

Welcome to the “New Normal”: The News Media and Neoliberal Reforming Education

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Not long ago, if you wanted to seize political power in a country, you had merely to control the army and the police... Today a country belongs to the person who controls communications (Eco, 1967, p. 135).

Introduction

The manufactured crisis in education has been foisted on the American people by reformers (Duncan, Rhee, Gates, Obama and others) brilliantly pushing the "public education crisis" narrative. This is not a new phenomenon as its history can be traced back to the race for space and Sputnik. However, this new iteration of the so-called “educational crisis” carries with it devastating consequences to education as well as society-at-large. For example, the media presented the refrain that the Soviet Union was winning due to better schools, and the media perpetuates the story to this day (Bracey, 2008, 2009). The media has often played a role in shaping public perceptions, regarding particular means to redress this constructed education crisis (Gerstl-Pepin, 2006; Ingersoll, 2003). Now, powerful businessmen like Bill Gates, Eli Broad, and Mark Zuckerberg use philanthropic funds to wield considerable influence over the media and US schools (Kovacs, 2011; Saltman, 2009, 2010). These scions of business speak at education summits, make substantial contributions to individual schools and districts, appear on iconic media outlets like Oprah where they can express their views to a captive audience and advocate for reforms like merit pay, charter schools, and the removal of tenure, while vilifying teachers and public schools (Kovacs, 2005; Kovacs & Christie, 2008; Saltman, 2009). Further, news articles quote conservative and neoliberal think tanks, like the CATO Institute and the Heritage Foundation, with little reference to who they are, their political or religious affiliations, and whose interests they serve (Dolny, 1998; Haas, 2007). Because of the social and cultural

capital wielded by the above, certain reforms and educational discourses gain more traction in the public consciousness than others, and eventually lead to indoctrination through co-optation (Shaker & Heilman, 2004; Stack, 2006; Wallace, 1997).

According to Harvey (and many others) neoliberalism is now ‘hegemonic as a mode of discourse’: [it] has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in and understand the world (2005, p.3). It is against this backdrop that we demonstrate how media coverage employs dominant neoliberal narratives and discourses to blame public education for societal ills. Next, we examine how the media’s use of neoliberal narrative and discourse has hegemonically become the ‘new normal’ of public education and school reform. We utilize data from media coverage of public education since the election of President Barack Obama, to illustrate how mainstream media news outlets (television, cable, newspapers, etc.) frame public education reform as a social, political, moral, and, above all, an economic imperative through the use a neoliberal interpretive framework, particularly the discourse of ‘shared sacrifice’. We argue that the media’s unbalanced treatment and integration of neoliberal educational discourses signals a dangerous turn in how we think about the relationship between public education and American democracy. Finally, we conclude that such hegemonic academic repression demands both moral outrage and a counter-hegemonic response.

Education in the Media and Neoliberal Discourses

The political battles over how to reform public education are ubiquitous in the mass media and throughout Internet sources and blogs, and occasionally make their way into the plot of some television series. Some media elements imply that there is something deeply wrong with public education, engage in political spectacle to heighten the sense of urgency, and exercise “control by isolating and fragmenting, denying history, distorting reality, alienating, and monopolizing communication (one-way, to its advantage)” (Vinson & Ross, 2003, p. 49). Simply put, the news media look for and create stories that sell. Media corporations are businesses with close ties to politicians and state and federal governments, and report on issues and stories that will attract readers, viewers, and revenue streams (Levin, 2004). Some of these stories rely on people’s fears, ensuring that topics within news reports have staying power

(Altheide, 2002). Thus, news reporting, particularly in the press, can influence the policy decision-making process (Anderson, 2007).

According to Ungerleider (2006) the media express predominantly neoliberal values, including:

- The economic interests of individuals should not be fettered by considerations of social equity.
- Choice, as a manifestation of freedom, is a virtue in its own right and the means by which individuals are able to express approval or disapproval in the market.
- People are better served through private entrepreneurialism than by public regulation or provision of services.
- Productive efficiency is the primary—perhaps singular—criterion by which any public policy should be judged.

