

# Marxism & Education

Journal of  
Class Struggle  
Education Workers

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**How to Defeat the Capitalist Attack**

## **Lessons of the Teachers Revolt**



Tyler Event/Associated Press

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## Introducing *Marxism & Education*

*Marxism & Education* is the journal of Class Struggle Education Workers and the continuation of the CSEW Newsletter. The CSEW is a militant opposition tendency that began in New York-area education unions and has since expanded to include activists in related areas. As we have often remarked, education is where issues of race and class come together, along with the struggles against all forms of social oppression. Our intention in launching *M&E* is to provide a platform for analysis of educational and related social and political issues. As Marx and Engels insisted, every serious class struggle is a political struggle. That is doubly true of education, which is constantly targeted by the ruling class, particularly over the last period of a concerted capitalist attack on public education.

Class Struggle Education Workers is fraternally allied with the Internationalist Group, U.S. section of the League for the Fourth International, and with similar union tendencies linked to other sections of the LFI, the Comitê de Luta Classista in Brazil and the Comités de Lucha Proletaria in Mexico. In this issue, we have included articles reflecting the work of our comrades in hard-fought union struggles in those countries and emphasizing the need for international workers solidarity. Marxist clarity is vital to waging those battles. And of course, as Marx insisted in his famous 11th Thesis on Feuerbach, not only must we analyze and interpret the world, “the point is to change it.”

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# What It Will Take to Defeat the Capitalist Attack on Public Education

## Lessons of the Teachers Revolt

As the tide of walkouts by teachers and other school workers spread from state to state this spring, the entire country was amazed – not least, educators themselves. The power of labor action was demonstrated as at no other time since the mass strike that convulsed Wisconsin in 2011. But that went down to defeat, while this time some limited gains were won. This energized millions of working people who have only seen failed labor struggles for decades. At the same time, it underscored the need for a class-struggle leadership that is up to the task of defeating the capitalist attack on public education.

This time around, as soon as the movement receded in one state, it broke out in another. Republican governors and state legislators sought to pacify strikers with a little cash. Democratic politicians sought to divert the movement into electoral channels for the mid-term elections in November. The business press published articles trying to divine which state would be next. And the hidebound leadership of the unions tried to ride the wave while seeking (not very successfully) to curb the militancy. But this was only the first round, next time will be a lot harder.

In terms of the actual gains, teachers and staff in West Virginia got a 5% wage increase, which amounted to about \$2,000 a year. In Oklahoma it was a \$6,000 pay hike, and by the time the wave hit Arizona, the governor claimed to have granted 20% raise for teachers – which turned out to be less than 10% and no raise guaranteed for other school workers. The budget increases were barely a quarter of the cuts to education over the last decade. Teachers' salaries in these states were at rock bottom of the pay scale nationally, and they still are. But the experience of beating back the bosses is key.

As explained in the article “Teacher Revolts Across U.S.” (see page 4), the teacher walkouts were by no means “wildcat strikes” or against the unions, as many in the big business media claimed, echoed by some misguided leftists. The strikes were initiated by the ranks, and the union tops tried to keep the lid on. AFT chief Randi Weingarten argued that the strikes are not relevant in places like New York, where unions are relatively strong. The “labor fakers” are scared to death of labor militancy. They yearn for class-collaborationist business as usual: lobbying, back-room deals and selling “labor peace” to the bosses.

So what are the key lessons of the spring 2018 teachers' revolt? First of all, we must *oust the bureaucracy* that stands in the way of real class struggle.

Class Struggle Education Workers defends the unions against attacks by union-busters, even as we fight to oust the sellout bureaucracy. In every battle you have know who are your friends, and who are your enemies. It is necessary to be precise. The *enemy* is the bosses, the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy is an *obstacle*, but the *unions belong to the workers*.

Second, it's necessary to *break with the Democrats* and all the capitalist parties, including minor league outfits like the Green Party or the “Working Families Party,” which is



Tyler Ever/Associated Press

**A class-struggle leadership and union power are needed to shred to anti-strike laws.**

just another ballot line for people to vote for Democrats while holding their noses.

The teachers unions are the organizational mainstay for the Democratic Party. In every election it is the AFT and NEA who ring the doorbells and phonebank. Then the Democrats turn around and push charter schools, punitive teacher evaluations, and the rest of the “reforms” that attack public education. Yet almost all opposition groups in teachers unions – and other unions – refuse to fight the Democrats. Once in power, they support the Dems, just as their predecessors did.

And third, it is necessary to *forge a class-struggle leadership* with a program to actually fight and win against a united ruling class. Republicans and Democrats, Trump and Clinton, may differ on Russia or “free trade,” but they are united in waging war on Korea and in the Middle East, in deporting millions of immigrants, and in privatizing schools. To defeat this capitalist onslaught, follow the lead of the Portland Painters union (IUPAT Local 10) which in 2016 refused to support “Democrats, Republicans or any bosses’ parties or politicians,” and called to build a “*build a class-struggle workers party*.”

We need a leadership that is prepared to do what it takes to shred no-strike laws. That means joining with the powerhouses of labor like Transport Workers Union Local 100 that can shut down New York. It means uniting all education workers – teachers, paraprofessionals, office staff, counselors, maintenance workers, bus drivers, cafeteria workers – together with students and parents for *teacher-student-parent-worker control of the schools*. In the next round of strike struggles, there should be *elected strike committees* including union members and non-members alike.

The union tops love to say that they’re “ready to rumble,” but their idea of a rumble is filing court briefs promising labor peace in exchange for keeping the dues checkoff and agency shop. We’re in a knock-down, drag-out class battle. Educators, workers, all the oppressed need a leadership that can and will *fight to win*. ■

# Needed: A Class-Struggle Leadership

## Teacher Revolts Across U.S.



Tyler Ever/Associated Press

### Striking teachers in West Virginia's state capitol, March 5.

*The following article is reprinted from The Internationalist No. 51, March-April 2018.*

Beginning in mid-February, a series of statewide teachers strikes broke out, first in West Virginia, then in Oklahoma and Kentucky, and as we go to press teachers in Arizona have struck as well. They are all states where teachers unions have historically been weak and where salaries and school funding have been at the bottom of the scale nationwide. After years of cutbacks and falling pay, with many if not most teachers having to take second (and third) jobs just to survive, the rebelling education workers (including staff and bus drivers) had had enough and walked out.

In each case, the strikes were sparked by rank-and-file teachers holding school-wide meetings and using social media, while the leaders of the state affiliates of the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers had to scramble to keep up. And when NEA and AFT tops in West Virginia and Oklahoma settled for token gains, the strikers voted to continue the walkout.

The strikes won important but limited gains, in itself a rare event in recent decades of union defeats. But they lacked a leadership capable of waging hard class struggle and an organizational framework to counter the sellout labor bureaucracy. The Internationalist Group has called for the formation of elected school-based strike committees, including members of all education unions as well as non-union workers, to select delegates (recallable at any time) to statewide coordinating bodies.

We print here the on-the-spot-report and analysis of the West

Virginia strike. An additional eyewitness report from Oklahoma is available on the Internationalist Group site on the internet, [www.internationalist.org](http://www.internationalist.org).

CHARLESTON/NEW YORK, March 11 – During almost two weeks, the statewide strike by some 30,000 teachers and other school personnel in West Virginia riveted the attention of labor and left activists across the country. For nine school days, every public school (757 in total) in all of the Appalachian Mountain state's 55 counties was shut down. Thousands of educators flooded the capitol building in Charleston day after day, demanding action from the governor and legislators. Then things really took off when on February 28 strikers refused to go back to work despite the announcement by the governor and union leaders of a deal to raise salaries by 5%, and the 98-1 vote for it by the state House of Delegates.

From the outset in late January, the struggle of the West Virginia education workers – not only teachers but also custodial, cafeteria and bus workers – was driven by unrest in the ranks, who were fed up with seeing their livelihoods ravaged. The leaders of the unions (West Virginian Education Association, American Federation of Teachers/West Virginia and West Virginia School Service Personnel Association) tried to hold the movement in check, and when that failed, to channel it in a “safe” direction with a backroom deal for a 5% raise. But as thousands of union members gathered in the capitol realized their power, and that this business-as-usual policy was leading to a defeat, they rose up against the sellout. Every county voted a resounding, over-

whelming “NO!”

The strikers rejected the “agreement” negotiated behind their backs, first of all, because it did nothing to fix the ever-mounting premiums, deductibles and co-pays of the Public Employees Insurance Agency (PEIA) beyond a temporary freeze announced before the strike; and second, because the state Senate was refusing to approve a the pay hike. This became the lightning rod as Republican Senate president Mitch Carmichael deliberately provoked strikers with talk of only a 4% raise, or using the money for the PEIA, or paying for a raise with cuts to social benefits. But as the strikers stood firm, on March 6 the WV Senate approved and the governor signed the bill for the 5% raise, while some other anti-union bills (notably attacking seniority) were shelved.<sup>1</sup>

The settlement was only a partial victory – partial because nothing was done about the PEIA beyond the 17-month freeze of current levels of costs and benefits (to expire in the summer when there are no schools in session to be shut down by a strike) and a task force appointed by the governor to “study” the problem (a non-solution which even the *Charleston Gazette-Mail* ridiculed). “A freeze is not a fix,” as teachers’ signs declared and demonstrators chanted over and over in the capitol. Partial also because the paltry raise – barely \$2,000 (before taxes) – won’t move the state out of the bottom tier of teacher pay nationally, much less provide a living wage. West Virginia teachers’ pay is reported as averaging \$45,000 a year, making it 48th in the U.S., so low that a huge percentage of educators have to take a second job.<sup>2</sup>

But despite its limited nature, the result was a victory nonetheless, as an energized, mobilized and united workforce was able to beat down opposition from hard-nosed union-busters, and to overcome the foot-dragging, diversions and outright sabotage by the sellout union bureaucracy. They did it despite the fact that since 2016, West Virginia has a so-called “right-to-work” law intended to cripple unions. Moreover, they did it in the heart of “Trump country,” where Democrat Hillary Clinton got barely a quarter of the West Virginia vote in 2016 (the second lowest state vote in the U.S.) and particularly in the southern counties where only one in seven voted Democratic. But these were also the centers of mine worker militancy, from the mine wars of 1912-22 to the wildcat strikes of the 1960s and ’70s and the Pittston coal strike of 1989-90.

Importantly, this was a strike by women unionists – three-quarters of WV and U.S. teachers are female – who were not going to let themselves be pushed around. Certainly not by a governor who called them “dumb bunnies” (at a February 6 town hall event in Logan County) for daring to strike, and not by some labor fakers whose go-along-to-get-along policies have been an unmitigated disaster. In this country where women still only earn 80% as much as men, and in the state of West Virginia where at the present rate women won’t reach wage parity until around 2099 (!), there were plenty of coal miners’ daughters active in the struggle who are ready to, and know how to, fight

<sup>1</sup> In the final state budget, the 5% pay raise was extended to all state employees.

<sup>2</sup> The official figures themselves are suspect. There are reports of teachers with, for example, 19 years seniority who only make \$39,000 a year; or with a masters degree and 15 years seniority making \$41,000.

for their rights – which they did.

What working people from coast to coast witnessed, and what the West Virginia educators set off, was a stunning explosion of labor struggle in a union movement paralyzed for decades by the class collaboration of the pro-capitalist bureaucracy, forever beholden to the Democratic Party. The WV teachers strike was not, as some bourgeois commentators and fake-leftists have claimed, a revolt against the unions, it was *a rebellion inside the labor movement* against the misleaders whose policies have led to the devastation of the unions. In the course of the struggle, the labor rebels *got a taste of their power*. But, then, so did the capitalist ruling class, from Wall Street to Main Street. So as everyone recognizes, the fight is by no means over.

Across the country, all eyes were on West Virginia. On March 4, an Internationalist team from Class Struggle Education Workers and Revolutionary Internationalist Youth<sup>3</sup> drove to Charleston to convey a message of solidarity with West Virginia strikers that had been voted the day before at a City University of New York Conference to Defend Immigrants. At the capitol on March 5, jammed by some 7,000 strikers and supporters, when asked what was going on, an official of the WVEA said he didn’t know, confirming that the union tops were not in control. He said a woman from Mingo County told him, “You can support us but we’re doing it.” More bluntly, other strikers had remarked, “You can either get behind us or we’ll run you over.”

The teachers struck together with school staff and bus drivers, thwarting any attempt at strikebreaking: no buses, no kids. In a state with high poverty rates, where in many schools 100% of students depend on free breakfast and lunch, strikers and other volunteers collected and packed food for their kids throughout the strike. (Senator Carmichael cynically responded, “if you have money to buy food for students, you must not need a raise”!) They communicated through a by-invitation Facebook group, “West Virginia Public Employees United,” that ballooned to 24,000 members. They didn’t flinch when the state attorney general declared the strike “unlawful.” They didn’t buckle when the union tops sold them out for empty promises.

The rank-and-file action was hardly spontaneous. A mid-January protest on Martin Luther King Day reportedly drew a little over a hundred demonstrators to the state capitol. But by the end of the month county-level union assemblies were voting to walk out. A public opinion survey showed 72% thought teacher pay was too low. The strike was also unusual in that it was backed by school superintendents, worried about teachers leaving because of impossibly low pay and benefits (currently the state is short over 700 teachers). This official acquiescence won’t be repeated in a hard labor battle – which is what it will take to win a solid victory.<sup>4</sup>

The West Virginia strikers went about as far as they could as a loosely organized rebellion. In future battles, forging a

<sup>3</sup> The CSEW is a tendency in New York City education unions politically supported by the Internationalist Group; the RIY is the youth section of the IG.

<sup>4</sup> In the last West Virginia teachers strike, in 1990, Jefferson and Greenbrier counties tried to force teachers back to work, threatening to fire them.

leadership with a program for powerful *class* struggle will be key. It's necessary to oust the pro-capitalist bureaucrats who have run the unions into the ground, but a generic "rank-and-file opposition" will founder on the shoals of the capitalist state. Look at Miners for Democracy in the 1970s: helped into office by the government and courts, the MFD's Arnold Miller was soon negotiating sellout contracts just like his predecessor Tony Boyle – and facing wildcat strikes in protest. A real struggle for "affordable health care" and raising teacher pay means taking on the energy conglomerates and the state power that serves their interests.

The teachers' struggle is political and can't be won without breaking from *all* capitalist parties and politicians, whether Trump or the Democrats. As the strikers were leaving the capitol on March 6, Democratic legislators were telling them to "remember in November." But it was Democratic then-governor, now senator Joe Manchin who first pushed for slashing the state corporate income tax. And the WVEA, AFT/WV and UMW all endorsed Governor Jim Justice in the 2016 Democratic primary.<sup>5</sup> The answer is not some phony labor party like the "Working Families Party," which is just another ballot line for liberal Democrats.<sup>6</sup> What's needed is a *class-struggle workers party* fighting to put an end to the dictatorship of capital.

### A Strike That Came From the Ranks

The momentum for the statewide strike kicked off on January 25 with a jammed meeting called by the Logan County WVEA together with the AFT and school service personnel. The next day an overwhelming majority voted for a one-day walkout to protest lack of funding for the PEIA, attacks on seniority and the call by the governor for an insulting 1% pay hike. School employees in Mingo and Wyoming counties also voted for a one-day work stoppage and rally in Charleston. The Mingo WVEA president said that state union leaders "kind of suggested that we hold off on it to see what happens, but our people were so fired up about it they said, 'No we're not waiting, we're going to do this now,' so we did" (*Charleston Gazette-Mail*, 30 January).

On February 2, hundreds of teachers from the southern counties flooded the state capitol building. A teacher from Logan County commented, "We're here because we are the coalfields. We've been taught since we were little not to put up with this kind of treatment, and we won't anymore." In other counties, teachers rallied outside schools in the frigid temperatures before work. On February 11, union representatives from all 55 counties met near Flatwoods, reporting that an overwhelming majority of public school employees had voted for statewide action. After a rally at the capitol on February 16, state union leaders announced a two-day walkout the next week. "The entire state of West Virginia will be shut down," said WVEA president Dale Lee.

