Explaining the defeat of tenure and teachers unions in Vergara

written by Lois Weiner | June 13, 2014

Tenure and teacher unions suffered a defeat this week when a California court ruled in the Vergara case that the state's law giving teachers tenure violated California's constitution. I've blogged about why the claims in Vergara were manufactured to pit students against teachers. But I think it's important for those of us who support to teachers unions to push on what needed to be done differently to defend tenure. Yes, it was important to clarify that tenure does not prevent administrators from removing poor teachers, as did both California teachers unions. But once again the unions pulled their punches and were unwilling to make a public case that Vergara is part of a project to de-professionalize teaching, to make teaching contract labor, so as to allow the global (capitalist) elite to control what our children learn and believe. To win we have to take the offensive. That means telling a radically different story from what's in the media about teacher union and teacher-bashing.

So what's next? The bipartisan gang pushing the Vergara case made tenure protections appear very strong. But in recent years union strength has diminished so much at the school site that teachers are often too frightened or weak to defend their legal rights, including tenure. The only way we are going to make schools safe for critical thinking and teachers' exercise of their professional judgment is to organize at the school site, bringing parents and students into the struggle. NEA and AFT need to augment a legal fight to reverse Vergara and keep similar court cases from being won elsewhere with agitation about the real meaning of these reforms that pretend to be about putting "students first." The capitalist elite that runs the World Bank – and our government – wants to control what kids learn so as to keep their power and profit. Teachers and unions stand in the way of their goal. It's as simple – and chilling – as that.