

How school reform gets hijacked by the Billionaire Boys Club: A cautionary tale for the Left

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A powerful new video, “The truth behind Stand for Children,” tells a cautionary tale for the Left. Even if you already understand how charter schools have become a vehicle for destruction of public education, take five minutes to watch this concise analysis of how “Stand for Children,” which began as a grassroots organization of parents fighting for increased school funding and reform, was taken over by the most powerful educational lobby in the world, the Billionaire Boys Club. The most chilling aspect of the video was, for me, the clip in which powerbrokers brag that they’ve outsmarted the Chicago Teachers Union.

In the article I’ve written for the upcoming issue of New Politics, I discuss this defeat and what we should learn from it. In a nutshell, we have to expect that activists who are democratizing the unions are going to make mistakes, and this one was a lollapalooza. Just as did Occupy Wall Street, the CTU leadership and Chicago teachers are standing up to THE most powerful force in the world – US capitalism and its political executive committee. Remember that Chicago’s mayor is Rahm Emmanuel. So after you watch the video, take a look at the CTU website and Facebook page. They’re really inspring.

It made my blood boil to watch the clip of the smug Masters of the Universe brag about taking down the union. Clearly they think they’ve won; they mistake idealism for naivete. But this new generation of teacher union activists is passionate AND savvy. As long as they stay moored in their vision of a democratic union that mobilizes its members to fight with parents and students for schools that serve all kids well, I think the Billionaire Boys Club is in for an unpleasant (for them) surprise.