Trying to head off the strike, the state legislature passed a bill raising the pay hike to 2% and the governor ordered a freeze on

<sup>5</sup> A longtime Republican, Justice ran for governor as a Democrat, then switched back to the Republicans in 2016 to back Trump.

<sup>6</sup> See "Working Families Party: Putting Lipstick on a Pig," *The Internationalist* special issue, November-December 2012.

PEIA payments. But the walkout took place on February 22-23 as upwards of 5,000 strikers filled the capitol with a sea of red shirts, many with red bandannas, symbolizing miners' struggle. In the face of the strikers' determination, state union leaders had to extend the walkout to Monday, February 26, and then to Tuesday. By then, Governor Justice and legislators were getting desperate, so in behind-the-scenes talks with union leaders they agreed to a 5% raise. After announcing it, the governor abruptly left (supposedly to coach a girls basketball game). But when WVEA president Dale Lee and AFT/WV leader Christine Campbell spoke on the steps of the capitol, the crowd erupted.

According to various accounts, the thousands of educators gathered there responded angrily, chanting "We won't back down!" "We aren't going back for that!" and "Back to the table!" People were angry that they hadn't been consulted, were presented with a done deal and told to go back to school Thursday. Most media announced that the strike was over. But instead the Wednesday "cooling off period" heated up. In the capitol strikers chanted, "We were sold out!" Again, jam-packed meetings and votes were held, county by county. As reports came in, hour by hour, in each case strikers voted to stay out. By late evening of Wednesday, February 28 every county superintendent in the state had announced that there would be no school the next day.

The biggest issue cited by many for rejecting the deal was the lack of a fix for the PEIA health insurance. But on Thursday the Senate voted to table the bill for the 5% raise, and on Friday it didn't even put it on the agenda. By then there was talk on the Facebook page of occupying the capitol. However, that went nowhere as there was no organization or means to carry it out. The union leaders told anyone who asked that the movement was out of their hands now. When Carmichael announced his 4% "solution" on Saturday (March 3), they saw their chance, and a joint WVEA-AFT/WV-WSSPA statement called for everyone to come to the capitol Monday to demand that the 5% deal be honored. There was no mention of the PEIA.

In the end, the agreement that was approved on March 6 was not very different from the deal that teachers rejected six days earlier. The *Charleston Gazette-Mail* emblazoned on its front page, "TEACHERS WIN." It's true that the strikers beat down the hard-line union-busters and made some gains – as we said, a partial victory – due to their determination and unity. But this also reflected the fact that sections of the bourgeois ruling class backed the strike, not only school authorities but particularly pro-Democratic media like the *Gazette-Mail*. The *New York Times* (3 March) waxed lyrical about the heritage of coal miners' struggles and how "West Virginia Teachers Give a Lesson in Union Power."

The striking educators saw the power of their collective action, and that is a considerable achievement, especially after so many strikes that have been lost by the deadbeat, play-by-the-rules business union bureaucracy. This is already having an effect beyond the state. Worried about a spillover as the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers scheduled a strike for March 2, the school board there hurriedly negotiated a contract after stonewalling for months. And teachers in Oklahoma, which is No. 49 in teacher pay, have been directly inspired by the West Virginia teachers revolt, planning a walkout on April 2 to demand a \$10,000 pay



**Thousands of teachers, students and supporters marched around West Virginia state capitol March 2 in student-organized rally backing strike.**

increase. As strikers left the WV capitol on March 6, they chanted “West Virginia first, Oklahoma next!”

### Lessons of the West Virginia Teachers Strike

During our visit to Charleston, strikers and their supporters emphasized, “We got the world watching us.” “We’re making history,” teachers kept repeating. “I am part of a history lesson,” said a Kanawha County eighth-grade history teacher. In fact, as they congregated, thousands strong, day after day in the rotunda and corridors and outside the capitol building, across the country educators, labor and left activists were watching intently, as were capitalist politicians and the bourgeois media. Many are saying that the historic 2018 West Virginia teachers strike could spark the rebirth of a near-moribund labor movement. But for that to happen, one must ask, what are the key lessons to be drawn from this powerful struggle?

The big business press is worried. “Could Wildcat Teachers’ Strikes Spread to Other States?” asked Bloomberg Politics (6 March). Earlier (2 March) it wrote of the walkout as “one of the country’s biggest unauthorized ‘wildcat’ strikes in decades.... As uncommon as work stoppages have become in the U.S., big wildcat strikes like West Virginia’s are almost unheard of.” The liberal *New York Times* (9 March) headlined about a “crowd-sourced strike” and how “Striking Teachers Defied West Virginia, and Their Own Union, Too.” The *Times* commented: “Wildcat strikes led by rank-and-file workers are rare these days, but they recall the big miners’ strikes that racked West Virginia’s coal country in the early part of the 20th century.”

The same theme – that the strike was in defiance of or against the unions – is echoed by some leftists. “Wildcat Roars in West Virginia: Teachers to Stay Out on Strike,” declared the anarchist website *Its Going Down* (1 March). The World So-

cialist Web Site (6 March) ran an article on “The West Virginia teachers strike and the rebellion against the trade unions.” The WSWs, a/k/a the Socialist Equality Party, claims the unions are “not working-class organizations, but agencies of the corporations and the state” (“Lessons of the West Virginia teachers strike,” 8 March). With pseudo-leftist verbiage, this dubious outfit led by one David North (who for years was head of a non-union printing company) aids the bosses by fueling reactionary anti-union sentiment.

The WSWs/SEP poses as Trotskyist even as it rejects Leon Trotsky’s analysis of the unions as workers organizations led by a privileged pro-capitalist bureaucracy, the “labor lieutenants of the capitalist class,” as American socialist Daniel De Leon put it. These imposters write off the unions as bourgeois institutions in order to justify not defending them against capitalist attack.<sup>7</sup> Genuine Trotskyists, in contrast, call to defend the unions by ousting the sellout misleaders and forging a class-struggle leadership. As Trotsky wrote:

“The primary slogan for this struggle is: *complete and unconditional independence of the trade unions in relation to the capitalist state*. This means a struggle to turn the trade unions into the organs of the broad exploited masses and not the organs of a labor aristocracy.”

– Leon Trotsky, “Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay” (1940)

Unsurprisingly, the WSWs anti-union propaganda fell flat with the union teachers engaged in a hard-fought, militant strike.

**Lesson One: The strike was not a wildcat but a revolt inside the unions for a militant policy.**

*continued on page 46*

<sup>7</sup> See “SEP/WSWS: Scab ‘Socialists,’” *The Internationalist*, December 2007

# Disaster for Poor, Black and Working People – “Opportunity” for Capitalists

## New Orleans Schools: Test Lab for War on Public Education



Gerald Herbert/AP

**Students line up at ReNEW SciTech Academy in New Orleans, August 2014. Ten years after Hurricane Katrina, privately managed charter schools have replaced public schools throughout New Orleans. This is what the Democratic and Republican partner parties of American capitalism are pushing for across the country.**

*The following article was published as a special Class Struggle Education Workers supplement in March 2016 in conjunction with a CSEW workshop on “Charter Schools = Capitalist Disaster for Teachers and Students” at a conference of the New York Collective of Radical Educators.*

**By Mark Lance**

“I think the best thing that happened to the education system in New Orleans was Hurricane Katrina.”

—Education Secretary Arne Duncan in the *Washington Post*, 30 January 2010

With 100 mph winds and a 12-foot storm surge, Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, Louisiana on August 29, 2005. As the storm passed over the city, floodwaters breached the city’s levees and 80% of New Orleans was submerged. Nearly 2,000 died, the victims disproportionately black and old. People drowned in their attics. Bloating bodies floated in the streets. The heavily black 7th, 8th and 9th wards were especially hard hit. 400,000 people were displaced, almost three-quarters of them African Americans. More than 80% of the schools were inundated, 100 out of a total 128 schools severely damaged or destroyed.

On the tenth anniversary of Katrina, politicians and

“education reform” advocates are hailing the supposedly miraculous transformation of New Orleans schools due to the introduction of semi-privatized “charter schools.” President Barack Obama declared that “we’ve transformed education” in New Orleans, proclaiming the city a “laboratory for urban innovation across the board” and a “model for the nation.” Former president George Bush, who launched the charterization of NOLA schools, called New Orleans a “beacon for school reform.” Earlier, *Education Week* (29 May 2014) called it “a breathtaking makeover of an urban school system.”

A look at the record tells a very different story.

Concerned educators from New Orleans, and serious education researchers and advocates of public education around the country, have underscored how the “turnaround” story is based on manipulated statistics. Mercedes Schneider, a Louisiana public school teacher and publisher of the education blog *deutsch29* (August 5), summed up her dissection of the stats: “New Orleans’ post-Katrina state-takeover experiment does not produce miracles.” Another Louisiana educator, Michael Deshotel, said that the purported success story was a “great big fraud.” Historian Diane Ravitch wrote on her blog, “No Miracle in New Orleans” (11 June 2012).



**Michelle Rhee, poster-witch of corporate/capitalist education “reform.” Rhee is now gone, trailed by scandals of rampant cheating and financial shenanigans.**

Beyond lying with statistics, the more fundamental point is that education is where race and class intersect, and by far the biggest factor determining test scores (and the condition of the schools) is poverty, segregation and socio-economic status. As Charles Gardner and others such as Jonathan Kozol (*Savage Inequalities*) have pointed out, perhaps the best predictor of test results is the student’s zip code. The “strategy” of the education “reformers” to produce their bogus New Orleans miracle was brutally simple: push out black and poor people and close their schools.

At bottom, the hosannas for school “reform” in the Crescent City are not about improving public education, but the opposite. New Orleans has been used as a test lab for “transforming” the school system *to serve the interests of capital*. The winners are the privatizers – the numerous vendors, charter school operators and investors who are making a killing by milking the education budget, plus the billionaire “reformers” who are pushing to remake the system in order to supply the labor force needs of corporations. The losers are the students, teachers, working people and all those who see quality public schools as a democratic right for all.

But by examining and drawing the lessons of what happened in New Orleans, we can prepare to better fight the “bi-partisan” onslaught against teachers, their unions and students. It’s all part of the one-sided “war on workers” being waged by virtually the entire ruling class, from Wall Street to the White House and even Hollywood, which is now regularly churning out “Bad Teacher” movies.

## Statistical Flimflam Behind the Wrecking Ball

For the people of New Orleans, particularly those who couldn’t escape the city, the storm was an unimaginable catastrophe. For the enemies of public education, Hurricane Katrina was a godsend. The grotesque, if candid, remark by Arne Duncan, Obama’s education chief, was no off-the-cuff hyperbole. Rather, it is straight from the playbook of the original “Chicago Boy” economist, Milton Friedman, author of the “shock treatment” employed by Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet who butchered 30,000 people after seizing power in 1973. Friedman wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* (5 December 2005) that:

“Most New Orleans schools are in ruins, as are the homes of the children who have attended them. The children are now scattered all over the country. This is a tragedy. It is also an opportunity to radically reform the educational system.”

Friedman proposed introducing competition via a permanent voucher system “to encourage private enterprise to provide schooling.”

Friedman’s acolytes in Louisiana wasted no time in exploiting their “opportunity” to remake the city, starting with the people. “We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans,” crowed Republican congressman Richard H. Baker from Baton Rouge. “We couldn’t do it but God did” (*New York Times*, 6 June 2006). An atypical quote from a Republican yahoo? Then how about *Times* columnist and National Public Radio stalwart David Brooks:

“If we just put up new buildings and allow the same people to move back into their old neighborhoods, then urban New Orleans will become just as rundown and dysfunctional as before.”  
–“Katrina’s Silver Lining,” *New York Times* (8 September 2005)



**For New Orleans’ hard-hit black residents, Hurricane Katrina was an unimaginable catastrophe. For the capitalists it was an opportunity to “remake” the city by expelling over 100,000 African Americans.**



**City rulers tore down public housing projects to make way for luxury development.**

“*The same people*”? Brooks was longing to disappear New Orleans’ black and poor. He got his wish. More than 175,000 black residents left New Orleans in the year after the storm. As many as 100,000 never returned.

Journalist Naomi Klein cited New Orleans as Exhibit A in her book, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007). She began her narrative by observing:

“In sharp contrast to the glacial pace with which the levees were repaired and the electricity grid was brought back online, the auctioning off of New Orleans’ school system took place with military speed and precision. Within nineteen months, with most of the city’s poor residents still in exile, New Orleans’ public school system had been almost completely replaced by privately run charter schools.”

While national leaders cheered, in New Orleans charter schools “are seen by many African-American parents as a way of reversing the gains of the civil rights movement,” Klein noted. She also linked the New Orleans “remake” to the U.S. occupation of Iraq two years earlier, where Bush’s “shock and awe” bombing was followed by “mass privatization [of previously nationalized oil wells], complete free trade, a 15 percent flat tax, a dramatically downsized government.”

The formula: catastrophe for the masses equals opportunity for the capitalists. But the “solution” Klein puts forward, “people’s reconstruction efforts,” is hardly radical but a liberal diversion to avoid the need to take on the rule of capital.

Immediately after Hurricane Katrina, the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) got rid of 7,000 school employees, including all the teachers, by putting them on “disaster leave” without pay. Many were homeless, most of them black, and all

of them represented by the United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO), at the time the largest union local in the South. The firings were made permanent in March 2006.

Today in New Orleans, 49% of the schools’ teachers are African American, down from 71% in 2005. Turnover has nearly doubled since Katrina with many of the new teachers coming from programs such as Teach for America (TFA) and lacking a long-term commitment either to teaching or to the city’s residents. According to a study by the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, more than half of all teachers have five or fewer years of experience while the percentage of certified teachers fell from 79% to 56% since 2003.

The Recovery School District (RSD) was created in that year to run a handful of failing New Orleans schools. After Katrina, the Louisiana state legislature gave the RSD control of four-fifths of the city’s schools. The RSD then closed or chartered every school it re-opened. Seventeen better-performing schools stayed in OPSB, thereby creating a two-tier system. As of September 2014, all of the schools in the RSD were publically funded but privately run charters making it the first all-charter school district in the U.S.

Supporters of school “reform” (charters schools, union busting and high-stakes testing) cite statistics that allegedly confirm the turnaround of New Orleans’ schools. Most point to an article, “Good News for New Orleans” by Douglas Harris of the Education Research Alliance (*Education Next*, Fall 2015). Harris claims that in 2012, 63% of children in New Orleans elementary and middle schools were proficient on state tests as compared to 37% in 2005, and he attributes those gains to charter school reforms. Allegedly, graduation and college entry rates likewise increased.

But Mercedes Schneider reported on her *deutsch29* blog that the state’s own statistics tell a far different story. “New Orleans Recovery School District ranked 70th out of 73 districts in the state. Its ACT scores are virtually unchanged over the last three years. The RSD ACT scores are far below the state average” (Louisiana’s 2015 District ACT Composite Scores, *Deutsch29*, 5 August 2015). As for the reported improved numbers of college-eligible students, the RSD’s scores are still below the cutoff for a tuition waiver at Louisiana State University. Statistics don’t lie but statisticians do.

In Milton Friedman’s 2005 letter to the *Wall Street Journal*, he refers to students as “consumers.” Not surprisingly, those pushing a “portfolio management model” of education resort to the same kind of subterfuges that a typical corporation does to improve its “bottom line.” An Education Research Alliance report (March 2015) admitted that in many New Orleans schools, “leaders used a number of strategies in response to competition ... which include ‘glossification,’ or marketing existing school offerings,” and “‘creaming’ and ‘cropping,’ actively selecting or excluding particular types of students.” One technique for courting more affluent families was an invite-only open house.

It’s clear which students are in demand. So who’s out? Special education students were pushed from school to school. Non-English-speaking students complained that their civil rights were being violated. Parents felt elbowed aside



AP-TV

**“Teacher appreciation,” NOLA-style: city fired over 7,000 unionized teachers and school staff, closed almost all the public schools. Right: White cops beat 64-year-old black retired teacher Robert Davis, who lost his house in the Ninth Ward to post-Katrina flooding, 8 October 2005.**

by out-of-town “experts.” And always, the discipline – like silent lunch for kindergarteners. “Expulsions were out of control,” admitted a former RSD official. “The traditional schools were dumping grounds” (*U.S. News & World Report*, 18 August 2015). For example, the George Washington Carver High School in the Lower Ninth Ward was given by the RSD to Collegiate Academies, a charter network notorious for its heavy-handed discipline. In the 2012-13 school year, the Collegiate Academies had an average suspension rate of over 62%.

