

Literacy and education for all is a social right!

By Niles Niemuth
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On June 29, US District Judge Stephen Murphy III ruled that there is “no right to literacy” guaranteed by the US Constitution. As the candidate of the Socialist Equality Party for Michigan’s 12th congressional district, I strongly condemn this decision and demand the social right to free, high quality public education at all levels.

Included in this right are: the right to full access to adult education in literacy and numeracy, a vast expansion of English as a second language instruction, universal preschool and free higher education.

The decision by Murphy was in the case of *Gary B. v. Snyder*, a class-action lawsuit brought by Detroit students and parents demanding an improvement in public education. Its outcome points to the future envisaged for working class youth by the ruling class—unemployment, low-wage gig-style jobs, and cannon-fodder for war.

Public education is facing catastrophic conditions, the result of decades of budget cuts and the rise of for-profit edu-businesses. From Bush’s No Child Left Behind, to Obama’s Race to the Top, and now the Trump-DeVos administration, education throughout Michigan and across the country has been starved of resources. Recent teacher strikes highlight the fact that many educators are working second and third jobs just to make ends meet, while also scrambling for money for their students through GoFundMe and other appeals for charity.

Literacy, like all educational issues, is entirely correlated with income. If parents have low literacy skills, their children have a 72 percent chance of reading at the lowest levels themselves.

The terrible growth of social inequality, coupled with deliberate government de-funding of education, has dramatically lowered literacy. A 2017 report by the Detroit Regional Workforce Fund found that 47 percent of Detroiters were functionally illiterate. Nearly

one-third of those living in nearby working-class suburbs were also unable to use reading, speaking, writing and computational skills in everyday life situations.

The appalling decline in working class schools was documented in the lawsuit, *Gary B. v. Snyder*. For example, some Detroit classrooms are so overcrowded, with up to 60 students in a room, “that a left-handed student could not sit next to a right-handed student.” While admitting the obvious—that the ability to read is “of incalculable importance” and essential to the ability to vote, apply for a job and find a place to live—Judge Murphy and the big business interests he represents coldly ruled that access to literacy for these children is not a fundamental right.

This same logic was utilized by Detroit bankruptcy judge Stephen Rhodes when he held that access to water was also “not a basic right,” as tens of thousands of Detroit residents had their taps turned off.

Nothing could expose the bankruptcy of the capitalist system more thoroughly! This system has showered trillions of dollars on Wall Street and the military machine but can no longer afford to provide the most fundamental necessities of life for the working class. If, as Murphy and the politicians say, the ruling class and its system do not recognize “positive rights,” then it is high time for socialism, to secure basic social rights for all.

Every man, woman and child is entitled to live and enjoy his or her life and develop his or her potential to the maximum, without the curse of illiteracy, poverty and material want. The Socialist Equality Party calls for the expropriation of the ill-gotten gains of Wall Street bankers, hedge funds and private equity funds, and the transformation of the banks and financial institutions into public enterprises. It calls for dismantling of the US war machine and reinvesting those trillions of dollars into public needs, including

public education, universal healthcare and rebuilding the nation's infrastructure.

Such measures will easily provide sufficient funds to ensure educational access to the entire population and, for the first time, make the fruits of mankind's cultural achievements available to all.

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