

International greetings of solidarity by David Edwards, Education International

Brothers and sisters of DLF, I bring you greetings and solidarity from your Education International.

Worldwide, the public sector is under assault from a confluence of opportunists, profiteers and political factions who have successfully framed their savagery as emergency assistance, their insatiable appetite for expanded market share as social responsibility and their biased opinions as hard facts. Prior to the economic crisis they focused on using natural disaster and the rebuilding of education systems to suspend social and labor standards. Would you be surprised to learn that the same rationale was used to break contracts and sidestep unions in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, Concepcion Chile after their earthquake, Christchurch after theirs and even Port au Prince after theirs? How about if the same reform consultant was brought in for guidance?

As a consultant, maybe the same one, once said, “Let no good crisis go to waste.”

And for many government waiting for an opportunity to squeeze, if not starve, essential public services into failure and out of existence without regard for their impact on quality, equity and the most vulnerable in our societies... the current context provides a dream scenario.

There is a common thread in the responses to the debt crisis of most OECD member states. Whether governed by the left, the center or the right, policies focus on austerity, on cutting back public expenditures, including education budgets. Greece, Portugal, Spain, Italy are forced to pursue horrendous austerity measures in exchange for loans from richer EU countries. In the United States, we expect more than one hundred thousand teachers to be laid off. And at this very moment...the infamous sequester, US' self-imposed troika is costing tens of thousands of children to lose their pre-school subsidies, teachers in non-essential areas to be furloughed...hitting poor families the most. Essentially deepening the crisis...

Imagine if you could shift the cause of the crisis itself onto the people who are most affected by it. For example, do you know what the main education focus is inside the G20? Financial literacy – so people don't borrow more than they can afford and thus avoiding future debt crises - not consumer protection and oversight of financial markets that specu-

lated us into this mess. Other times education systems and educators are blamed for not training future employees adequately. The solution – be outcome focused...that means test score focused. Don't pay attention to systems, or inputs or processes or professional development or PLANNING TIME. Innovate by expanding class sizes, employing unqualified teachers or putting everything online. Evaluate teachers on test scores. Pay teachers on test scores.

You don't have to imagine. It's real and yes, they are out to get you.

In the education sector we are seeing a constant attack on our profession. Our General Secretary describes these as the seven signs of de-professionalization:

“De-professionalization is, I believe, one of the main challenges facing our sector today. There are seven signs, signals, or perhaps I should say “plagues”, which pose a serious threat to the future of our profession and its capacity to ensure high quality teaching. Number one: the influx of unqualified teachers; number two: the casualization of teaching; number three: the growing gap between teachers' pay and remuneration in other sectors; number four: the restriction of teachers' autonomy; number five: the rapid spread of standardized testing; number six: (mechanistic forms of) high stake teachers' evaluation; and number seven: private sector management practices sneaking into our educational institutions.”

The actual evidence shows that the best way to ensure quality is to reject all these fads and ensure that your educational system is coherent, well designed, open to learning, equitably funded and staffed by reflective practitioners who can make real time decisions using meaningful data that is developmentally appropriate and adapted to different learning needs.

Although the Education Policy Paper EI adopted at our last World Congress sketches out our view of quality it is no longer enough to lay back and assume that parents, students and the larger society understands our thinking. For this reason EIs Executive Board has laid out its intention to mobilize globally for quality education and we are designing a whole year of activities and events that will culminate in a world day of action around World Teachers' Day.

We need a defense and an analysis that helps us understand the depth of the attacks against teachers unions and education – our previous campaign, Education in Crisis educationincrisis.net has helped us do this for

the last 18 months. But we now need to increase our offense and we need to do it linking globally and nationally. This is the time for us to lead our profession, our union and ensure that our students are ready for the world they are inheriting.

This will require us to make principled stands.

It will require us to hold our elected leaders accountable to their own principles of dialogue and compromise.

Today you are taking a stand. You have heard the stories of burnt out teachers with declining status fighting to have a single hour of prep time a week. They and their students are the victims of a relentless attack that frames teachers as instruction deliverers and learning as testing. Yet highly effective and equitable national education systems talk about teacher leadership, teacher learning and teacher scholarship...and they talk about them not in empty platitudes but in their everyday dialogues, respectfully with teachers.

Know that Education International and our 30 million teachers worldwide are with you. That we are fighting defensively and offensively for the future of public education and that we are fighting it in legislative battles, in the media, on the streets and in the classrooms. As soon as we get victories we do what teachers do, we share, we organize, we reinvent and we get our ideas through...we always get through. And you will too.

Thank you.