This practice is by no means peculiar to New Orleans, of course. In my own class (New York City adult education), one of my students has a daughter in a private charter. “They’re like soldiers,” the mother said. “She can’t wave to me when I see her at school. She has no friends, because the kids are not allowed to talk to their classmates.” Her daughter is in the third grade.

One way for a school to elevate its performance numbers is to simply make dropouts disappear. Every student leaving a Louisiana public school receives an exit code. Since out-of-state transfers can’t easily be checked, assigning an Exit Code 10 (“Transferred Out of State”) to a student who dropped out would not affect a school’s graduation rate. In a state audit of a random sampling of exit codes for the class of 2013, every single New Orleans record lacked verification.

In another ploy, some school principals decided not to advertise open spaces and chose to forgo additional funds rather than accept “troublesome” students. In the words of one principal, “The enrollment game is the game in town. It’s how we get our funding” (“The Uncounted,” *International Business Times*, 28 August 2015). Under community pressure and after a ruling by Louisiana courts on a suit by the Southern Poverty Law Center that New Orleans schools were violating special-education students’ civil rights, the RSD has made some changes, but the incentive remains.

When students are “consumers,” and education is a com-

modity, the goal is to get lots of customers into the store. But make sure they’re the ones you want. As another school leader succinctly put it: “Every kid is money.”

### **Winners and Losers: Who Profits from Charter Schools?**

New Orleans schools were in terrible shape prior to the hurricane. A June 2007 study by the UTNO, state and national teachers union reported, “Before Katrina, well-credentialed veteran teachers already were in short supply in the city’s schools.” Test scores were among the worst in the country. In the last state achievement tests before the storm, three-quarters of 8th graders couldn’t demonstrate basic skills in English and language arts, while 70% were below basic in math (*The Atlantic*, January-February 2007). The OPSB was \$450 million in debt, bureaucratic infighting and corruption among school board members and administrators were rampant. There were so many investigations being conducted that the FBI opened an office in the district.

From a pre-Katrina baseline it shouldn’t be too hard to demonstrate “progress.” When the storm hit, there were 65,000 students in the New Orleans public school system. Today there are 45,000. By losing tens of thousands of its poorest and least well-served students, the average score of those that remained is bound to improve. As one New Orleans parent wrote to the blog Education Talk New Orleans (September 1):

“10 years ago the state took all of those “bad” schools and promised to do a better job. They never re-opened many of the schools, so automatically by virtue of doing nothing but keeping some schools closed, the RSD can take credit for having fewer failing schools. The state then closed 26 RSD New Orleans schools displacing nearly 5000 students in a 6 years time period. That will certainly get you fewer failing schools. THAT’S PROGRESS! The LDOE even closed 7 of the new charters schools it opened post-Katrina, displacing 1700 of those 5000 students. That is certainly a way to make your charter school performance look better than it actually is.”



“People ask me if things are better 10 years after Katrina,” a special education and parent leader in New Orleans said. “I say ‘better for whom?’” For the top performing students in the OPSB schools, maybe things are better. But for special education students, or tens of thousands minority kids from poor families traumatized by Katrina? Not so much.

The companies producing test and test prep materials are doing fine. How about charter school executives? Now we’re talking. Kathy Riedlinger, CEO at the Lusher Charter School in New Orleans pulled down \$316,306 in 2012. Mickey Landry, the top exec of Choice Foundation, got 258 K. (*Times Picayune*, 9 January 2015). Education bosses in the Big Apple do even better than their counterparts in the Big Easy. David Lenn at KIPP made \$395,350 (*New York Daily News* 27 October 2013). Eva Moskowitz at the Success Academy Charter chalked up \$475,244 in 2012. Before he stepped down as CEO of the Harlem Children’s Zone, Geoffrey Canada, featured in the pro-charter film *Waiting for Superman*, made a cool half million – over \$512,000 in salary, expense account and pension in 2010, plus various fees and other perks.

Who else is making money from charter schools? The business TV channel CNBC (15 August 2012) posed a question, “are charter schools a wise addition to your investment portfolio?” to David Brain, President and CEO of Entertainment Properties Trust. It’s worth quoting Mr. Brain’s response at length.

**DB:** “Well I think it’s a very stable business, very recession-resistant. It’s a high-demand product. There’s 400,000 kids on waiting lists for charter schools, the industry’s growing about 12-14% a year. So it’s a high-growth, very stable, recession-resistant business. It’s a public payer, the state is the payer on this category, and if you do business with states with solid treasuries then it’s a very solid business....

**Anchor:** David there has been somewhat of a backlash to charter schools in some areas given their use of public money, as you noted. Any risk to the growth of charter schools generally?

**DB:** I don’t—there’s not a lost of risk, there’s probably risk to everything but the fact is this has bipartisan support. It’s part of the Republican platform and Arne Duncan, Secretary of

Education in the Obama Administration, has been very high on it throughout their work in public education. So we have both political parties are solidly behind it....

**Anchor:** You’ve invested in retail centers, ski parks, you’ve got charter schools, you’ve got movie theaters. If you could buy one thing right now, David, one type of asset in real estate, what would it be?

**DB:** Well, probably the charter school business. We said it’s our highest growth and most appealing sector right now of the portfolio. It’s the most high in demand, it’s the most recession-resistant. And a great opportunity set with 500 schools starting every year. It’s a two and a half billion dollar opportunity set annually.”

—CNBC, 15 August 2012

Now you know why they call it the “portfolio management model” for education! In this model, the David Brains win, while you, everyone like you and public education generally lose.

## Capitalist Education “Reform”: Hedge Funds, Cash Flow and National Security

The problems of the New Orleans schools can’t be separated from the problems of the city. Child poverty in New Orleans is at 39%, unchanged since the storm. Economic inequality has increased. For black households, median household income is 42% of whites’. An article from the *National Journal* (20 October 2014) paints a picture of post-Katrina New Orleans:

“But away from the French Quarter, New Orleans is not the same place it once was. The famously African-American city has gotten whiter and more Hispanic. Townhouses have popped up where housing projects once stood, pushing poor, black residents to the suburbs to find cheaper rent – or to homeless camps under the city’s highways.

“Outside grocery stores and apartments, immigration agents frequently detain and fingerprint Central American workers who settled in New Orleans after cleaning up the mess Katrina left behind. Latinos now outnumber the city’s established community of Vietnamese refugees, who are keeping the Louisiana shrimp industry afloat after a double hit from Katrina and the BP oil spill. Then there’s the influx of the so-called white ‘YURPS’ (Young, Urban, Recovery Professionals).”

For the rulers of America, post-Katrina New Orleans is a model of the “creative destruction” of capitalism, in the famous phrase of Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter, precursor of Milton Friedman’s “Chicago School.” Kristen McQueary, a member of the *Chicago Tribune* editorial board recently wrote that, “I find myself wishing for a storm in Chicago—an unpredictable haughty, devastating swirl of fury. A dramatic levee break. Geysers bursting through manhole covers. A sleeping city, forced onto the rooftops. That’s what it took to hit the reset button in New Orleans. Chaos. Tragedy. Heartbreak” (*Chicago Tribune*, 13 August 2015). Faced with an uproar, like Duncan, McQueary later tried to “clarify” her despicable remarks.

But like former NYC mayor Rudolph Giuliani’s statement that he longed to “blow up” the New York school system, such overly frank statements express the real animosity of the capitalist ruling class toward public schools, teachers and teachers unions in particular. The nationwide, bipartisan attack on public

education is not the result of misguided educational policy. It is the *strategy* of politicians, business leaders and their think tanks who want education run like any other capitalist enterprise: privatize the schools, break the unions, evaluate teachers and schools solely through standardized, high-stakes testing. For what purpose?

There are various interests at work. For one, there are the hedge fund operators, who have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in charter schools. You may have wondered why these Wall Street speculators are so interested in education. One of them, Ravenel Boykin Curry IV of Eagle Capital Management, let the cat out of the bag in an interview for a *New York Times* (6 December 2009) Dealbook article on “Scholarly Investments”: “The schools are ‘exactly the kind of investment people in our industry spend our days trying to stumble on,’ Mr. Curry said, ‘with incredible cash flow, even if in this case we don’t ourselves get any of it’.”

Hmm. No money for the money men – like \$0 in management fees on the huge investments in charters, 0% interest on the millions flowing through their coffers. You think? And what was it that led to the collapse of a lot of hedge funds in the 2008 crash? Oh yes, insufficient/negative cash flow. This isn’t philanthropy, they are *investing* in this trillion-dollar education “industry” in part as insurance. The next time the market goes south, they may take a beating but with a steady stream of government funds they can avoid going under.

Other capitalist forces have broader aims in mind. “National security,” for one, i.e., preparation for war and economic competition. In March 2012, a Council on Foreign Relations Independent Task Force, chaired jointly by former head of the NYC public schools Joel Klein and former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, made their case for school “reform”: “Human Capital will determine power in the current century, and the failure to produce that capital will undermine America’s security,” the report states. “Large, undereducated swaths of the population damage the ability of the United States to physically defend itself, protect its secure information conduct diplomacy, and grow its economy.”

Recommendations from the task force? “With the support of the federal government and industry partners, states should expand the Common Core State Standards, ensuring that students are mastering the skills and knowledge necessary to safeguard the country’s national security.” This fear is echoed by the Broad Foundation (assets: \$2.1 billion), one of the Big Three (along with the Walton and Gates foundations) financial backers of school “reform.” The Broad Foundation worries that “Too many people are not qualified to join the military, in part because they lack adequate education.”

For all these forces, New Orleans is key. Last October, Eli Broad hired the former state superintendant in Louisiana, Paul Pastorek, to lead the effort to privatize the schools of 50% of



**The perpetrators: Arne Duncan (left), Democrat Obama’s “education czar,” and Paul Vallas, then Louisiana Recovery School District chief, in October 2009. Both are former CEOs of Chicago schools and point men for the capitalist war on teachers and public education.**

the children now attending public schools in Los Angeles. Then there’s Paul Vallas, former superintendant of the New Orleans RSD, who was previously CEO of the Chicago public schools where he was succeeded by none other than Arne Duncan. Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel is the former chief of staff to Barack Obama. It was Emanuel who famously said “never let a good crisis go to waste.” The ruling class took that to heart with Katrina. Republican Bush started the wrecking job, Democrat Obama is continuing it. It’s up to us – to the education workers, students, parents and working people – to stop them.

### **The War on Teachers, Unions and Public Education**

Today, there are countless activists, writers and bloggers dedicated to resisting the takeover of public education by private forces. Their work is informative and often inspiring. Yet in almost all cases, while exposing the truth about school reform and its political, media and financial backers, there is little or nothing in the way of a strategy for fighting it. Diane Ravitch’s *Reign of Error*, an eloquent exposé on “the hoax of the privatization movement,” concludes with the feeble statement that “we must work together to improve our public schools.”

As we wrote in “Three ‘R’s’: Ravitch, Research and Revolution” (*Class Struggle Education Workers Newsletter* No. 4, Summer-Fall 2014):

“Ravitch reveals the dangers of corporate ‘reform’ and privatization, but her responses are confined within the framework of capitalism and the acceptable discourse of the Democratic liberal brand of bourgeois politics. Therefore her proposals are doomed to failure, for this is not primarily a ‘conversation’ about what is effective education reform. It is a bruising battle over union-busting, privatization and class power.”

The “reformers” are not out to improve public schools, they want to gut public education, milk the education budget for profit, destroy teachers unions, regiment students and make the schools into skills training institutes. Educating students to critical thinking is the last thing they would want. The rampant standardized testing, endless test prep, linking teacher evals



**More perpetrators: Hillary Clinton has worked for years with billionaire teacher union-bashing education “reformer” Eli Broad (left), shown here at the 2008 inaugural of Barack Obama. The Democratic Party has been pushing charter schools and spearheading the capitalist assault on public education.**

to student test scores are all part of a *class war* being waged by a united ruling class.

Public school students in New Orleans, their parents and teachers don’t just face a pro-charter mayor (Democrat Mitch Landrieu) and, until recently, a rabidly pro-reform governor, Republican Bobby Jindal. In her blog (November 22) Diane Ravitch hailed the election of John Edwards, a Democrat, as Jindal’s replacement: “Great News from Louisiana! New Governor!” Edwards may not be the same kind of crazed teacher-basher as his Republican predecessor, but he will just tone down the corporate reformers’ projects. He declares that it is “not true” that he wants to ban charters, that he won’t eliminate vouchers, that “I’m not about ending choice, I’m about informed choice,” etc. (Huffington Post, 30 November).

Sort of like NYC mayor Bill de Blasio, about whom we wrote: “Liberal Democrat NYC Mayoral Candidate Won’t End ‘Stop and Frisk,’ Charters or Privatization of Public Education,” even as many teacher activists and the United Federation of Teachers backed him. (See the October 2013 Class Struggle Education Workers leaflet, “Despite the Hype, de Blasio Will Be ‘Bloomberg Lite’.”) As we predicted, so it has come to pass.

Advocates of public education are up against a national network of politicians from both parties, big business and education “reformers.” They are also opposed by a cadre of journalists in the mainstream media and think tanks funded by the billionaire philanthropists. To see their reach, check out the “supporters” of the Chalkbeat education news sites in New York and elsewhere which include the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (as well as the Gates Family Foundation), the Ford Foundation and Walton Family Foundation. Or look at the *Education Week* web site funded by Atlantic Philanthropies, the Carnegie Corporation, and the Broad, Cooke,

Ford, Gates and Walton foundations, among others.

And this juggernaut of ruling-class heavies isn’t just relying on its journalists for hire. The big guns of education “reform” have a whole state apparatus to enforce their will. At their beck and call is an actual army of police and National Guard (as well as private security guards) ready to bust strikes ... and heads as ordered in case any student, parent or union gets out of line. Remember how the enforcers of “law and order” terrorized the desperate people they found in the streets after Katrina hit, how whites were “struggling to feed their families” while blacks were called “looters”? Just last August, an appeals court upheld a decision to overturn the conviction of the five New Orleans cops who shot six unarmed African Americans on the Danziger Bridge, killing two. The victims’ “crime”: they were trying to get food and water six days after the storm.

Here in New York, a teachers strike would have to take on the state’s notorious Taylor Law, which bans strikes by public workers. As for police in the schools, you need only view the sickening videotape of the October 26 assault on a black, female student in a Columbia, South Carolina high school.

A strategy to fight the enemies of public education begins with naming the enemy: capitalism.

Every day, teachers confront the all-sided oppression of this capitalist society. More than anything else, low academic achievement correlates with poverty. Children who are poor receive less medical care, have worse nutrition, and are more likely to be exposed to childhood diseases, violence, drugs and abuse. They are sick more often. Many arrive at school hungry. And homelessness! New studies by the Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness and the NYC Independent Budget office report that a staggering 8% of all NYC students are in temporary housing – that’s 83,000 – up from 1.1% in 2008. In impoverished African American and Latino school districts the figure is 15% or more homeless. You can’t talk about “fixing” public schools without taking this on.

To win, we need fighting unions. But the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association refuse to take the corporate ed “reformers” head-on. They both supported Obama in 2008 and 2012, who in turn installed Arne (“I Love Katrina”) Duncan as his education “czar.” What it will take to defeat the teacher union-bashers and public education privatizers is hard class struggle. With a one-week strike in September, Seattle teachers won their first cost-of-living raise in six years and an end to use of students’ standardized tests to evaluate teachers, as well as a one-year ban on out-of-school suspensions, and smaller special education classes. They didn’t win a reduction in the welter of standardized testing and other demands, but they wouldn’t have won anything without a fight. And for the last several months, Detroit teachers have carried out a series of bold “sick-outs” protesting the abysmal conditions of the schools, including notably protesting during a visit by Barack Obama.

