

Union "reform" or reform?

July 3, 2013

In These Times describes reformers winning elections in two key teachers unions, Washington DC and Newark NJ. While the change in the DC local shows members' dissatisfaction, that's nothing new in the local, which for many years has been riven by competing cliques and individuals vying for power. In contrast, the caucus that provided the organizational backbone for the challenge to the Newark union leadership aims to build the union at the school level and has been working with parents and students, forming real alliances over school and district issues. Their inspiration has been CORE's work in the Chicago Teachers Union. For teachers unions to survive in anything but name, they have to be transformed, both in how they operate and the vision for which they fight. We can't afford to mistake thorough-going change with replacing the "ins" with the 'outs." which is what occurred in DC. So while two union elections resulted in new faces in leadership positions, only the Newark election posed a threat to the business unionism that characterizes the national AFT - and most of its locals.