

ISO leader endorses Chicago school closings

By Alexander Fangmann
6 December 2012

Anyone who may still harbor any illusion that the International Socialist Organization is an oppositional or “left”—let alone socialist—organization should take a look at the video of ISO leader Jesse Sharkey’s appearance on *Chicago Tonight*, a news program produced by local public television station WTTW.

Sharkey—the vice-president of the Chicago Teachers Union and the right-hand man of Chicago Teachers Union President Karen Lewis—was one of the two guests on the November 27 program, which discussed the Chicago Public Schools plan to close approximately 100 schools and an open up another 60 charter schools.

During the course of the 12-minute discussion nothing Sharkey said could be remotely construed as oppositional towards the closings, which will devastate working class families and eliminate the jobs of hundreds of teachers and educational staff. There was not the slightest hint in his remarks of the deep anger felt by teachers, parents and students towards Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the billionaire “school reform” advocates behind this attack on public education.

Instead, Sharkey comes across like a petty functionary, complaining only that the school authorities lacked a coherent or effective plan for shutting schools. “There’s no point in closing schools until there is a plan in place,” Sharkey insists.

The ISO leader never challenges the basic lie by school CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett: that the aim of closing schools is to improve education! Instead he welcomes Bennett’s claim that resources from the closed schools will be used to improve the schools that remain open.

In order to make the CTU’s position crystal clear, Sharkey says matter-of-factly, “First of all, I want to say that no one in the union thinks that you should keep an empty school building open. That doesn’t make any sense.”

But the decline in school enrollment is not the result

of some natural process. It is the outcome of a deliberate policy by the corporate and political establishment to starve the public schools of resources and drive working class families out of the city with mass unemployment, poverty wages and the gentrification of neighborhoods. Talk about “empty school buildings” only provides a political cover for the closing of more schools and diverting public resources to for-profit charters—a process that inevitably results in a further decline in public school enrollment.

Far from mounting any struggle against the attack on public education, Sharkey made clear that the CTU is only concerned that the school closings not be carried out unilaterally. Part of the “plan” that the CTU is no doubt pushing for is to get a crack at the potential dues money it could collect from the low-paid teachers that will be hired at the new charter schools.

Earlier this year, Lewis and Sharkey betrayed the powerful strike by 28,000 Chicago teachers that was a challenge to the Obama administration’s corporate educational agenda. The CTU accepted all of Emanuel’s anti-teacher demands and paved the way for the implementation of the current school-closing plan.

Sharkey’s TV appearance makes it clear the CTU will continue its collaboration, and that the ISO is nothing more than a mouthpiece for the trade union bureaucracy, an adjunct of the Democratic Party, and defender of the capitalist status quo.

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