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# “Slave Market-Based Education Reform” in NOLA

*The following article was published in March 2016 as part of the CSEW special supplement on New Orleans schools.*

Last August 4-5, a conference of education researchers was held in New Orleans on the theme, “The ‘New Orleans Model’ of Urban School Reform: A Guide or Warning for Cities Across the Nation.” Workshops were attended as well by local educators, community spokesmen, parents and students. The conference included a bus tour of the devastated school system and vivid testimony about what the corporate education “reform” means on the ground.

The tour underlined the way in which educational opportunity has been systematically cut off for black residents, and how the schools that have been reopened in black areas, often in temporary structures, have prison-like conditions. A participant, Julian Vazquez Heilig, who wrote an extensive blog post on the conference, from which these excerpts are taken, commented about one photo: “Guess: Is this a NOLA school or minimum security prison?”

They saw the well-appointed Charles Hynes charter school in the mostly white Lakeview area which was rebuilt while the John F. Kennedy HS (which served African American students) just across City Park has been demolished and slated for “land-banking,” even though it was a modern (1960s construction) school in what former students called an “idyllic” setting. Calls by JFK alumni to rebuild the school were dismissed.

Many neighborhoods don’t have operational elementary schools even though there are shuttered facilities in the area. In the Lower Ninth Ward, ten years after Katrina, only one neighborhood school was functioning of the five that used to be there. Conference participants asked: “Where did the



Ted Jackson/Times-Picayune

**Students at Carver Collegiate and Carver Prep charter schools after a December 2013 protest where parents complaining of prison-like conditions withdrew them from the schools.**

“\$1.8 billion given to rebuild schools go?” A 2013 article by Kirsten Buras, a professor at Georgia State University and primary organizer of the conference, in the *Berkeley Review of Education* gave the answer:

“Meanwhile, the RSD has received millions from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for damage to these schools. This money was not allocated to rebuild schools in the Lower 9th Ward, but instead was put in a general fund to support school construction in largely white



**In the City Park area, the largely white Edward Hynes charter school (left) was rebuilt, while John F. Kennedy HS (with its overwhelmingly African American student body) was torn down.**

**Students present demands against harsh discipline in New Orleans charter schools on 10 October 2015, as part of National Week of Action Against School Pushout.**



neighborhoods uptown – all of this despite the fact that the vast majority of students in the city’s public schools are African American and live downtown. Most of the renovated and newly built spaces would be given to privately managed charter schools.”

Karran Harper Royal, a New Orleans native and parent, noted: “Students in Lower 9th Ward [were] not allowed in nearby St. Bernard Parish. They are bused to schools across town.” She noted that school buses bringing kids home often arrive as late as 8 p.m.

Dr. Raynard Sanders, a prominent New Orleans educational researcher and educator at the secondary, university and graduate levels, kicked off the conference. Here are some tweets from participants:

“What was a disaster became an opportunity.” Schools taken over “when bodies were still floating.” -Raynard Sanders

You’ll hear wonderful stories about the privatization of NOLA’s schools. They’re hallucinations. -Raynard Sanders

Then came a session with parents. What they had to say was chilling:

“Mom do you want to check me for weapons when I come home from school” NOLA parent of 7yr old child  
NOLA parent advocate: 7 year old “patted down” every day.  
“I cry daily for my children.”

NOLA parent advocate: What’s happening to our children is criminal. Our children have been sold to charters for profit.  
NOLA parent advocate: “I live in fear for my children.” They are being trained to be subservient- prepared for jail.

NOLA parent advocate: Children forced into “silent lunch” from kindergarten on...

Schools in NOLA look like prisons. We are training children to go to prison. -Parent advocates.”

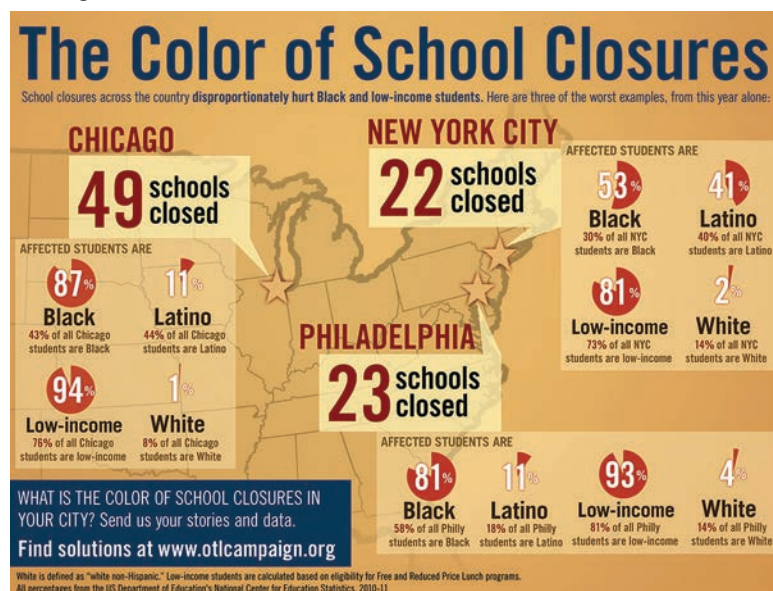
Another theme was how highly paid charter school managers brought in Teach for America (TFA) to replace the public school teachers. “Between 2005 and 2006, NOLA fired 7500 teachers/school employees. Then claimed teacher shortage and brought in TFA.” TFA has been central to the drive for charterization, by providing non-union “teachers” without pedagogical training. But a number of former TFA recruits had become critical of their role. A former TFA administrator reported:

“Discipline should not beget self-hate. When we met w/struggle, we punished & retraumatized kids. -Former charter admin.

“No excuses charters: Students punished for speaking their native lang., hairstyles. Suspended when can’t afford uniforms.”

A panelist said that “no excuses charter schools” cultivate a “culture of silence.” An educational researcher specializing in TFA and “market-based” school reform described “constant surveillance of kids at NOLA charters she observed, justified by ‘cultural deficit.’” An attorney reported: “Kids kicked out of no-excuses school for chewing gum, not walking in line. Many complaints re: dehumanizing treatment.”

An item in a slide show reported that at Carver Prep, teachers corrected students “who sit incorrectly, speak incorrectly, wear their uniforms incorrectly, show their work incorrectly, and transition in the hall-



ways incorrectly.” “We get detentions or suspensions for not walking on the taped lines in the hallway.” In short, “‘Control them, silence them, punish them.’ Life of high schoolers” in “no excuses” charters.

Behind it all is rampant racism. A panelist, Ramon Griffin, wrote an article, “Colonizing the Black Natives: Reflections from a Former NOLA Charter School Dean of Students,” wrote of his experience that “everything at the school was done in a militaristic/prison fashion.”

“My daily routine consisted of running around chasing young Black ladies to see if their nails were polished, or if they added a different color streak to their hair, or following young men to make sure that their hair wasn’t styled naturally as students were not able to wear their hair in *uncombed afro styles*. None of which had anything to do with teaching and learning, but administration was keen on making sure that before Black students entered the classroom that they looked ‘appropriate’ for learning.”

Summing up, Joyce King, a professor at Georgia State and recent past president of the American Education Research Association, concluded: “What’s happening in NOLA is ‘slave’ market-based reform. African Americans are controlled & used for profit” (from the blog posting by Julian Vasquez). Class Struggle Education Workers has stressed repeatedly that in NYC and elsewhere, school closures have resulted in a pattern of “educational apartheid.” At the New Orleans meeting an illustration prepared by the Schott Foundation showed how in city after city, over 90% of closed schools were in black and Latino communities.

New Orleans is what educational colonialism, corporate-sponsored apartheid and “slave market-based” ed reform looks like. This is the “new Jim Crow,” a 21st century *Code Noir*. The abolition of slavery required the Civil War, the second American Revolution. To defeat the racist, capitalist attack on public education will take nothing less than a socialist revolution that will make possible for the first time a truly liberating education in the interests of working people and all the oppressed. ■

## New Orleans Schools...

*continued from page 14*

The war on public education is bipartisan. It’s not just the Koch brothers and right-wing Republicans. It’s also Democrats from Obama on down, including New York governor and big-time Common Core proponent Andrew Cuomo. Attacking the Chicago Teachers Union was the centerpiece of Democrat Rahm Emanuel’s 2015 mayoral re-election bid. In 2012, “Mayor 1%” provoked a strike by the CTU by canceling a union-negotiated raise and laying off more than 900, predominantly black, teachers. But when faced with a court order, the CTU leadership, led by the Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE), shoved a sellout contract down the throats of the union’s House of Delegates which initially voted it down.

Still, teachers, in the crosshairs of the education “reformers,” have powerful allies starting with educators in every school district in the country. Teachers are by far the most highly organized section of the U.S. working class (union representation of teachers in New York State is 98.4%), which is why we are under attack. And *we* have allies: our students

and their parents and above all, our brothers and sisters in organized labor. We teach their kids! Let them try to open a struck “reform” school in New Orleans if teachers are joined on the picket line by longshoremen from ILA Local 3000. What would happen in New York or Chicago or Philadelphia if Teamsters, transit workers and sanitation workers, as well as students and their parents, join the picket lines of the people who are with their kids every day in class?

Will this be easy? Certainly not. A class-struggle strategy requires a fight with the existing labor bureaucracy which embodies the opposite: class collaboration. On the eve of the 2012 Chicago teachers’ strike, American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten was at the Democratic National Convention endorsing Barack Obama. Weingarten cited “common ground” with the politicians, local and national, who had declared war on her own union membership. Weingarten’s AFT has already endorsed Hillary Clinton (former board of directors member at Walmart and attorney to Eli Broad) for president in 2016. Weingarten is a perfect example of a “labor lieutenant of capitalism” who chains workers to their mortal enemies.

Class Struggle Education Workers puts forward a program to fight the privatizing education *deformers* down the line. Against the present mayoral dictatorship over schools in New York and many other large cities, we call for teacher-student-parent-worker control of the schools. We say forthrightly that it’s necessary to break the Democratic and Republican parties of capital, and we need to build a workers party to fight for a workers government, to lay the basis for the badly needed *revolution* in education. It’s not an easy path, but it’s the only road to quality public education for everyone, for education that serves not Wall Street but working people. *Join the CSEW!*

*Mark Lance teaches math at the Continuing Education program at the Borough of Manhattan Community College.*

The second expanded (98 page) edition of this important bulletin on *Marxism and the Battle Over Education* includes several new articles on the struggle of teachers in Oaxaca, Mexico, on New York City schools, as well as translations from Russian on education in the early years of the USSR.



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# Interview with Vera John-Steiner on Vygotsky and Language, Marxism and Education, Malcolm X, and Other Topics

## Part 1

*The following is the edited text of an interview with Veronka (Vera) John-Steiner. The interview was carried out at her home in Santa Fe, New Mexico on January 5, 2017, by Sándor John. It begins with the development of her interest in the work of pioneering Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), and ranges over a few aspects of her own professional, intellectual and political life. Vera was born on June 13, 1930 and died at home on December 6, 2017, a little less than a year after participating in this interview.*

*Special thanks to Irma and Mark Lance for their hard work on the transcription.*

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*Let's begin with where and when you were born.*

I was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1930.

*Before we get to Vygotsky per se, could you talk a bit about some of the interests and experiences that paved the way for your interest in Vygotsky?*

Sure. Because I studied in more than one country, I was very interested in what actually is a Whorfian question.<sup>1</sup> That is: Does the structure and the vocabulary of a language affect the way in which we perceive the world? What is the connection between the shaping forces of language and how language is used in a particular culture. Hungarian being my native language, I was very interested in the specification, in the vocabulary, of sensory impressions, particularly of food, that made discrimination among tastes more specific and more detailed.

The more important issue is to what extent certain grammatical features of a language may affect our conceptualization. In English, our time differentiations between past, present and future are obligatory, so English speakers kind of assume that the rest of the world also divides the flow of time into these categories. But a very basic question, and difficult question, is: What is the present? Is the present the beginning two words in my sentence? Or is it the whole phrase? What are the boundaries of the present?

### **How Time Is Differentiated – In Hopi and in English**

In languages like Hopi, which do not differentiate in this

<sup>1</sup> See next page for explanation of the term “Whorfian.” (This and subsequent notes have been added to clarify references to some events, names, etc. – SJ.)



Internationalist photo

### **Vera looking for a book during the interview.**

way – where verb differentiations require an indication whether an event that you are describing was witnessed or reported – the time differentiations are adverbial rather than grammatical, in terms of the past, present and future in the verb structure. And then there is the way in which languages divide space; whether they use certain kinds of perspectives and signposts, or whether they use a more generalized orientation in space. I was not aware when I was a teenager and I was in an international school of these specific differentiations between language and our perceptions in language and our conception. But I was aware that when I was speaking in French versus speaking in Hungarian that there were different ways in which I viewed my experience.

*Different ways in which you viewed your experience according to which language you were discussing the experience in. Can you give an example?*

As we had institutional food, my fantasies about more flavorful food were usually conceptualized in Hungarian.



**Lev Vygotsky as a young man.**

The other thing was we were required to write an expository essay every week, based on some “*explication de texte*,” and I thought that the French language was very helpful. The boundary between language and cultural expectations is not always easy to differentiate, but I thought that the precision that was required in the *explication* of a text was particularly suited to French.

*In a sense, it's a very rigid language and therefore requires precision. Regarding taste and food, in Spanish, “exquisito” is similar to English, exquisite. If somebody asks how you like the food and you say it's “exquisita,” that's a good thing. In Portuguese “exquisito” is horrible, so you can unintentionally offend somebody very badly. You referred to a Whorfian question. What does that mean?*

Benjamin Lee Whorf was actually a fire inspector, but he was a self-taught linguist, and he studied particularly Hopi. He was the first person who wrote widely about the distinctions imposed by language upon the conceptual structure. His theory of language being a determining factor in conceptual categorizations was called the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Edward Sapir was another early linguist, who didn't describe the hypothesis as clearly and precisely as Whorf did. Actually, Whorf had a very dramatic example. When he was investigating at the beginning of fires, people would say the container was empty. But it really wasn't empty. It had some gases in it. So the word “empty” was very important. The choices of words and what they implied – he had a very deep understanding of this. With

the time categories in Hopi, he was able to understand better the culture that was cyclical, looking at time in terms of seasons rather than in terms of past, present and future.

*Regarding what led to your interest in Vygotsky, you began to study psychology, and was your first interest in psychology related to these issues?*

Yes.

*So your first interests in psychology were not clinical.*

No. My training included some clinical training, but that was limited because clinical training was affiliated with the Veterans Administration, and they would not have anything to do with me because of my politics. So I was looking for psychologists who have addressed issues of this kind.

It was the height of behaviorism, and there really was virtually nothing. I was lucky enough to be invited to Harvard, where I met Jerome Bruner, a psychologist who established a center for cognitive studies. And there was quite a break from the behaviorist mainstream of psychology.<sup>2</sup> Bruner had actually met [Soviet neuropsychologist Alexander] Luria<sup>3</sup> at an international congress, and Luria told him about Vygotsky.

When I met Bruner it was in 1963, and they had just published in English the translation of Vygotsky's last book, that was entitled *Thought and Language*. So he recommended that to me.

## **Navajo Reservation and Bilingual Education**

*You got involved, if I remember correctly, with schools on the Navajo reservation.*

Right. My first trip to the Navajo was in '64.

*Was this through your involvement in bilingual education?*

No, through Head Start. But later, when I got to Yeshiva [University], I was working with the major figure in bilingualism, Joshua Fishman, who actually was a specialist in Yiddish. We taught together, and he urged me, with my bilingual background, to do some work in bilingualism. So actually, my first small book publication was on bilingual schools, before bilingualism was established on a national level.

