens of countries, and who oppose the efforts of the Trump administration to divide us between American born and foreign-born.

“These fascist measures start with the undocumented who are merely trying to work and provide their children a better chance in life, but these attacks are directed against us all. Immigrants and their children are being scapegoated for a crisis created by the billionaire oligarchy and their never-ending wars abroad that cost trillions.”

She said, “We must defend each and every one. The old slogan ‘An injury to one is an injury to all’ has never been more important.”

Phyllis pointed out that the attacks on immigrants did not begin with Trump. “The Democrats have paved the way for Trump, with Biden/Harris and Obama before them carrying out their own mass deportations and attacks on education.

“For years, Democrats have joined with Republicans telling us there is no money to make schools and school workers whole for years of budget cuts. Trump won only a plurality, not a majority, of the popular vote, yet the Democrats bow before him like he’s a king, like everybody loves him and supports his policies.”

In conclusion she said, “We are fighting a dictatorship of the rich, by the rich, and for the rich and that controls both political parties and serves the billionaire oligarchs, the Elon Musks and Betsy DeVoses and Ilitches and Dan Gilberts of this world.”

The teacher’s remarks were greeted with warm applause and shouts of “That’s right” from the audience.

The increasing hostility displayed by both educators and parents toward the Democratic politicians in charge of the city of Detroit, a city that has been under Democratic Party control for decades, is very significant.

The growing public antipathy in the city toward the Democrats is legitimate. The day before the school board meeting, two homeless children in Detroit, Darnell (9) and Amillah Williams (2), froze to death while sleeping with their extended family in their mother’s car, a tragedy that highlights the severe poverty that persists in the once-prosperous “Motor City,” despite claims of a “revival.”

The mother of the two children, Tateona Williams, is a 29-year-old unemployed medical assistant caring for a total of five children. She had been rendered homeless and repeatedly denied assistance from the agencies run by Democratic Mayor Mike Duggan and the Democratic-dominated City Council.

Despite the lies about a “comeback” of the city, Detroit remains one of the poorest large cities in America. Its median household income is \$27,838, and the official poverty rate is 37.9 percent. The purported “comeback” refers solely to the financial boom realized by billionaire developers and corporations, who have reported billions in profits year after year. Both parties, but in particular the Democrats, have overseen a vast transfer of wealth from the labor of the Michigan workers to the Wall Street oligarchs.

A DPSCD teacher speaking separately to the *World Socialist Web Site* described the collusion of the Democrats in the deepening attacks on the working class. “What Trump is doing is illegal, and no one is doing anything about it in the legislature. Biden, Pelosi, the Democrats are all going along with it. Barack Obama and Biden sat there at Trump’s inauguration, smiling and shaking Trump’s hand.

“All the Big Tech firms were there, together with the hedge funds and all those financial firms which raided the entire corporate sector. They stripped them, and now they are stripping the government. They want to strip us, the working class.

“Musk is roaming around to collect funds and aiming to go for the crown jewel, Social Security. They are just trying to steal it from the working class. They eliminated funding for cancer research and the CDC [Center for Disease Control] is scared to even put out information on the avian flu,” she angrily stated.

“Workers are riled up,” the teacher noted. “They [the ruling elites] are very concerned that people will see they have two right-wing parties, not just one. We just can’t afford these rich people anymore. They don’t build anything; they merely suck it all from the economy. America doesn’t build anything anymore.”

Asked about the effect of this on schools, she described the conditions in her dilapidated DPSCD building, “Just the other day, as I was teaching my class, a ceiling tile fell, bam, on the classroom. Thank goodness no student was sitting there. Nothing has been fixed; we had an educator (since retired) who used to walk around our building in a construction helmet due to tiles falling down.

“Trump wants to end Title I and IDEA and turn them into block grants. The states are already suffering. If they turn these programs into block grants for the states, they won’t hand over this money to education. I understand that the Republicans are considering attaching the bill to destroy the Department of Education to the continuing resolution over government debt.

“They want to get rid of public education and turn it all into vouchers. This is class warfare and oligarchic rule.

“As an educator, I represent the children of the poor and working class. They need a voice. They deserve far more than what they are getting. Parents and grandparents fought for education going all the way back to the Freedman’s Bureau in the South after the Civil War. They fought to get education and get us to this point. We cannot go back. In fact, we want it all, completely socialized education. Anybody should have the right to go to college or trade school free. We have the money.

“I am tired of being told things are scarce. How are a few people ruling over 300 million, telling us what we can’t have?”

In her public remarks, Phyllis also pointed to the complicity of the unions, including the teachers’ unions, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), which provide the Democrats with hundreds of dollars of teachers’ dues in political donations.

Phyllis informed the crowd that AFT President Randi Weingarten had written a letter to Trump, literally “begging” him to recognize sanctuary schools and churches while at the same time legitimizing the fascist president’s bogus claims of an immigrant “invasion.” She said that educators should have no illusions that the unions could be compelled to fight, warning that “Weingarten and the NEA, the union apparatus, has grown wealthy on dues revenues, and will not disturb the status quo no matter what.”

Phyllis added, “But mobilizing the thousands of educators

who oppose Trump and want to defend immigrants and our democratic rights in industrial action would have an effect.”

Explaining the tasks of the Educators Rank-and-File Committee, she said, “We must educate and organize our parents, neighbors and colleagues. We must organize ourselves, joining together to alert and educate our communities, independently of the official politicians and the phony ‘representatives.’” She urged educators to join the MERFC and “reach out to farmworkers, autoworkers, healthcare workers, and more.”

“This is the power that must be used to stop these attacks,” she emphasized.

Agreeing with these sentiments, a Detroit teacher warned, “The unions will not fight.” She cited the lesson of the toothless UAW “stand up strike” in 2023. “Look at the UAW, [UAW President Shawn] Fain called a partial strike. Who does that?” Indeed, the faux “strike” left most workers on the job and in the aftermath of the inevitable betrayal has resulted in thousands of autoworkers losing their jobs.

The teacher noted the similar complicity of the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association with the privatization of education. In Detroit, fully half of children attend charter schools, most of which are run by for-profit corporations.

“I stopped paying my dues to the AFT after Randi Weingarten failed to fight against the mass testing and charter schools. In fact, she organized for Bill Gates [Microsoft billionaire and national advocate of charter schools and privatization] to come and speak to us. That’s when I quit.” The Trump administration, building on these policies, is calling for universal vouchers and the evisceration of public education.

Summing up the situation, she said, “Why? The economic system is just not meeting the needs of the 21st century. Capitalism served its purpose, but that purpose is gone.”

She concluded with a similar call to action. “We need rank-and-file committees because we have to fight back. We cannot allow education to be taken away. We need to alert other workers. The working class cannot allow them to get away with this.”



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