

Zimbabwe and Rhode Island: The new exemplar for labor

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“Unions are killing the economy” says Henry Blodget at the Business Insider. He gleefully applauds the firing of every teacher in a Rhode Island school for their arrogance. How dare workers, teachers especially, think they have a voice in their working conditions or salaries? How uppity of teachers to sneer at the bosses’ absolutist control of the workplace. Let’s recall that Henry Blodget was indicted for insider trading. He made lots of money by cheating people who buy stocks, exploiting his role as an analyst. He was banished from Wall Street and now he’s resurrected himself. He’s been “kicked out of finance, and into journalism.”

Blodget’s hypocrisy is endemic to politics. What’s new in this Rhode Island firing is that the most brutal aspects of the neoliberal program have come home. Rhode Island re-plays policies long imposed by the World Bank in developing countries, as the quid pro quo for loans. Teachers hired as contract workers in Sub-Sahara Africa go for months without pay and are fired when they ask for their wages. Zimbabwe fired 600 teachers when they struck for better pay. Teachers in Russia are owed millions of rubles for back pay. They have the legal right to strike (which is more than they do in New Jersey), but Russian law makes it difficult for them teachers to exercise their right. Such is the case in New York state, where the Taylor Law fines public employees 2 days pay for each they strike. So what Henry Blodget and the neoliberals want is for Zimbabwe to be our model for labor relations with teacher unions. Russia’s laws seem too progressive for them.