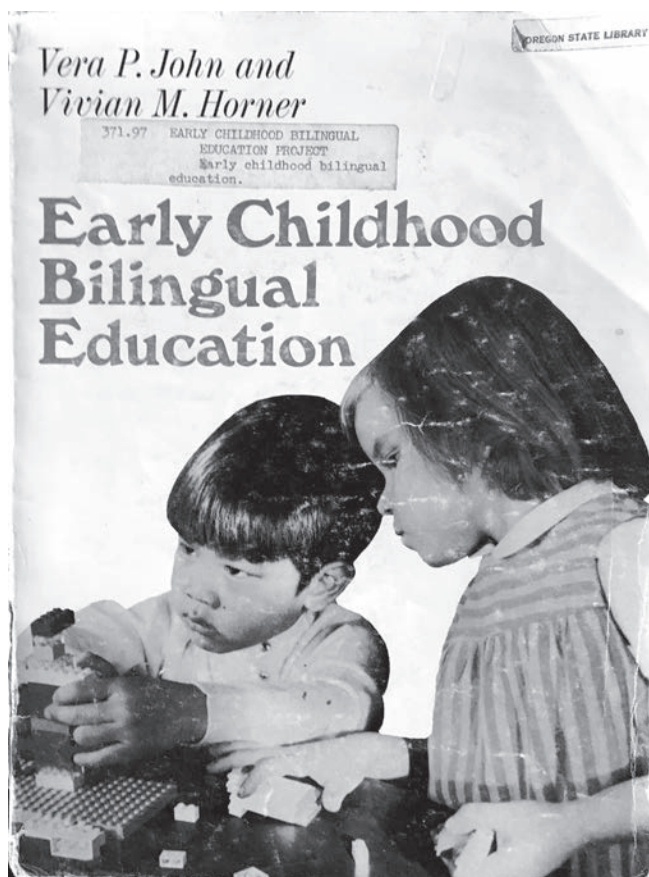
*Let's spend a minute on your experience on the Navajo reservation. I remember that you had a colleague or friend who was involved with –*

Navajo literacy and bilingual education. She was Navajo. When you travelled to the Navajo,<sup>4</sup> you actually went into the area where an experimental school was established at Rough Rock, mainly supported by the Ford Foundation. It was the first

<sup>2</sup> “Behaviorism” refers to the outlook associated with Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936), John Watson (1878-1958) and others. (It was notoriously taken to reactionary extremes by B.F. Skinner [1904-1990].) It focuses on stimulus-response behaviors that can be observed and measured, rather than mental or psychological states or processes.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Luria (1902-1977) was a widely influential Soviet brain research scientist. He was a founder of “cultural-historical psychology” and worked closely with Lev Vygotsky before the latter's death in 1934.

<sup>4</sup> The Navajo (Diné) reservation is often known locally just as “the Navajo.”



school where they were not just using Navajo as a “transition language,” but had bilingual education eventually into high school. My friend’s name was Anita Pfeiffer. Her husband, Kim Pfeiffer, was Anglo, but he learned Navajo, so in the family they spoke Navajo. You met them.

*We’re going to get to Vygotsky in a couple of minutes. Marjorie [of CSEW] is very involved in related issues in Oaxaca. We sponsored a very interesting forum with two leaders of indigenous educators in Oaxaca recently at Hunter College. I think you told me at some point that there was also some intersection with the question of the Roma or “cigány” people in Hungary.*

Right, but that was a little later. By that time I had spent some time on the Navajo. But I knew another student of language acquisition who happened to come from a Hungarian family, and she knew a linguist in Hungary who was a specialist in Roma. But I didn’t get to Hungary until the ’70s.

*Because you couldn’t travel.<sup>5</sup>*

Right.

*So, when you were working with Head Start on the Navajo reservation in 1964, what did that involve?*

We were gathering case studies. The Ford Foundation always knew what was happening in national politics, and they knew that [the Bilingual Education Act] was in the works, but that there was really no information about how bilingualism

<sup>5</sup> Vera was stateless from the 1940s to the late 1970s. She had been repeatedly threatened by the FBI with deportation, and with being denied reentry to the U.S. if she went abroad.

was being implemented in the country before there was a general program and programmatic developments.

So Vivian Horner, whom I met at Rochester, and I got this grant. It was not limited to Native Americans; most of the programs that we looked at were in Spanish-speaking communities and were supported by churches and private agencies. Interestingly enough, Texas – because of German schools there in the 19th century – was particularly open to starting bilingual schools.

*I wonder if any of the “Red ’48ers” that became part of the Union army had been involved in those schools in Texas; that would be interesting to pursue.*

## Vygotsky and Marxist Concepts

*Can you explain a little about your early work on Vygotsky and how that developed?*

Well, my dissertation was written in the ’50s, and at that time there was only one neobehaviorist, Charles Osgood, who even dealt with human cognitive functions. He did not deal with language.

I already had this interest in the relationship between cognition and language, but I had to phrase it in language that was acceptable to the behaviorists, so I titled it “The Role of Verbalization in Problem-Solving.” There were very concrete terms that could be defined and operationalized.

I took some tasks that had been used in problem-solving literature that went back to the Gestalt people, who were German psychologists in the ’20s.<sup>6</sup> One was an anagram task; one was coded addition so rather than saying “seven,” the problem was given as “red: seven, yellow: three” or whatever. It was long addition and the person had to do it with the coded language and then bring it back to numbers.

One of the things that we found was that some people, as soon as they heard a “number word,” they immediately visualized the number and they had an easier time with the task. So again, it showed the role of language in a cognitive task.

Then I did anagrams, and people who were verbally very fluent had an easier time. So the dissertation was a road to exploring more fully the relationship between language [and cognition]. I found that people differed in the way in which they represented some of these problems: some people more visually and some in a more auditory way. You were a very important stimulus since you were so auditory, because of your visual challenges.

*And then you started to read things by Vygotsky?*

Well, there was only one book available at that time, the *Thought and Language* book, which later was reedited and

<sup>6</sup> Participants in the German Revolution of 1848, thousands of whom emigrated to the United States after the uprisings and subsequent military engagements were defeated by the Prussian military. Many Red ’48ers settled in Texas, where they opposed slavery and secession in the U.S. Civil War. A number of ’48ers became leading officers in the Union army.

<sup>7</sup> “Gestalt psychology” (from the German for shape, form, or, by extension, configuration) is a school of psychology originating in Austria and Germany. Opposing what they saw as a tendency to fragment the study of the human mind and behavior, its founders Max Wertheimer (1880-1943), Wolfgang Köhler (1887-1967) and Kurt Koffka (1886-1941) sought to approach them as a whole or totality.

republished. People now refer to it as “Thinking and Speaking,” because they really are processes, not essences.

*How is that related to Marxist concepts?*

[Laughs.] Oh, it was clearly related to Marxist concepts, because it showed that what we learn about society ourselves and so on, we learn it in movement, not in static forms. That was a very obvious but long ignored realization. It’s again Whorfian: if you use a static word, that influences your conception of the phenomenon. So if you use a more dynamic word, you are more likely to look for the dynamic elements.

*Then this is a specific example of dialectical rather than static ways of thinking?*

Right.

*Can you tell me a little about how your own engagement with Vygotsky developed and how it was expressed in your own research and your own work?*

My earlier research was with children. I had a job which was a precursor of national Head Start – at NYU, actually – and we were confronted with all the racist interpretations of achievement differences between white and black children. And because the prevalent belief was that this was genetic, it ignored the social context. Martin Deutsch – a complicated person, who established the Institute of Developmental Studies at NYU – first of all talked about the nutritional differences between white and black kids. I compared working-class and middle-class black children in my work.

That’s where Vygotsky first entered, with his strong emphasis on the social aspects of acquiring language and acquiring concepts. So rather than being stuck in the genetic model, first of all I moved away from black and white and focused on class; and Vivian Horner did a very interesting study where we attached small recorders on mothers and children in their homes and found that just the way in which a morning took place in a single female-headed home where she started to get to work and tried to feed the children – that even in that [situation], the amount of knowledge-related exchanges was much higher than anybody who saw those children in school would have guessed.

So Vygotsky provided us with a very strong emphasis on really documenting the nature of the environment, not just using indicators, like income, but looking at how significant the social and verbal interaction was in developing the children’s capabilities. Even your experience with your dog in that little program that we had in a high-rise housing in the ghetto showed that the children were a lot more verbal when they had a concrete topic that was interesting to them. If I had looked at the number of questions that they asked you about your dog, in comparison to the number of questions they asked me about what are we going to do today, there was no comparison.

### **“Lived Experience” and “Zone of Proximal Development”**

There’s a Vygotskian word we didn’t use in the early stages: *perezhivanie*, lived experience. That lived experience is crucial to engaging children in learning, in contrast with canned experience, and he differentiates between spontaneous and theoretical concepts.



Internationalist photo

### **Emphasizing a point.**

Theoretical concepts are usually introduced in a formal manner in school. Spontaneous experiences are inductively built. And what he argues is that unless there is a rich opportunity to develop spontaneous concepts, like eating for all living organisms, you can’t introduce nutrition on a theoretical level – but that the two get woven together. And that’s another dialectical concept.

This notion of spontaneous and theoretical concepts is very important in education, and it’s still not fully developed. It breaks down the dichotomy between progressive education and more traditional education, because it shows that each of them has been based on some experience with learning, but that by creating the opposition between them, they lose the productive interaction between them – because theoretical concepts are systematized and therefore, in that systematic introduction, they cover much larger areas of knowledge, while spontaneous concepts are tangible, accessible and are connected to personal experiences.

*What does “spontaneous concepts” mean?*

It means that you generalize from more than one example of the concept “dog” and you combine the features that are particularly important, so they can’t survive without the assistance of the theoretical concepts, but they give specificity and richness to the concept.

*So when you say, in this example, “the theoretical concept,” you mean an abstraction. Like the abstraction “dog.”*

Right. But when you use the word “dog,” rather than the name of a particular dog, you already are on the way of [to] that generalization. Every word, in a way, except proper names, is necessarily a simple generalization.

*Can you relate what you were just discussing to a couple of the key concepts of Vygotsky, like the idea that all learning is social, on the one hand –*

Right.

*... and then this term, “the zone of proximal development”?*

OK. On the zone of proximal development – later there’s a question about Piaget.<sup>8</sup> What was dominant in the rebellion against behaviorism was Piaget’s psychological work that was based on the child’s exploration of nature without any interaction with other people. You learn by doing. It was Piaget’s version of that. And ZPD [zone of proximal development] stands for: You learn with the help of a more experienced other – whether it’s a classmate who’s particularly good in an area, or an adult parent or teacher – with the support of that other, so what you can do with the help of an “other” today, you can internalize and do more and more on your own. But it’s not just a two-step thing.

What you have internalized, then you externalize in your future interactions with others, so it’s a constant movement between close experience with a more knowledgeable other – that’s why apprenticeships were so crucial, because you can watch as well as hear – and that has been missing from mass education for a very long time... So when you watch and hear, you take it in and you connect it with your previous experience. And then, in that transformed manner, then you express it in play, in schoolwork, in interaction with your friends.

So you take and you give. You take and you give. And I see it as a dialectical process.

*In terms of what you were just discussing, what about the concept sometimes referred to as scaffolding?*

Well, Vygotskyans complain, because “scaffolding” is close, but it is again a little bit too mechanical, as if it’s just that you provide the support and then you dismantle it; and it does not include human agency. In ZPD we are very interested in human agency.

*In terms of Vygotsky’s own activity and the environment in which he was working, what can you tell us about the impact in early Soviet education? And was there any role, in Vygotsky’s thinking, of the concept of the labor school?*

I have never come across anything about labor school in his writings. His impact was manifold. He was an excellent diagnostician, so people brought children with various difficulties to him, and he would do kind of a clinical assessment that later on became institutionalized in many countries. He had that in common with Piaget.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Piaget (1896-1980): Swiss psychologist regarded as a pioneering theorist of child development.

They both were very good at it, whether it was a child who had difficulty in acquiring language because of a minor hearing loss, or more serious neurological problems. He went to medical school for a while and knew quite a bit about the brain, and then his collaboration with Luria was very helpful. So, one, he did diagnosis; two, he was very interested in work with children who had aphasia,<sup>9</sup> or were blind...

There’s a whole famous school that’s based on his theories that the brain consists of functional systems and that when one system is injured, other systems take over in compensatory ways. So that idea had some impact on schools. Interestingly enough, explicitly Vygotskian schools were not established until his granddaughter, 20 or 30 years ago, established the Golden Key schools, which made more explicit the implications of his theories and based a curriculum on them.

He also was involved in the social efforts of the orphan children being gotten off the streets. I don’t know how closely he worked with Krupskaya but I think that there was some contact between them.

## Vygotsky and the Russian Revolution

*Do you think that Vygotsky’s activity was part of the general cultural, artistic and intellectual flowering of the early years of the Russian Revolution?*

Oh yes, very much so. When he was a teacher, in the town in which he was born,<sup>10</sup> he taught drama, he wrote drama criticisms; his first thesis was on *Hamlet*. So he was a very literary person. He

<sup>9</sup> Aphasia is a loss of ability to speak or understand speech, resulting from brain damage.

<sup>10</sup> Lev Vygotsky was born in 1896 in the town of Orsha, in a part of the tsarist empire that is now Belarus. He died of tuberculosis in Moscow in 1934.



Early Soviet posters promoting literacy among women. (Left) “Woman! Learn to read!” at the top and, at the bottom, “Mother, if only you knew how to read, you could help me!” (Right) “If you don’t read books, you’ll forget how.” The woman is holding a Russian edition of John Reed’s *Ten Days That Shook the World*.

was profoundly influenced by Stanislavski<sup>11</sup> and one of his concepts is one that he shared with him. And that is that he talked about meaning in two ways: dictionary meaning and sense. Sense is like subtext in drama – so they had a friendship and they shared a lot of ideas.

When Vygotsky was invited to go to Moscow [in 1924], he was quite young and he made a presentation at a congress, and the impact of that presentation was so great that he was invited, even though his degree was not in psychology. He attended two universities, one where he studied law, because his father wanted him to have a profession; and then there was an independent school where he studied philosophy and psychology and many other things. He was definitely part of that circle, and they had influences on each other. He and his family were very involved in poetry and would recite poetry to each other. The important poets of that period were among the people whom they recited.

*Since 2017 is the centenary of the Russian Revolution, what was Vygotsky's interaction with the Revolution?*

Well, I don't think that he was an active revolutionary in 1917. He became a Marxist during his early 20s, and he was a member of the Party, but he was really an academic; he was not a politician. But he was committed to developing a Marxist psychology, and he thought that that was essential for the creation of the Soviet person.

*Did Vygotsky have some polemics, some arguments, some disagreements with other figures who were trying to do that kind of thing at the time?*

Oh yes. There was already a forerunner of what psychology became in the mid-'30s. Vygotsky was first very close to both Luria and Leontiev.<sup>12</sup> Leontiev then established a different school away from Moscow, and there was increasingly tension between the two of them.

*What was the tension about?*

Well, Leontiev considered Vygotsky too ... "cosmopolitan." They hadn't used that word yet, but Vygotsky was very good at going through Piaget's psychology, for instance, and taking concepts and reformulating them into his own system.

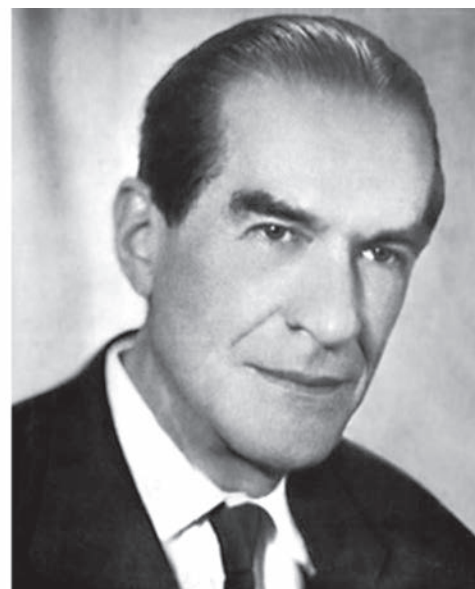
Leontiev was much more narrow and focused primarily on the concept of activity – and that difference is still alive and kicking today. But Luria was more complementary to Vygotsky. He had his own identity, but he went into neurology.

<sup>11</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938) was a Russian theater actor and producer who formulated the "Stanislavski method" for training actors.