The above list is not at all surprising. Commercial media are themselves beneficiaries of neoliberal messages. Narratives that depart from neoliberal interpretations occur in the media but their occurrences are less frequent and their presentation more muted than ones that fit the dominant interpretive and ideological framework. It is largely unnecessary to use heavy-handed editorial regulation to ensure that the media use a neoliberal interpretive framework, although such regulation is not completely absent. The media achieve control through recruitment and retention practices. Those who own and manage commercial media employ and promote persons with values similar to their own.

The media have featured stories implying that public education has sufficient resources. Following the neoliberal framework, if these resources were better used they might be sufficient to meet the demands that the public has for education. The problem is not so much one of adequate resources as the need for fiscal and educational accountability. If audits and testing will not, by themselves, improve public schools, increased choice and competition through privatization, apparently, will (Smyth, 2003).

Tapping into parental anxieties and selling hidden messages about the ‘need’ for charter schools is illustrated in a recent Canadian newspaper article that suggested that “Providing parents with standardized test scores and more information about school performance is useful

only if it is accompanied by an ability to choose schools” (Owens, 2002). The neoliberal ideology of choice and business practices in schools can be used to determine best practices, meet parental preference, provide services for children who are not well served by their neighborhood school, provide a better match between student/programs/teachers and make more efficient use of dwindling resources, and, at the same time, create a demand for school choice and effective accountability (Owens, 2002).

While the media have successfully identified the anxieties that many have about our economic future and its impact on public education, many in the media and politicians have successfully mined this same vein of anxiety for political and ideological advantage. Such messages have misrepresented data that indicate that public education is actually doing quite well and gradually improving, feeding the media’s voracious appetite for comparisons, and using such anxiety to fuel the desire for choice and competition within the public school system and between the public system and private alternatives (Bracey, 2009; Ungerleider, 2006).

Still, the American public consumes media messages, consciously and unconsciously. The American public has more access to a wider range of news, opinion, and information than in the past because of the Internet (blogs, news aggregators and news filters, in particular), and, yet, they still rely upon legacy press outlets like *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* (in print and online) for information (Matheson, 2004: The Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010). News coverage of public education is minimal at best, and is rarely covered by knowledgeable journalists (Pelikan, 2005; West, Whitehurst & Dionne, 2009). Even so, that little coverage helps create what Bourdieu called “a reality effect”: “The simple report, the very fact of reporting, of putting on record as a reporter, always implies a social construction of reality that can mobilize (or demobilize) individuals or groups” (1999, p. 21). The news media, then, reflect Gramsci’s notion of “common sense,” and help to reinforce hegemonic culture (1971). For US public education, this means certain reforms are viewed as more natural and logical than others, and are reported as such (Bracey, 2009).

Neoliberal Discourses and the Evolution of the ‘New Normal’ of Education

One of the shifting realities about the news media is the fact that while the internet has democratized news to some extent, news sources are increasingly controlled by fewer and fewer corporate media interests, and this might be why we are seeing agreement and convergence in

just how to fix our “failing schools.” Increased corporate monopoly control of the news narrows the range of voices and perspectives regarding different issues, and many perspectives reflect those of the social and economic elite (Berger, 2005; Callaghan & Schnell, 2001; Richardson, 2007). Powerful political interests have harnessed the media to reinforce neoliberalism as the defining reality in which people live, work, and learn, and have dismissed any critique (Giroux & Saltman, 2009; Harvey, 2005). The language of the market—commercialism, privatization, and deregulation—has become its own “regime of truth” and relegates citizen participation to supporting the free market, even in crisis.

The resulting practices and policies “assault all things public, sabotage the basic contradiction between democratic values and market fundamentalism, it also weakens any viable notion of political agency by offering no language capable of connecting private considerations to public issues” (Giroux, 2002, para. 1). The neoliberal narrative is totalizing, and it is no wonder that neoliberal interests and solutions guide public education reform, which leads to talk about them in terms of shared sacrifice and the new normal. They are considered to be common sense and politically, racially, ethnically, and culturally neutral (Duggan, 2004; Giroux and Saltman, 2009). Neoliberalism, its supporters, and the media have, quite literally, shaped how we think about, talk about, and engage in daily life at the local, economic, and civic levels. Further, its discourses have helped to constitute a *new normal*—employing neoliberalism at all levels of government to fix the never-ending crises of American society—despite the fact that those same neoliberal principles have helped to bring about those same crises (Bolter & Grusin, 2000; Giroux, 2009; Harvey, 2005; Kellner, 2002).

