

Editorial

Your child's education is not a private matter

As state and local finances continue to collapse in the wake of the general economic decline, giving the schools over to private companies to manage may appear attractive to desperate but unwary parents and educators, who are grasping at straws. Many of these schemes actually function like charity scams, in which profits are skimmed off the top by the new so-called managers, so that even less money becomes available to run already-impooverished schools.

Much more serious is the implication of replacing public education with a system of private schools, which must function to the disadvantage of the poor and underprivileged. Still worse is the takedown of what might have remained of traditional educational values, and the substitution of kookery, pornography, and mental masturbation in place of the "three R's."

It is good to know, therefore, that the American Federation of Teachers is mounting a campaign against this outrage. On March 30, the AFT released a report on private management of public schools which gave a case study of what happened when, in 1992, the city of Baltimore allowed a private group, the Minneapolis-based Educational Alternatives, Inc. to run nine schools for profit.

Faced with the reality of the decline of education in the schools—poor performance, poor attendance, and so on—the corporation could not meet its contractual obligations. Rather than admit failure, it inflated attendance reports and tried to hide declining student test scores. EAI has also been accused of diverting funds. Needless to say, these Baltimore schools went from bad to worse.

We applaud the American Federation of Teachers for demanding a federal investigation into the matter: They have filed a suit against the City of Baltimore for entering into such an agreement in the first place. It is important that they give a lead to parents and teachers throughout the United States who are horrified by what is happening in the schools, but are confused about how to fight it.

The Baltimore City Council must be held to ac-

count. Was it reasonable to expect that stockholders could reap profits from corporate running of these schools? This would be to suppose that the problems afflicting American education today are in the domain of corporate management, rather than caused by a shrinking tax base, coupled with lack of job expectations by many students, and a general collapse of cultural standards. So-called outcome-based education, which substitutes psychological manipulation for traditional educational standards, is the problem, not finding a new and better method of cost accounting.

Sad to say, Baltimore teachers at first supported the privatization plan. They were soon disabused of their enthusiasm when they faced severe staff cuts and larger class size. Such measures had obvious negative effects on the quality of teaching in the school, but they also did not produce significant savings, because, although salaries and benefits for staff comprise more than 65% of Baltimore's school budget, instructional staff salaries and benefits made up only 44% of the EAI contract.

This is not merely occurring in Maryland. Districts in San Diego, California, Pinckney, Michigan, and Washington, D.C. are considering having EAI run their schools. Other companies such as Public Strategies, Inc. and the Edison Project of Whittle Corp. are running schools in Minneapolis; and Chicago is entertaining a proposal from Whittle.

People today too often fall for the myth that profits made from financial speculation are equivalent to legitimate profits that are realized from investment in the growth in the physical economy. The all-too-tragic results of this misconception are being seen now in the numbers of men and women who cannot find decent jobs. Now is the time for every American—man, woman, and child—to join with the American Federation of Teachers in exposing this newest financial swindle.

Without education, neither our children nor our nation can have a future. We must no longer permit the asset stripping of our schools and the enslavement of our children to this bestiality.