<sup>12</sup> Alexei Leontiev (1903-1979) was a Soviet developmental psychologist, who worked with Vygotsky and Luria, becoming famous as the founder of "activity theory."



**Alexander Luria**



**Alexei Leontiev**

*What about Pavel Blonsky?<sup>13</sup>*

Blonsky was even more abstract than Vygotsky. Vygotsky did a lot of actual work with children. That's all I know about [Blonsky].

*I have a question written here that I'm just going to read. It says, "Vygotsky criticized those that wanted to create a Marxist psychology by just stringing together quotations from Marx without understanding his methodology. He also wrote a 1930 essay on 'the socialist alteration of man.'" So what can you tell us about that?*

The latter I read only once, and I was not very excited about it. It didn't have his depth of thinking, but I read a lot about his complaining that many of his more careerist colleagues just used quotes from Marx and Engels and Lenin.

*More careerist colleagues?*

Yes.

*Around when was that?*

I think it was in the early '30s. He really believed that Marxist thinking required a developmental and a historical dialectical method. And he took all those three things very seriously. In his work on unification of things that were polarized, he worked hard on developing a dialectical approach. In his interest in the development of consciousness, he paid close attention to historical conditions, though he was not a sophisticated historian – he was much more sophisticated in literature than in history. He was multilingual himself, and read in English and French and German.

When it came to child psychology, he was very interested in the first sign functions, like pointing, which needed an interpretation from a more experienced other – because it could have been just a random movement. So he thought that before you could even get to the word, you had to look at sign functions. It was a very developmental process that he looked at.

<sup>13</sup> Pavel Blonsky (1884-1941) was a Soviet psychologist and educational theorist.

## Why Vygotsky's Work Was Suppressed Under Stalin

*Regarding some of the other people in the Soviet Union who said that they were trying to develop a Marxist psychology, did Vygotsky see them as mechanistic?*

Some, yes – right. But he had a group of people around him, about eight people, three of them women, with whom he shared all his thinking, and it was very collective, travelling a lot and providing lectures and demonstrations in many places in the Soviet Union. He had this one thing that [Roza] Levina, one of his co-workers, worked very hard on: “private speech.” Other people around him kind of took up part of the total fabric and worked more deeply.

*Wasn't there a school of thought that gave a great emphasis to Pavlov?*<sup>14</sup>

Yes. Actually, quite a number of the institutionally leading figures did. They thought Vygotsky was verging on being an idealist, and they thought that Pavlov was the only scientifically based psychologist.

*And was also Russian.*

Right. [Laughs.] Institutionally leading people like heads of psychology departments, institutes, etc. So it really required very sustained, not particularly supported effort for Vygotsky to develop all the work that he developed. He was 38 when he died, and he had over a hundred publications. He was very, very hard-working, while fighting TB.

*What happened to Vygotsky in terms of the reception of his work in the Soviet Union? What happened with him?*

He had a position at the Institute of Psychological Research at Moscow University. And he also had a position in an institute that specialized in what we would call special ed now, “defectology” – we don't like that word anymore, but that was the word that was used. So he had minimum salaries, but he did teach, and his lectures have been published in his Collected Works.

*What happened later to him?*

Well, the people who worked with him smuggled his writings out, actually, in their clothes, from the institutes as the campaign against him started.

*What was that campaign against him? The people who read this interview won't necessarily know that.*

Yes. He was denounced as a “cosmopolitan.” The word



**Vygotsky teaching in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 1929.**

“Jew” was never mentioned, there were no anti-Semitic attacks. But the fact that he had correspondence, and some people actually even visited him from the West was the basis of accusations, but it never became a trial or anything like that, because he was dying. The campaign against him, against his writings, became more intense. He died in 1934 and the campaign reached its height in '36.<sup>15</sup>

*Were his writings actually suppressed?*

Yes. That's why people had to smuggle them out and keep them in safe places. [Around] '56, Luria was able to reintroduce him into Soviet academic life and republish one of his books. And then it grew and grew and grew.

*So this occurring in 1956 must, then, have had an association with Khrushchev's campaign that came to be called de-Stalinization? It became possible to publish a book by Vygotsky.*

Yes, right... You know that I had a correspondence with Luria?

*No, I didn't remember that. I'm pretty sure I met him in the airport, at JFK. I just remember a very imposing figure with white hair.*

Vygotsky's work continued to be published in journals. The last one in Russian was in 1935. You can see, just by looking at his publication list in the book *Mind in Society*, which has been translated into, I think, twenty languages.

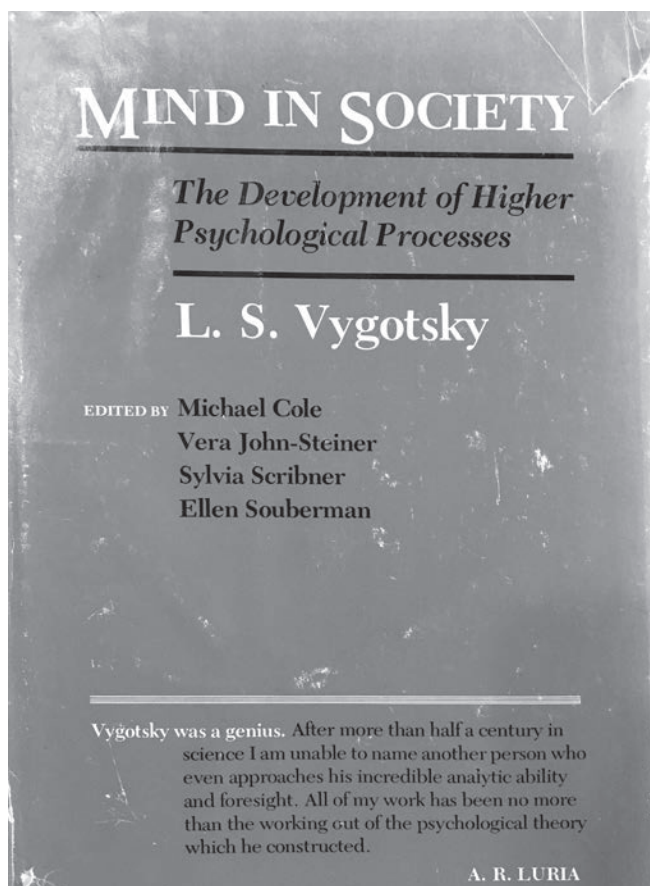
*It's a book that you co-edited.*

Right.

*Regarding the fate of Vygotsky's work and the campaign against him that accelerated posthumously – historically this is clearly associated with Stalinism.*

<sup>14</sup> Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936) was a Russian physiologist known for his work on conditioning.

<sup>15</sup> The year 1936 marked a peak in Stalinist repression in the USSR, including the first of the infamous Moscow Trials.



Right.

Why?

Well, I think he presented a vision of the direction of the country that was really in stark opposition of [to] the bureaucratic and very rigid institutions affecting education and children. As I think some of the best Marxists are, he was a humanist, as well as a Marxist; or he was a Marxist humanist. There was a sideline, pedology,<sup>16</sup> that I know very little about, but that made some of these notions more explicit.

I think that, as with many of the really outstanding intellectuals at that time, their conception of where the Soviet Union should go, and what kind of society it should be, they put it into practice. As his family said, this is a man that it was not a problem to decide what to bury him in, because he only had one suit. He lived very, very modestly, and worked all the time. He was a model of a human being in that, not only in his ideas of fighting mechanistic Marxism – which he really, really did – but he was also a figure around which opposition could have collected.

*One of the [written] questions refers to some of this as “significant differences between Vygotsky’s methods or his approach and the kind of vulgar Marxism that was being promoted by Stalinism.”*

Right.

*Is that accurate?*

<sup>16</sup> Pedology is the scientific study of “the nature and development of children.”

Yes. I think before Leontiev, they used Pavlov in a mechanistic way, and then they used Leontiev. And Leontiev didn’t do historical, cultural – he just was interested in activity that had a goal: actions and not much cultural context. And it was trying to use a factory model of production and not looking more deeply into the more full development of human beings.

*And at one point, in terms of language and language acquisition, Stalin himself was proclaimed to be a great theorist of linguistics, right?*

Right, which was pretty ridiculous.

TO BE CONTINUED

## Lillian Pollak (1915-2016)

Lillian Pollak, a radical educator and activist who knew Trotsky and fought the United Federation of Teachers’ support to the Vietnam War, died on August 10, 2016 at the age of 101. Her life and struggles in the labor and socialist movements were the subject of a lively interview that Class Struggle Education Workers activists carried out with Lillian in her Manhattan apartment and published in the predecessor of *Marxism and Education*. (See “Radical Teacher Remembers Picket Lines, Trotsky, and a ‘Confrontation’ over Vietnam,” *Class Struggle Education Workers Newsletter* No. 3, April-May 2012.)

Some of the interview’s topics overlapped with the autobiographical novel that Lillian published in 2008, titled *The Sweetest Dream: Love, Lies & Assassination (A Novel of the Thirties)*. As we wrote, the novel is “based on her experiences as a young revolutionary who joined the Young Communist League during the Great Depression,” but, “repelled by the way Stalin and his followers were trampling communist ideals,” joins the youth wing of the Trotskyist movement, and later the Socialist Workers Party, at that time the U.S. section of Trotsky’s Fourth International. In the interview, as well as the book, she described the visit she and another young American Trotskyist made to Trotsky in Coyoacán, Mexico. In the interview she also described how “one of my closest friends,” Sylvia Ageloff, was tragically ensnared by Ramón Mercader, the agent of Stalin assigned to carry out the assassination of Trotsky.

A teacher since the 1950s and a member of the UFT since its foundation in 1960, Lillian regaled us with stories about being the only picketer from her school in the “illegal” strike of November 1960 that won the right of collective bargaining. Her pioneering role in the union led to her being made a member of the UFT Executive Board – on the bureaucracy’s Unity Caucus slate – but soon enough the union leadership under Albert Shanker “got an earful of the fact that I was a Trotskyist, so I was kind of eased off the board.”

The interview goes into the close relations between Shanker and Max Shachtman, the anti-communist renegade

*continued on page 45*

# NYC Schools Must Be a Sanctuary for Immigrant and All Students

## Keep I.C.E. Cops Out of Our Schools

**By Class Struggle Education Workers/UFT**

*The following article was issued as a leaflet in February 2017.*

The day after last November's elections, a wave of fear swept through the schools over the threat to undocumented immigrants. "Will I be deported?" students asked teachers. School administrations and teachers unions issued statements of support. But much more is needed. We need to prepare now to defend our students and actively resist the threat of deportations with action.

Class Struggle Education Workers have demanded that the NYC Department of Education refuse to hand over to federal authorities any information on students' immigration status, and that they delete any such information as may exist. We demand that ICE police and immigration authorities not be allowed on school premises under any circumstances, period. We call on the UFT and other NYC unions to mobilize mass labor/immigrant action to stop deportations.

Now there are important initiatives to build school-wide committees. Pathways to Graduation, in District 79 has formed a school-wide committee to defend immigrant rights and support our students. P2G is a multi-site program across the five boroughs, servicing students working toward their TASC high school equivalency diploma, and increasing literacy skills in English and bilingual programs. P2G has students from 36 different countries. 31 percent of P2G students are English Language Learners. 44 percent of the students were born outside the U.S., and 51 percent of the students speak a language other than English at home.

The UFT P2G Immigrant Students Support Committee can serve to encourage similar efforts in other schools, and will seek to join with initiatives in other unions. DC 37 Local 768 health care workers in city hospitals have likewise a committee to defend the rights of immigrant patients, families and staff. Faced with directives to reduce the numbers of undocumented immigrants in their facilities by 40%, they have declared that they will continue to serve all those in need and will oppose



Internationalist photo

**CSEW at rally outside Panel for Education Policy, 28 February 2017.**

any attempt to use immigration status against them.

At Hunter College, part of the City University of New York, a Committee to Defend Immigrants and Muslims has been formed at the initiative of the CUNY Internationalist Clubs.

Our perspective is to link teachers, parents, students and all school workers, including counselors, paras, school aides, bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria workers and support staff, with the power of the labor movement to STOP DEPORTATIONS. Rapid response networks are needed in schools and neighborhoods. If students or their families are picked up by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) police, we must be prepared to flood the streets and shut down the schools.

We look not to the administrators but call for worker/immigrant action against the bipartisan capitalist attack on our students and their parents. The deportation of more than 5 million immigrants by the Democratic Obama administration built up the machinery that the Republican Trump is now wielding against our sister and brother workers from around the world. The CSEW calls to break with the partner parties of capital and to build a class-struggle workers party that will champion the cause of all the oppressed. ■

# NYC Schools Must Be A Sanctuary For Immigrant and All Students

*The following resolution was put forward by Marjorie Stamberg, delegate, D-79, Class Struggle Education Workers, at the December 2016 UFT delegate assembly.*

The day after last November's elections, a wave of fear swept through the schools over the threat to undocumented immigrants. "Will I be deported?" students asked teachers. School administrations and teachers unions issued statements of support. But much more is needed. We need to prepare now to defend our students and actively resist the threat of deportations with action. The following resolution was raised at the December UFT Delegates Assembly. While the Unity Caucus voted it down, we urge teachers everywhere to take the initiative to form school-based committees to defend immigrant and all students.

-----  
Whereas, in his election campaign, Donald Trump vowed to deport all 11 million undocumented immigrants, after the Obama administration already deported more than 5.5 million immigrants in its first seven years, and

Whereas, in the wake of the election there has been an unprecedented upsurge in racist attacks of all sorts, including at universities and in schools, as well as taunting of immigrant students in New York City schools, and

Whereas, Muslims, African Americans, Latinos and immigrants from Mexico, Central America and the Near East have been singled for attacks, which also threaten Jewish, gay and lesbian individuals and communities, and

Whereas, immigrant communities have been swept by fear of deportation and all manner of victimization, and

Whereas, putative president-elect Trump has threatened to cut off funds to "sanctuary cities" that refuse to cooperate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) police, while majorities in both houses of Congress have threatened to cut off funding to "sanctuary campuses," and

Whereas, under the Constitution of the State of New York (Article XI), all children must be provided free public schools and the Supreme Court has ruled that education cannot be denied to students on the basis of immigration status, and

Whereas, 40% of the population of the City of New York are immigrants, and

Whereas, under local laws and executive orders (Nos. 34 and 41) New York City employees, including police, have long been instructed not to provide information on individuals' status to I.C.E. and other immigration authorities except in limited circumstances, and

Whereas, Chancellor's Regulation A-101 states that students are not required to present documentation of immigration

status, and that reference to such status shall not appear on any school records, and

Whereas, Mayor de Blasio has stated that the City of New York will not participate in deportation proceedings and would not hand over information on immigration status from the municipal ID cards to federal authorities, but

Whereas, a judicial injunction has been issued to prevent NYC from destroying information on immigration status from municipal data bases, therefore be it

Resolved, that working people, immigrants and all oppressed sectors can only rely on our own strength; and be it further

Resolved, that our union **issue a statement that we will stand by our immigrant students, faculty and staff**, as well as their families, who are at risk of reprisal due to their status; and be it further

Resolved, that the UFT **call on the NYC Department of Education to publicly restate that it does not collect information on students' immigration status**, and that it will **refuse to hand over to federal authorities and will immediately delete any such information** that may exist in school records; and be it further

Resolved, that **ICE police and immigration authorities will not be allowed on school premises under any circumstances**, and be it further

Resolved, that the United Federation of Teachers will seek to mobilize **mass labor-immigrant action to defend those threatened and to stop deportations** and call on other unions and all opponents of racism and defenders of democratic, minority and immigrants rights to do likewise; and be it further

Resolved, that a **representative union-wide committee** be set up to **monitor all threats and indications of action by immigration authorities** against members of our community; and be it further

Resolved, that the union take the initiative **to set up committees in every school including faculty, staff and parents, to establish phone trees, social media networks and other measures for rapid response** and outreach; and be it further

Resolved, that **if immigration authorities detain any NYC school students or their families** for deportation proceedings, such **school-based committees should immediately call an ongoing assembly**, including teachers, students, staff and parents, to **shut down the affected school**, and other schools in solidarity, and that the **UFT shall mobilize mass action citywide in support of such protest action.** ■

# Betsy DeVos: Trump's Voucher Vulture

By Class Struggle Education Workers/UFT

*The following article was published as a CSEW leaflet on 11 January 2017.*

Who is Betsy DeVos? Trump's pick for Education Secretary is an extremely wealthy former head of the Republican party in Michigan who is a zealot of vouchers and privately run, publicly financed charter schools. Her goal is to abolish public education outright.