Among the earliest evolutions of what would later become the *new normal* was Didion’s writing about the Bush Administration’s key military, intelligence, and economic policies through its first term (2004). According to Didion, the nation and its people were living in a changed world in which the security of the nation required a complete rethinking of how to wage war, including redefining torture and democratic participation. That, coupled with plans to move forward to alter or cut different social programs—including Social Security, Medicare, and public education—and encourage the transition to market-driven alternatives, cutting taxes, particularly for corporations and the wealthiest Americans, led Didion to conclude that under the *new normal*, one thing remained the same:

the primacy, for this administration, of its domestic agenda, the relentless intention to dismantle or “reform” American society for the benefit, or “protection,” since the closest model here was a protection racket, of those segments of the business community that supported... President [Bush]. (2004, section 5, para. 5)

The idea of *new normal* steeped in the politics of emergency is, according to Robbins (2008), rooted in a form of neoliberal globalization in which the elite reinforce and institutionalize insecurity and anxiety—social, economic, and cultural—as central to the evolutions of the *new normal*. Robbins connected the discourse of fear to the new normal, noting that the criminalization and militarization of schools serve as clear illustrations of the march to global neoliberalism because schools serve as a primary site for where young people learn to live within the *new normal*:

The function of regimenting-gone-wild in public schools—since, in its systemically violent undermining of basic human and pedagogical relationships, it clearly fails to satisfy its stated intentions of producing safe school environments—might be to teach kids how to learn to live (in fear) with neoliberal globalization in the future. (2008, p. 344)

The regiments of testing, accountability, and the accompanying consequences of failure, decoupled from the needs of an engaged democratic sphere, leave current and future generations of young people, especially those most vulnerable, at risk of further victimization. They are learning that they have few opportunities if they do not submit to the rules and practices of global neoliberalism, and, at the same time, are coerced to accept a view of life in which the next economic crisis is around the corner. Enacting neoliberal practices and policies as the *new normal* of education instills in them the sense that there is nothing they can do to change their current or future situations. Indeed, the conceptualization of the *new normal* of education can best be understood as the permeation of neoliberal discourses, practices, and policies into all elements of public education.

Applying a Neoliberal Interpretive Framework to Media Coverage of Education

Obama's choice for Secretary of education, Arne Duncan, has been popular among neoliberal advocacy groups and some scholars emanating from his work as CEO of Chicago Public Schools. He worked closely with allies to realize the implementation of the Renaissance 2010 Plan, what Saltman (2007a, c) considered a form of disaster capitalism. Renaissance 2010 sought to continue the gross underfunding of public education, contributing to the crisis state in which too many schools in Chicago and nationwide now find themselves (Lipman, 2004). Underperforming schools were militarized and put on lockdown, which saw a proliferation of with police, security, metal detectors and cameras (Giroux, 2010; Giroux & Saltman, 2009). Closed public schools reopened as charter schools, and teachers were pressed with additional accountability measures to perform (Lipman & Hursh, 2007). Just as the Bush Administration brought the "Texas Miracle" to Washington, Obama and Duncan brought Renaissance 2010, only with more accountability, more testing, merit pay, and charter schools resulting in dire consequences for failure. In many ways, Obama's educational policies would extend, expand, and magnify particular elements of NCLB, some of which continue to be hotly contested, particularly in media reporting (Milbank, 2010).

Traditional news media outlets inflamed the battle over who would be the next Secretary of Education. The media identified the two sides consisting of the so-called "real reformers" and the other, the status quo, consisting of teachers and their advocates. The melee that ensued unfairly presented the teachers as being guilty of causing the current education crisis in the first place. It is clear after a review of the data that in the weeks following Obama's election news sources presented a more balanced view in the front sections. However, the editorial pages leaned in the direction of the candidate with neoliberal credentials and ideas. Indeed, editorial recommendations across outlets were surprisingly similar. For example, *The Washington Post* commented:

It would be a mistake to retreat from the accountability that No Child Left Behind has brought in improving learning and narrowing the achievement gap for minority students. And the next secretary should encourage the kind of innovation and entrepreneurship typified by Teach for America's success in attracting top

college graduates to inner-city schools. (“A job for a reformer,” 12/5/2008, para. 3)

Compare it to *The New York Times* editorialist David Brooks’s comments the same day:

The stakes are huge. For the first time in decades, there is real momentum for reform. It's not only Rhee and Klein -- the celebrities -- but also superintendents in cities across America who are getting better teachers into the classrooms and producing measurable results. There is an unprecedented political coalition building, among liberals as well as conservatives, for radical reform. (Brooks, 2008, para. 11).

