

Training Activists One Pandering Letter at a Time

The nation's two major public-school teachers' unions may be rivals of sorts, but they apparently are in agreement on at least one important and troubling matter. In the aftermath of George Floyd's death, the presidents of these two organizations placed an ad in newspapers across the country, labeling it a "message to our students."

Signed by both presidents, [this "message"](#) came off as an AP course in promoting Activism while engaging in Pandering, as opposed to anything approaching a traditional Advanced Placement course. In this version of AP, the instructors have perhaps revealed more than intended.

Everything begins on a non-controversial note: "We teach to prepare our young people for the future – hopefully for a better future." Who could possibly quarrel with that?

Yet the trouble starts shortly thereafter in a series of sentence fragments. "We teach them to dream. To think. To engage. To act. To make a difference. To lead."

Still, who could object to the sentiment expressed in each fragment?

The heads of these teachers' unions surely wouldn't presume they are the only instructors in classrooms. That quickly becomes apparent as the "message" shifts into full scale pandering by resorting to nothing less than a full sentence: "And, often, our students teach us."

Ah, the obligatory line that invariably goes something like this: "I learn just as much from my students as they learn from me."

What we soon read from these union officials is that they have learned that students often take the lead in movements for social change. Perhaps this even happens courtesy of a little shove from their teachers. This stretches back to the student lunch counter sit-ins of the early 1960s and extends to those protesting for social justice in the wake of the “murder of George Floyd by a police officer.”

Lest they be lost in the wake of a new wave of student protests, our union presidents want to assure their protesting students that they are with them all the way. And why not, given the “violence of modern-day lynchings and brutality by police”?

What’s especially admirable for our union leaders is that their students have responded “peacefully and nonviolently.”

There was a choice between responding peacefully or responding with violence. Some chose the first path, but many did not. Do these union leaders so much as mention the looting, burning, and killing amid the general mayhem? Not once.

Instead, they launched into a brief history of the successfully non-violent efforts of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. They deploy a full sentence as they continue telling their less than full story: “Nonviolence is a weapon of the strong.”

Perhaps so, but doesn’t that imply that violence is a weapon of the weak? Are the looters, arsonists, and rioters of recent weeks evidence of that?

Clearly, the lessons of Gandhi and King were not much in evidence in the aftermath of Mr. Floyd’s death. They were certainly not learned by many student activists. Nor have they apparently been learned by the union leaders who would presume to teach them and learn from them.

Continuing to play the role of teachers, these union leaders

declare the country to be in the midst of three crises: an immediate health crisis, an accompanying economic crisis, and the continuing crisis of the “failure of the American justice system.”

Might there also be a spiritual crisis, not to mention a family breakdown crisis? If so, both go unmentioned in this message.

It should almost go without saying that the two union presidents believe that these three crises have been aided and abetted by a certain unnamed sitting president of the United States, whom they pillory in their letter. To remove any doubt, this would be the president who “threatens to deploy military forces to quash protests.”

In the face of such threats, students are praised for not being deterred from their allegedly nonviolent protests. Specifically, they are praised for “persist(ing) with peaceful protests throughout our land.”

Nowhere in this message is there any mention of the violence that has besieged our cities. Perhaps some comfort can be taken from their silence. At least their pandering did not take them to the point of praising it. But it ought to have been mentioned and condemned.

As matters stand, our union heads have apparently concluded that the only perpetrators of violence within the country are the police and the president. Their solution to this violence is to hope that students will use their “power and voice to continue to raise awareness and organize.” So long as schools remain closed, they will likely have plenty of time to do both.

What if schools open? Well, then teachers will have a captive audience to help ensure students’ collective awareness remains raised. After all, an election looms, and what are schools if not a tool for getting their favored politicians into office?

As that election approaches, the presidents of the NEA and the AFT seem to have a pretty good idea as to what their true mission really is. They have inadvertently stated as much in a message that manages to give concerned adults a few darn good reasons to consider keeping their children out of union clutches.

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