

Far more than a struggle over pay and pensions: Why the Oct. 1/17 UK teacher strikes matter

Both teachers unions and headline-writers seem to agree that the NUT (National Union of Teachers) and NASUWT (National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers) joint strikes that start Tuesday 1 October are over pay and pensions. They're wrong.

Yes, the dispute is related to pay and conditions but the real story, missed by the media as well as the unions in their public outreach, NASUWT more so than the NUT, is Gove's intention to re-organize UK schools in line with "corporate school reform" in the US and policies the World Bank has imposed on Asia and Africa. The World Bank's goal is to refashion teaching as work, replacing career teachers with a rotating door of minimally-trained, short-lived employees who teach what's on standardized tests. Demands of Michael Gove, who heads education, (equivalent of Arne Duncan in the US), advance this same strategy.

As Kenneth Saltman explains in [The failure of corporate school reform](#), Right wing foundations and think tanks supported by the super-wealthy are quite straightforward that they want to replace public education with a privatized national system of schools that compete with one another. When one group of profit-seekers fails, a new school or network will replace it, as occurs with clothing stores or delis. Privatization advocates like this "creative destruction" or

“churn,” which they see as essential for efficiency and innovation.

In contrast to the US, the UK and most other countries pay teachers on a uniform national salary schedule. Gove’s push to end the national pay scale is intended to inject competition into the job market for teachers. Eliminating national pay will give employers who run profit-making schools the freedom to pay teachers as little as possible. It will also inject new inequality in UK schools. Eliminating national pay supports teacher churn, experienced teachers migrating to schools that are higher-paying and whose students are easier to teach, as occurs in the US. Without national pay requirements, UK schools serving low income students, whose parents cannot supplement the school budget, will end up with the least experienced teachers.

Gove’s policies mirror the project to transform education globally. Critics often call these project an “experiment,” but as Saltman demonstrates, their project is driven by ideology, a quasi-religious belief in “free markets,” not empirical evidence. The reasoning of the wealthy elites who head this project is that since most jobs being created require only minimal education, governments waste valuable money educating workers beyond what they will need. Minimally educated workers require only teachers who are themselves minimally educated. Teachers with significant education are a liability because they are costly to employ, the largest expense of any school system. Only a small portion of the workforce will be educated for highly-paid jobs that require critical thinking. Therefore, we can make do with “good enough” teachers who are measured and paid based on students’ standardized test scores.

The UK's national pay scale and teacher pensions are barriers to this plan being realized. In striking, NUT and NASUWT are defending teaching as a profession and the dignity of teachers' work. The unions are protecting children's rights to have a quality teacher in every school, a professional who exercises his or her judgment about what each child needs. The upcoming industrial action is a battle over much more than pay and pensions. The struggle is over the future of the nation. Let NUT and NASUWT know you support them and that this is a strike for the teaching profession and public education internationally.

You can tweet support with the hashtag #teacherroar and follow the strike on the NUT website. As I find out more about how you can express solidarity, I'll blog and tweet this information. We have to rely on social media because globally the corporate media carry the message of the social engineers. A case in point: The Guardian has some excellent reporting – but not on teachers unions. So share this message.

Note: I invite reader comments, either on this website or to me directly at drweinerlo@gmail.com. Is there a subject you want me to tackle? Let me know. And you can follow my thoughts on teaching, schools, and education on twitter , Facebook, as well as my blog here at New Politics.