That these two pieces reverberate so much with one another is telling about the curtailed perspectives available to the public. Two major newspapers with millions of readers ran editorials regarding the choice for Secretary and framed Obama’s decision in terms of selecting between those who wanted to hold public education back and those who would boldly continue to reform schools employing neoliberal practices. Concerns about the financial, educational, and emotional impacts of No Child Left Behind were irrelevant because it was working. Obama should tap into those who, in his own words, were able “to move beyond the old arguments of left and right and take meaningful, practical steps to build an education system worthy of our children and our future” (Obama 2008a, para. 15). Obama’s choice for Secretary of Education was a crucial bellwether in the battle over America’s public schools. Who would win? The real reformers or the status quo?

Upon Duncan’s nomination, newspapers across the nation, including *The Boston Globe*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Baltimore Sun*, and *USA Today*, hailed Duncan as a wise choice. He firmly supported charter schools, school choice, privatization, the elimination of teacher tenure, performance pay, and business-style models of accountability (Dillon, 2009; Glod, 2008). *The Chicago Tribune* commented on Duncan’s ability to bring talented people with very different views together (Malone & Sadovi, 2008). *The Boston Herald* noted that Duncan had:

an excellent track record as an innovator and a supporter of charter schools who isn't afraid to take on the teachers unions... [He] headed the nation's third largest school system for the past seven years, during which time its students have shown slow but steady progress on statewide tests in each of those years. He's not anti-teacher, he's just pro-kid. "He's not beholden to any one ideology, and he's worked tirelessly to improve teacher quality," Obama said of his Cabinet pick yesterday. ("Ed gets innovator", 2008, para. 3-5)

In truth, Duncan is a prime example of this new generation of reformers who have embraced and enacted neoliberal ideologies and practices without full consideration of their impact on public education. With this decision, Obama revealed his position on public education in the United States. Neoliberal educational reform was in its nascent stage as the *new normal* of public education.

In his first address to Congress, Obama connected the current economic crisis to the need to continue aggressive public school reform efforts, commenting that the current crisis had not developed overnight, noted that all elements of US society would have to work and sacrifice to turn the nation around, and, further, that hard choices would have to be made in order to bring about economic recovery (Obama, 2009). Among the long list of issues to address was the continuing transformation of US public schools. In fact, the stimulus plan developed by the Administration allocated nearly \$40 billion to assist schools and colleges struggling under the new economic conditions (Hayes, 2010). It also led to the \$4.3 billion Race to the Top Funding Competition (RTTT), "by far the largest pot of discretionary funding for K-12 education reform in the history of the United States" (Duncan, 2009, para. 1). Duncan called it education reform's "moonshot", an opportunity for schools, communities, teachers, faith-based communities, nonprofits, and businesses to effect change in how the United States educates its children (2009, para. 5).

In addition to RTTT, the Obama Administration also enacted a number of different initiatives that called for a different vision of teacher education that challenged schools of education, and called for new ways to quickly and efficiently recruit a new generation of teachers who would be innovative (Darling-Hammond, 2009). Those new teachers would contribute to the continuing transformation of public education by striving to push student learning, being held

accountable and being rewarded for success through merit pay systems, and working in innovative new learning settings like charter schools (US Department of Education, 2009; Hursh & Lipman, 2008). Instead of moving the nation back towards more equitable education free of market controls, Duncan has worked to further entrench neoliberal policies, and actively strives to bring business and education together (Giroux, 2010). For those who support the news media's message that reform under Obama would address some of the more deeply entrenched problems of public education—namely tenure and teachers' unions—the *new normal* is supposedly a welcome outcome of engaging in school reform during an economic crisis. For others, the *new normal* signals a dangerous turn in the social contract between the state and the people.

