Labor Day and school reform

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This Labor Day, I'm hoping that teachers will press labor to fulfill its responsibilities to kids, by breaking with any politicians who don't "put kids first" by creating jobs.

The labor movement, and teachers unions in particular, has failed to challenge the Obama administration's contention that education is the panacea for the nation's economic malaise. As labor shrinks back, its "friends" in the Democratic Party (not to speak of its avowed enemies among the Republicans), cast education as the key to economic revitalization. From employment to housing, social policy depends on accepting reforms that are destroying everything that makes school engaging, fulfilling, and enlightening. Arne Duncan's announcement of community improvement grants, which will encourage gentrification and charter schools to serve the new demographic, puts the administration's stance quite clearly: "Communities across the country recognize that education is the one true path out of poverty."

Education is the "one true path out of poverty"? The first tip off that we're dealing with propaganda and not anything for which there is evidence is the term "the one true path." What about jobs that pay enough for people to survive without food stamps? What about health care? How about housing? Education can democratize access to the labor market but it can't change the number or type of jobs that capitalism is creating. Sure we need to work at improving schools that serve the kids who most need a superior education to compete for the diminishing number of well-paid jobs. But the way out of poverty is to put people to work. Labor has been cowardly and disoriented about pushing the Obama administration to create well-paying jobs, and that, not education reform, is what all the unions should be demanding.