She is married to Dick DeVos, heir to the family fortune derived from the totalitarian Amway Corporation. Amway (for the American Way) is a giant Ponzi scheme which uses its sales force as a private political-religious army and funds far-right groups, making the Koch brothers look like bleeding-heart liberals.

Betsy is from another wealthy Michigan family, the Princes, whose money came from their auto parts corporation. Her brother, Erik Prince, is the founder of Blackwater, the mercenary killer-elite "contractors" notorious for gunning down Iraqi civilians with reckless abandon. Along with extreme right-wing ideology, Betsy and Erik both seek to finance privatization schemes with public money.

DeVos bases her philosophy on Milton Friedman, the apostle of "free market" capitalism, who declared: "Vouchers are not an end in themselves; they are a means to make a transition from a government to a market system." Friedman was an advisor to Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet and first implemented his education policies under that bloody regime.

Hearings start next week on Trump's Ed Sec nominee. Confirmation is guaranteed. With Republicans in control of the Senate, the House of Representatives and the White House, the Betsy DeVos agenda will soon determine national educational policy.

Betsy DeVos was central to the near-destruction of public education in Detroit. The schools were taken over by the state and starved of money so that their physical condition was marked by broken windows, rats everywhere. They treated the schools like landlords trying to drive out tenants. Then they were massively taken over by for-profit charters, and have sunk into chaos.

DeVos also played a key role in pushing through a union-busting "right-to-work" law.

Donald Trump's voucher vulture DeVos represents a mortal threat to teachers unions and to public education overall. The leadership of the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association know this. But like a deer staring at the headlights of an onrushing car, they are paralyzed.

The politics of the AFT and NEA tops, like almost all union leaders in the U.S., are summed up in the phrase *class collaboration*. They chain the unions to the parties of capital, particularly the Democrats. But like the tango, it takes two to class-collaborate, and the Trump Republicans aren't interested in that dance.

What it will take to defeat DeVos, Trump and the rest of the privatizers and union-busters is hard *class struggle*. Last month United Federation of Teachers president Mulgrew predicted that in 2017 "it's going to be war." He got that right. In recent editorials Mulgrew warned that NYC schools stand



Drew Angerer/Getty Images

**Donald Trump and Betsy DeVos have declared war on public education.**

to lose half a billion dollars in Title I federal funds which the Republicans have their eye on to finance vouchers.

But it's not just the Republicans. "Democrats for Education Reform," is a powerful lobby bankrolled by Wall Street financiers. Hillary Clinton has been closely tied to the corporate education "reformers" since she was on the board of the anti-union Walmart corporation in Arkansas. And Barack Obama's administration has used billions in federal money to push charters, standardized testing and punitive teacher "evaluations."

All in all, Betsy DeVos is a fitting successor to the Democratic charterizers, from Obama's basketball pal Arnie Duncan to John King. And don't forget Obama's former chief of staff Rahm Emanuel, who got to be mayor of Chicago by bashing the teachers union and has kept it up ever since. The difference is that while the Clinton/Obama Democrats want to undermine public education from within with corporatizing "reforms," the Trump Republicans want to tear it down altogether.

Efforts to outright privatize the public schools have repeatedly failed, from the Edison Schools (which went bankrupt) to DeVos's campaign from Michigan to Pennsylvania and Indiana using their millions to promote vouchers by hook or crook. But we have to defeat *all* the schemes to milk public schools for private profit, which threaten our children's education and working people everywhere.

Corporatizing and privatizing "education reform" is backed by both parties of capital. To defeat the bipartisan *capitalist* assault on public education we need to take the schools out of the hands of Republican and Democratic politicians. Class Struggle Education Workers fights for teacher-student-parent-worker control of the schools. To accomplish this we need to oust the labor bureaucrats, who have sold out hard-won union gains, and break with the Democrats to build a class-struggle workers party. ■

# Unions Protest I.C.E. Cops in the Courts

*The following article is updated from a 10 December 2017 posting on the CSEW website.*

Being an undocumented immigrant became even more dangerous since Donald Trump took office; now they are being hunted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) agents even at the so-called “sensitive areas,” like schools, places of worship, hospitals ... and courts.

Across the country, I.C.E. snatch squads have been staking out courthouses aiming to kidnap undocumented immigrants who show up there on unrelated matters. According to the Immigrant Defense Project, arrests in courts in New York State are up 900% since January, going from 11 in all of 2016 to 110 by late November. Now this sinister secret police operation is being met with public protest.

On November 14, Ishmael García Velásquez showed up in Brooklyn Criminal Court, as he had on seven previous occasions, for a hearing on misdemeanor charges. When the hearing was once again adjourned, I.C.E. agents grabbed García Velásquez, dragged him into a private elevator and with the aid of court officers whisked him out of the building. His lawyer, Rebecca Kavanagh, said her client had no record and no previous removal record and was only there because he was insisting on his innocence. The lawyer was able to tweet a picture of the arrest to warn others, but two more were arrested in court that same day (*Village Voice*, 16 November).

Two weeks later, on November 28, Genaro Rojas Hernández was in court on charges of violating a restraining order. After Kavanagh was appointed as his attorney by the court, a judge asked them to step into the hallway where Rojas was pounced on and arrested by I.C.E. agents, who shoved his lawyer out of the way. This time, incensed public defenders with the Legal Aid Society stormed out of the courthouse and organized a picket line of up to 100 attorneys and supporters outside the building. Impromptu signs demanded “ICE Out” and “ICE, Go Back to Where You Came From” (*Village Voice* and *New York Post*, 28 November).



**Protest outside Brooklyn Borough Hall, 7 December 2017, against I.C.E. police arresting immigrants in and around the courts.**

Fed up with the sinister actions of the I.C.E. cops who are scaring immigrants away from the courts, the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys (ALAA), which is United Auto Workers Local 2325, called a protest on the steps of Brooklyn Borough Hall on December 7. Scores of immigrant rights, legal and religious groups and leftist and community activists joined the sizeable crowd of some 200 people.

Supporters of Class Struggle Education Workers, Revolutionary Internationalist Youth and the Internationalist Group came with signs calling for “Workers Action to Stop Deportations,” “I.C.E. Jails Out of NYC” and “Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants.” Also present were supporters of the Democratic Socialists of America and Refuse Fascism.

Luis Mancheno, from the Bronx Defenders told the crowd, “I.C.E. agents lurk in the halls of justice to snatch immigrants away from their right to have their day in court.... Mothers are afraid of fighting for the custody of their children.” Amanda Jack from the Brooklyn Defenders denounced I.C.E. for “terrorizing the courts” (RT, 7 December).

The immigration cops continue to infest the courts. On February 28, Homeland Security police in plain clothes arrested Aboubacar Dembele, 27, outside a Bronx courthouse. Dembele, who was brought to the U.S. at the age of 3, is married to a U.S. citizen. In response to the arrest, hundreds of attorneys from the Bronx Defenders and the Legal Aid Society held an emergency protest outside the court. Aboubacar is now being held at the Hudson County Correctional Facility in Kearny, N.J. Member of the RIY and the Hunter College Committee to Defend Immigrants and Muslims have been attending his



**CSEW and Internationalists at protest by Legal Aid attorneys.**

*continued on page 48*

# CUNY-Wide Conference in Defense of Immigrants Held at Grad Center

By CUNY Internationalist Clubs

*The following article is reprinted from The Advocate (Spring 2018), published by the Doctoral Students' Council at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.*

On March 3, eighty CUNY students, faculty and staff members, came together with immigrant rights activists and labor organizers for a conference in defense of immigrants. Attendees participated in intensive discussion and organizing, and the conference included a panel aimed at creating the framework for a university-wide rapid response network against the threat of deportations.

The conference opened with reports on two recent cases of repression against immigrants. The first exemplifies the urgency of the conference: the detainment of Aboubacar Dembele, a prospective Bronx Community College student who was detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) agents on February 8. Dembele's attorney, Monica Dula of the Legal Aid Society, told the conference that plainclothes I.C.E. told Dembele, who has been in the U.S. since the age of 3, they were detaining him because his DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) renewal was rejected after the program was rescinded by Trump. Conference participants made plans to attend Dembele's bond hearing as well as his court appearance on April 15. The second case was that of Juan Esteban Barreto, who was recently detained by I.C.E. in collusion with the New York Police Department.

Greetings from activists at Latin America's largest public university were read to the conference in Spanish and in English translation. The message, from the Internationalist Committee at the National University of Mexico (UNAM), connected the defense of immigrants on both sides of the border to the fight against capitalist repression, as in the case of the 43 "disappeared" students from the Ayotzinapa rural teachers' college. (See facing page.)

The first conference panel was entitled "DACA and TPS: Where Do We Go From Here?" Among the speakers were Janet Calvo and Matías González, respectively a professor and student at CUNY Law. Their presentations provided detailed information on the present legal situation of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals as well as legal cases in a number of states related to DACA. Kaitlan Russell of the Hunter College Committee to Defend Immigrants and Muslims spoke on DACA as well as the revocation of Temporary Protected Status for Haitians and Salvadorans. She warned against any kind



**A representative of the Hunter Committee to Defend Immigrants and Muslims addressing the conference.**

of reliance on the Democrats, who, under Obama, deported a record number of immigrants and under de Blasio have permitted collusion between the NYPD and I.C.E.

The next panel was "Opposing Islamophobia and the 'Muslim Ban.'" It featured Naz Ahmad, staff attorney from CUNY CLEAR, Debbie Almontaser from the College of Staten Island and Muslim Community Network, and Chaumtoli Huq from Borough of Manhattan Community College and Law@theMargins.

Speakers traced the three versions of the Trump "Muslim bans," noting that these built on a history of anti-Muslim measures long predating the current administration. Panelists also spoke on the revelations of NYPD's spying on Muslim students at several CUNY campuses, as well as other topics. Speakers from the floor noted that when CUNY student Saira Raifee was stranded by the ban in February 2017, protests by students and unionists highlighted her case, helping facilitate her return; and also underlined the significant presence of workers from a number of majority-Muslim countries in several sectors of the NYC working class.

The third panel was "Immigrant Workers' Struggles: Lessons For And At CUNY." It featured Mahoma López of the Laundry Workers Center, and well as three activists from Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas (Class Struggle International Workers). The panelists spoke powerfully about their experiences in the restaurant, garment, taxi and domestic-worker sectors, and their activity in organizing campaigns at the Hot and Crusty bakery, B&H Photo, Liberato Restaurant, and in solidarity with Ayotzinapa. Particular emphasis was given to connecting immigrant rights struggles to a working-class strat-

egy for uprooting women's oppression, which, as one of the TIC speakers stressed, "falls with triple force on immigrant working women." During the discussion, conference participants emphasized the need for CUNY activists to "break with ivory-tower approaches" and connect up with the living struggles of the multinational, largely immigrant working class that makes NYC run.

The final panel was called "Building a CUNY-Wide Network." Marjorie Stamberg, public school teacher, United Federation of Teachers delegate and member of Class Struggle Education Workers, talked about the determination of NYC teachers to stand up against any threats by the immigration police against their students or students' family members. Maeve Campbell, a CUNY Internationalist Club activist who chairs the Committee to Defend Immigrants and Muslims at Hunter College, made the case for building a rapid response network throughout CUNY, and cited recent examples of direct action against deportations from several parts of the U.S., as well as the "Transport Workers Against Deportations" in Los Angeles.

Campbell stated that the tasks of such a network include alerting students, faculty and staff of any I.C.E. presence on or near CUNY campuses, and systematically laying the basis to "mobilize students, faculty and workers" to actually block attempted deportations, and "shut down CUNY schools in response to a deportation or detainment." She emphasized that this is counterposed to illusions of collaboration with the administration, and some headway was made in building this network.

The conference was called by the CUNY Sanctuary Committee, which has been meeting since early 2017 at the Professional Staff Congress union hall. Bringing together student and union activists from across the City University, these meetings have worked towards building a university-wide rapid response network. At the March 3 Grad Center conference, it was noted that a letter sent by the CUNY Sanctuary Committee resulted in Kingsborough Community College officially eliminating restrictions it had applied to undocumented students receiving grants from the College Foundation. This was cited as a small but relevant example of organizing at CUNY to fight all kinds of anti-immigrant measures.

Organizers of the March 3 conference expressed the hope that participants will return to their campuses with redoubled dedication to the ongoing work of organizing in defense of immigrants and the rights of us all. To get involved in these efforts, please write to [committeetodefendimmigrants@gmail.com](mailto:committeetodefendimmigrants@gmail.com). ■

## From the National University of Mexico Greetings to the CUNY-Wide Conference in Defense of Immigrants

(Translation)

March 3, 2018

*Compañeros and compañeras:*

From the largest public university in Latin America, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, we send greetings of solidarity to the conference of City University of New York activists in defense of immigrants.

Of all international news topics, struggles in defense of immigrants in the United States may be the one that receives the most attention here in Mexico. Radio and TV news programs, as well as the daily papers, provide detailed coverage about the anti-immigrant attacks: the horrific raids by the ICE police, the constant provocations and threats issued by President Donald Trump, by his government officials and by anti-immigrant racists who have been emboldened by the new administration. But it is with particular urgency that working-class families follow the struggles to resist these attacks. The connection between working-class families on one side of the border and on the other is very real. The future of those on one side closely depends on the future of those on the other side.

Many of those who migrate from Mexico to the United States come from peasant and indigenous families, who, within NAFTA's framework of imperialist pillage against Mexico, have lost their land or find that it is now impossible for their land to be productive. This vast sector is impoverished by the policies of the Mexican bosses, who offer up the poverty of the Mexican workers on the altar of so-called free trade. That is the sector that our *compañeros* of the Ayotzinapa rural teachers college come from. These are the Ayotzinapa students who were brutally attacked by the police in the state of Guerrero in September 2014, and who to this day remain "disappeared."

The things that you will be discussing today are very important for the workers and poor people of Mexico. It is of vital importance to discuss not only how to resist, but how to defeat the anti-immigrant onslaught that is the product of the North American bourgeois politicians of every kind. As revolutionary Marxists, we know that there is a social power that is able to defeat the attack by the employing class: that is the power of the working class, which makes everything in the capitalist system run, and which can, for that reason, bring it all to a halt. The United States working class is a multiracial and multiethnic giant whose mobilization is the key to defending immigrants and their families. All immigrants must have full citizenship rights!

Mexico is not only an enormous "expeller" of migrants; it is also a country of transit for migrants from different parts of the world seeking to reach the U.S. At the same time that the Mexican government says it will defend besieged Mexican immigrants in the North, it carries out raids against immigrants of other nationalities here. Over the past weeks, the number of Central American, Caribbean and even African immigrants detained and deported by the Mexican "Migra" (immigration police) has multiplied. For many of those who leave their countries and set out on the dangerous train voyage on what is known as "La Bestia" (the Beast), going long distances by foot and always facing the risk of capture by the Migra or criminal bands, it is of vital importance to have full citizenship rights here in this country as well. The defense of immigrants demands the international – and internationalist – mobilization of the workers of Mexico and the United States.

It is with this conviction that we send you revolutionary greetings, hoping to hear from you in return.

UNAM Internationalist Committee

# **“School Choice”: Watchword for Racial and Class Segregation**

# **Free Market Racism:**

# **Segregated Schools,**

# **Gentrified Neighborhoods**

## **For Teacher-Student-Parent-Worker Control of Schools!**

New York schools are the most segregated of any state in the country, bar none.<sup>1</sup> Sixty-four years since *Brown v. Board of Ed* ruled that having separate public schools for black and white children is unconstitutional, the vast majority of NYC’s black and Latino students attend intensely segregated schools. But it’s not just the schools – only one in four New Yorkers live in racially integrated neighborhoods, while wealth disparities in NYC are some of the sharpest in the country.<sup>2</sup> In 2014, the median yearly per capita income for the city’s bottom 50 percent was a little over \$12,000, while the top 0.1 percent made upwards \$5.2 million each, accounting for 24 percent of NYC’s total income.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, gentrification is pushing poor black and Latino residents out of their neighborhoods and into precarious housing situations, as landlords take advantage of white, middle-management yuppies moving into historically black and Latino neighborhoods like Bedford-Stuyvesant (Brooklyn) and East Harlem to drastically raise rents.