The “New Normal” and Public School Reform

In discussing the impact of the “worst recession since the Great Depression” on public education, Duncan noted eighteen months later, in a speech at the American Enterprise Institute, that the [2009] stimulus funding saved the jobs of more than 325,000 educators, and the 2010 education jobs bill was intended to save tens of thousands more (Duncan, 2010, para. 7). He also noted that such funding was coming to an end. States and districts were going to have to make tough decisions and sacrifices in the coming years:

The abrupt loss of those jobs would have been absolutely devastating for children and the nation's economic recovery. But the stimulus funding will run out--and states and districts are facing a funding cliff as those dollars disappear. This New Normal is a reality. And it is a reality that everyone seeking to improve education must grapple with. Yet, there are productive and unproductive ways to meet this challenge of doing more with less. (Duncan, 2010, para. 8 & 9)

Simply put, America's schools have to do more with less, and have to look to innovative ways to keep their spending down while continuing to innovate in the classroom, maintain high standards and accountability, and ensure that graduates would be able to compete in the global marketplace. Districts need to be innovative in how they engage in the process of school reform, and, at its heart, require “a fundamental rethinking of the structure and delivery of education”

(Duncan, 2010, para. 16). Under the *new normal*, “educators, principals, unions, district leaders, state chiefs, parents, lawmakers, and governors [must] explore productive alternatives to old ways of doing things. Challenging the status quo will take courage. It will take commitment. And it will take collaboration.” (para. 17). Among the most important reforms to consider were merit pay, reforming tenure practices, ostensibly to keep the best teachers, and changing pension and benefits. Only then, would districts and schools be able to survive in the neoliberal economy of the *new normal*.

In other words, the most relevant reforms would be the ones that most directly affect the working conditions of teachers: alter or eliminate tenure, cut salaries and benefits and move to a merit pay system, and, if necessary, lay off teachers to make up for the budget shortfall. Scapegoating teachers has been a common refrain among the critics of public education, especially among conservatives, neoliberals, and those who support the corporatization of American society and schools (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). In this respect the *new normal* in public education is a continuance of a long progression of debates in which neoliberal interests have capitalized on framing the debate surrounding teachers, schools, and society (Giroux & McLaren, 1989; Hursh, 2000; 2008; Cross, 2004). What is significant about this historical moment, however, is that the news media reveals a frightening consensus: teachers and teachers’ unions are the problem, especially in their reticence to cooperate in the enduring economic crisis (Hart, 2010). The news media’s coverage of school reform presents a consensus that neoliberal school reforms work, with little reflection regarding how those reform efforts have resulted in greater access to quality education they promised, even under the conditions of the *new normal* (Anderson, 2007; Goldstein, 2010; Hursh & Lipman, 2008; Saltman, 2007b, 2010).

The results of the *new normal* have been devastating for public workers and teachers in particular. The economic crisis has spurred a media excoriation of unions and teachers by focusing on contracts, benefits, pensions, and collective bargaining. A *New Yorker* exposé is illustrative of media attacks on teachers and union contracts, posing the question “Should a thousand bad teachers stay put so that one innocent teacher is protected?” (Brill, 2009, para. 29). According to Brill, the power of the unions was a primary obstacle to reforming public education. What is striking about this question is the presumption that the necessity of ridding districts of bad teachers was so important that the occasional innocent teacher losing her

livelihood is acceptable collateral damage. With the power of the unions substantially reduced, or better yet, eliminated, on both a global and national level, school reformers would finally be able to achieve their goals, while simultaneously undoing most of the gains of the labor movement (Compton & Weiner, 2008). Under the *new normal*, the refrain is that unions are no longer necessary because they are antiquated at best, obstruct the market, and refuse to share in the sacrifices that must be made to return the United States to global ascendancy.

Articles like *The Wall Street Journal's* "How teachers unions lost the media" illustrate the fact that the news media support neoliberal school reformers, harshly criticize teachers and their unions, and are open to more extreme measures to fix American schools (Whitmire & Rotherman, 2009). The *Newsweek* piece "Why we must fire bad teachers" noted that "It is difficult to dislodge the educational establishment. In New Orleans, a hurricane was required: since Katrina, New Orleans has made more educational progress than any other city, largely because the public-school system was wiped out" (Thomas & Wingert, March 6, 2010, p. 3, para 2). Clearly, extraordinary measures are needed to supplant the power of teachers, unions, and their supporters, regardless of the tragedies that provide the opportunities.

New Orleans was a man-made tragedy exacerbated by FEMA. Evacuation plans moved the poorest and most vulnerable the farthest from New Orleans with little chance for return. The recovery plan reduced the footprint of New Orleans by turning what was once predominantly black communities to marshland. The outcome was a much smaller, wealthier, and whiter city. By "capitalizing" on the disaster, neoliberal advocates, backed with incredible private funding, have used New Orleans as their own personal petri-dish to enact neoliberalism from the bottom up in education. The *new normal* not only builds upon the economic insecurities of the working and middle class, it further victimizes them by reinforcing the notion that if the United States is going to be globally successful, everyone must make hard sacrifices, even if those sacrifices are the result of man-made or natural disasters.

The media has invoked the economic crisis to justify the increased attacks on teachers, public employees, and unions, even though they did not create the crisis. News media outlets ran stories in which state politicians blamed teachers, public employees, and unions for failing to share in the sacrifice ("Walker trying to help", 2011). This, coupled with the above mentioned other factors, has culminated in an unprecedented convergence among neoliberal interests and

democratic politics in which they called for a “[f]rontal challenge to the teachers’ unions,” arguing:

that a country that spends more per pupil than any other but whose student performance ranks in the bottom third among developed nations isn’t failing its children for lack of resources but for lack of trained, motivated, accountable talent at the front of the class. (“High-scoring school reforms”, 2010, para. 5)

In other words, it comes down to efficiency and economics, and the unions, according to this ideology, must be eliminated. The only reason the wealthiest country in the world could perform as poorly as it does, the argument goes, is because of ineffective teachers, who are protected by the unions. Current teachers had a choice: accept the changes or start thinking about a new career. New talent was encouraged to apply.

The Obama Administration’s education reforms are particularly vexing to teachers and unions. Dennis Van Roekel, President of the NEA, was quoted in a *New York Times* article, “Today our members face the most anti-educator, anti-union, anti-student environment I have ever experienced,” (Dillon, 2010, para. 4). Regardless of how teachers perceived the issue, the article focused on how teachers and unions were going to have to shift: “the angry rhetoric from union leaders now was less important than the long-term changes the administration has begun to coax from them (Dillon, 2010, para. 18).” Ultimately, words, no matter what teachers and their unions say, no matter what evidence they provide, no matter how much they question these market reforms, change is inevitable.

Conclusions: Challenging the Hegemony of the “New Normal”

Neoliberal school reformers have gained amazing control of the narrative, and the media has helped to bring this about by reinforcing a new hegemonic discourse with its longstanding attacks against teachers, teachers’ unions, and organized labor in general (Gerstl-Pepin, 2002, 2007; McLaren & Fischman, 1998; Wallace, 1997). That the Obama Administration is taking part in the attacks indicates a break with, and betrayal of, one of the Democrats’ staunchest supporters: organized labor. If Obama, Duncan, and neoliberal reformers are able to further weaken organized labor, end tenure, and institute merit pay for teachers, and the media continues

to benignly support it as the latest story in the struggle over school reform, public school teachers, *en masse*, could become the newest members of a very economically fragile club: professional itinerant workers. Other members of this club include small-scale consultants, adjunct faculty at universities, temp agency workers, or consultants who live contract to contract. They are the middle class that the Obama Administration claims it wants to protect from the errors of the Bush Administration. Yet, Obama and Duncan's support of school-wide firings and other market-reform initiatives makes such decisions seem legitimate and appropriate in the quest to reform public education.

The hegemonic transformation of teaching into a permanent state of itinerancy starts with stripping teachers of any voice they have left in regard to the curriculum, what they teach to whom and how, and their working conditions. The media has helped to convince the public that the current teaching work force is questionable at best, and, significantly, unions and the tenure system stand in the way of real reform. The Obama Administration's school reform plans resonate with neoliberalism's extreme distaste of labor unions and public workers, and reflects their admiration for free market practices in which the mantra could be "every person for him or herself". Given the fact that many major news outlets have carried stories about "problems with the unions" it should be no surprise that so many people support the latest attacks on teachers *en masse*. Neoliberals have been able to capitalize on this fact to achieve their own ends: truly free market schools uninhibited by workers' rights. It is, at its core, anti-democratic, anti-worker, and inhumane.

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