For “Tale of Two Cities” Bill De Blasio, the liberal Democrat who was first elected in 2013 promising to fight inequality in education, housing and income, and who was re-elected last year on a “more of the same” platform, not much can be done about school segregation because “we cannot change the basic reality of housing in New York City.” Even his vow to make the elite specialized high schools better reflect the city has gone by the boards. Admission to these schools is determined solely by



Buck Emiss/Crain's New York

**New York City’s Democratic mayor Bill de Blasio (left) yuks it up with real estate mogul William Rudin, at Real Estate Board of NY gala, 22 January 2016.**

an entrance exam that does not measure what is taught in middle school. While African American and Latino students make up two-thirds of the NYC school population, they only account for 10% of the specialized high schools, and only ten (10) black students made it into Stuyvesant High School this year. The mayor hides behind a 1971 state law (which only affects three of the eight elite schools) barring changes to the admissions rules. The reality is that he doesn’t want to tarnish the crown jewels of NYC’s education system, whose alumni are wealthy donors and fiercely defensive of specialized high school elitism.

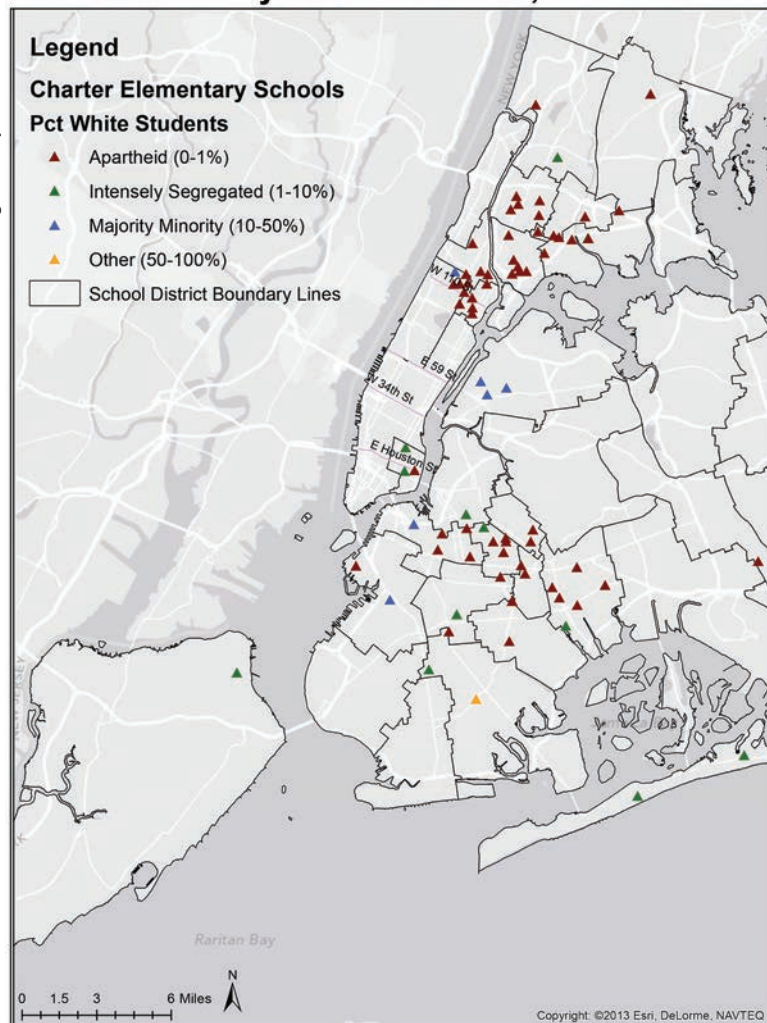
De Blasio’s position reflects his role as a bourgeois politician administering the world center of finance capital. He serves the interests of the ruling class, and in NYC that means Wall Street and the Real Estate Board of New York. The real estate speculators and finance capitalists have the final say-so on what goes on in this city, and they profit immensely from New York’s racial segregation. (Mega-mogul Donald Trump and his father were notorious for “redlining” their housing complexes to keep out black people, and son-in-law Jared Kushner is an actual slumlord.) Without the backing of the real estate industry, De Blasio would never have gotten elected, and his “affordable” housing policies have made them richer,

<sup>1</sup> John Kucsera with Gary Orfield, *New York State’s Extreme School Segregation: Inequality, Inaction and a Damaged Future* (UCLA, The Civil Rights Project, March 2014). Also “New York Schools Have Worst Segregation in the U.S.,” in *Class Struggle Education Workers Newsletter* No. 4, Summer-Fall 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Ingrid Ellen, Maxwell Austensen and J. Yager, “Housing: The Paradox of Inclusion and Segregation in the Nation’s Melting Pot,” in B. Bowser and C. Davedutt, eds., *Racial Inequality in New York City: Looking Backward and Forward* (SUNY Press, forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> “How Has the Distribution of Income in New York City Changed Since 2006?” New York City Independent Budget Office, April 2017.

## Minority Concentration of Charter Elementary Schools in NYC, 2010-2011



Map from UCLA Civil Rights Project study, *New York State's Extreme School Segregation* (2014). The majority of charter schools have 0 to 1% white students, which the study compares to the “blacks only” schools of the racist South African apartheid regime.

subsidizing new residential construction to the tune of \$83 billion. The so-called affordable units in these subsidized buildings are often not in the budget range of lower-income working people, and with preference for neighborhood residents, the result is that segregated housing patterns don't change. But property values go up, and with them, so do taxes on the present minority homeowners, in some cases forcing them out of the neighborhood.

Meanwhile, income inequality between white and non-white households is increasing and the accumulated wealth of African Americans and Latinos is falling sharply. By one analysis, from 1983 to 2013, the wealth of median Black and Latino households fell by 75%, while for whites it rose by 14%.<sup>4</sup> This was exacerbated by the subprime mortgage crisis of 2007-09,

<sup>4</sup> Institute for Policy Studies and Prosperity Now, *The Road to Zero Wealth: How the Racial Wealth Divide Is Hollowing Out America's Middle Class* (September 2017).

when many new black homeowners lost their homes. In fact, if you subtract the value of the family car, the median net worth of a black family is practically non-existent, a mere \$4,000, while for a white family it is 34 times greater, \$140,000.<sup>5</sup> And a whole slew of studies show that the “achievement gap between rich and poor is widening,” dramatically so. Today the average difference in reading test scores between children from high-income families and low-income families is almost twice as big as the gap between black and white children, regardless of income.<sup>6</sup> Thus in the poorest ghetto neighborhoods public schools' racial segregation and class segregation are compounded.

Teachers know what this means for schools. In New York State, 62 percent of levied local property taxes go to funding schools, meaning that wealthy suburban, Long Island and Hudson River Valley communities have far more money to spend on schools. Plus the state's distribution of school aid has systematically shortchanged New York City by billions of dollars a year.<sup>7</sup> NYC schools still receive several thousand dollars less per pupil than neighboring suburban school districts. Within the city there are huge differences between schools in coveted districts and attendance zones in the wealthiest ZIP codes compared to those in impoverished districts like East New York. Families living in Carnegie Hill townhouses on Manhattan's Upper East Side, in posh Upper West Side apartments and Cobble Hill Brooklyn brownstones can raise literally a million dollars a year *per school* through Parent Teacher Associations, and alumni associations at selective schools like Brooklyn Tech raise over \$2 million annually, to fill budget gaps, stock libraries, air condition classrooms, buy Mac computers, etc., further widening disparities.<sup>8</sup>

To make matters worse, the “school choice” regime enthroned by former billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg and his lackey schools chancellor Joel Klein exacerbates school segregation. A recent report from

the Center for New York City Affairs at The New School (*The Paradox of Choice: How School Choice Divides New York City Elementary Schools* [May 2018]) found that this practice keeps zoned schools in rich white areas as-is, while encouraging white parents in gentrified neighborhoods and middle-class African American families in poor areas *not* to send their children to their overwhelmingly black and Latino zoned schools, instead going to charter schools or richer areas. According to the report,

<sup>5</sup> Antonio Moore and Matt Bruenig, “Without the Family Car Black Wealth Barely Exists,” People's Policy Project, 30 September 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Sabrina Tavernise, “Education Gap Grows Between Rich and Poor, Studies Say,” *New York Times*, 10 February 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Judges ruling on the 1994 suit by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity calculated the shortfall at between \$4.7 and \$5.6 billion a year, but the state still refuses to pay up.

<sup>8</sup> “Way Beyond Bake Sales: The \$1 Million PTA,” *New York Times*, 3 June 2012; “PTA Inc.: Wealthy parents are picking up the tab at some New York City schools,” *Daily News*, 16 March 2015.

“free lunch-eligible families were 80 percent less likely to opt out of their zoned schools and English language learners were 73 percent less likely to opt out of their zoned schools.” That means the majority of poor, working-class and immigrant families are sending their children to resource-starved zoned schools, where books are in short supply and classrooms run-down, and where they are being pushed out by well-funded charters.

De Blasio points to the numbers, saying NYC spends the most money of any U.S. city on its students and bragging that graduation rates and test scores are rising. But teachers who have to deal with ballooning class sizes and traumatized students whose lives are fraught with adversity know that these numbers mean precious little. They know how excruciatingly difficult it is for the *almost 100,000 homeless students* – fully 9% of all students, up by one-half in the past six years – to study and learn. In areas of the South Bronx, one in five students is homeless and up to a third of those transfer schools during the school year.<sup>9</sup> Yet in a city that’s home to some of the world’s most predatory finance capitalists, there is no shortage of resources. The problem is the capitalist society which benefits the leeches on Wall Street at the expense of the working masses who make NYC run.

### School Choice and Racist Reaction

From the outset, “school choice” has been a racist reaction to *Brown v. Board of Education*. Barely a year after the landmark 1954 ruling, right-wing economist Milton Friedman – whose free-market policies were later put into practice with brutal effect under the murderous dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in Chile – came up with the idea for school vouchers. To Friedman, it was bad enough the government was paying for education. Now that schools had to be desegregated, it was even worse that government “imposed” integration on white families. He proposed that money the government would normally spend on education be allocated to families as vouchers they could spend on their school of choice. This meant that integration could be avoided, and profit could be made from schools competing to attract white families. The first implementation of school vouchers was in 1956, in Virginia, under the Stanley Plan that set up all-white “segregation academies.”

Resistance to school integration took a more sinister and violent turn in the mid-’70s. In 1971, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled (in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*)

<sup>9</sup> Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness, *On the Map: The Atlas of Student Homelessness in New York City 2017* (August 2017).



**Segregationist mob jeers school buses transporting black children to South Boston in October 1974. Maoists embraced the anti-busing racists. Other leftists joined black Democrats in calling for federal troops to Boston. The Trotskyists called for integrated workers defense guards to defend busing.**

that school segregation could be remedied by busing students from predominantly black neighborhoods to schools in white neighborhoods, and vice versa. When federal courts ordered busing programs in Boston, Massachusetts and Louisville, Kentucky, this led to a racist backlash, with angry white mobs attacking buses filled with black children. At one point a prominent leader of the Ku Klux Klan spoke before a large crowd of whites in the predominantly Irish working-class neighborhood of South Boston (“Southie”). Despite the court order, the fear of violence by marauding racists patrolling the neighborhood was so great that only 10 percent of black students who enrolled in South Boston High attended in 1974. Various bourgeois politicians, Democrat and Republican, black and white, seized on the racist frenzy to call for “community control” of schools – i.e., for re-segregation and busting the teachers union.

At that time, founders of Class Struggle Education Workers were members of the then-Trotskyist Spartacist League (SL), which stood on the program of revolutionary integrationism. We called to defeat the anti-busing terror campaign, noting that busing to integrate the schools, while wholly inadequate, embodied the basic democratic principle of free and equal public education. In contrast, the precursor of the Maoist Revolutionary Communist Party capitulated to the Southie racists and *opposed* “forced busing,” saying it “divided poor and working people.” Other opportunist leftists *supported* calls by black Democrats for federal troops. We called instead for labor/black defense of busing.

Beginning in the late 1980s, court decisions and government policy have undone many of the school integration programs. By 2007, the Supreme Court ruled (in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*), in a split decision, that even voluntary programs cannot order school integration where racial segregation is de facto rather than by law



**At October 1974 Boston Commons rally, Marxists called for labor/black mobilization to defend black children and to extend busing to the suburbs.**

(de jure). Then, under Republican George W. Bush's 2001 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law and continuing under Democrat Barack Obama's 2009 Race to the Top (RTTP) initiative and the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), school choice was enshrined as a goal. Schools labeled as failing were slated for closure, while semi-privatized "charter schools" were aggressively promoted with federal funds and billions from Wall Street investment houses. On top of this, where in the 1960s and '70s white families "fled" to the suburbs, now the white flight has been reversed with gentrification, as more affluent young white professionals from the suburbs move into African American and Latino inner-city neighborhoods.

The combination and interaction of school choice, charterization and gentrification is having a devastating effect on public schools and housing on oppressed communities across the country. It amounts to *educational redlining*. Washington and New Orleans have ceased to be majority black cities and their public school systems have been heavily or almost totally replaced by charters. In NYC, Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant are becoming gentrified, and are prime locations for charters aided by Wall Street vultures such as Eva Moskowitz's Success Academies and Geoffrey Canada's Harlem Children's Zone. The result is to siphon off children from middle-class black families into charter schools, leaving the zoned schools with the poorest and almost exclusively (99% or more) non-white students. In many cases, well-funded charters move into the same buildings as the poverty-stricken public schools, so that the latter are targeted to fail. Meanwhile, a perverse effect of school choice is that gentrifying white parents take advantage of the preference given to students from areas of "failing schools" to enroll their children in elite schools.<sup>10</sup>

In New York City in the new millennium, residential

<sup>10</sup> See "School Choice May Be Accelerating Gentrification," *The Atlantic*, 19 March 2019; and "How Gentrification Is Leaving Public Schools Behind," *U.S. News & World Report*, 20 February 2015.

segregation is as pronounced as ever, and public schools are more segregated than at any time since 1968, both by race and class.<sup>11</sup> The recent *Paradox of Choice* New School report shows that white families are least likely to exercise school choice (29 percent), because by and large they live in majority white areas with high quality zoned schools. But "more than half" of families in gentrified neighborhoods opt out of their zoned schools. This means, the report said, that school choice "provides families of means with exclusive access to the schools they like, while choice allows them to flee the ones they don't."<sup>12</sup> Conversely, black families are most likely to exercise school choice (60 percent), often opting

for charters. And when poor and working-class families do try and exercise choice, they are effectively turned away:

"The Center identified a pattern of 'gate keeping' behavior on the part of the schools, such as school officials who told parents a school was 'not for them,' that the school application required a photo, and that they could not sit by their kids at breakfast drop-off for fear of the parent eating the free food.... They were informed the children would be asked where they slept at night and might receive impromptu visits from social workers to verify this home address. They even had a principle who said 'this is not a free lunch school' on a tour."

## Battle Over School Integration in New York City

Jonathan Kozol in his famous book, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* (HarperCollins, 1991) recounts a conversation with a New York taxi driver from Afghanistan, who gestures toward the street in a run-down neighborhood and tells him, "If you don't ... begin to give these kids the kind education that you give the kids of Donald Trump, you're asking for disaster." Or the children of Barack Obama, who never went to a public school in his life and whose daughters attended the elite Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C. while he was president, and before that went to the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools. In New York, many of the children of the upper petty bourgeoisie attend the eight specialized high schools, which are overwhelmingly white and Asian. Fully 60% of their students come from just 45 middle schools, many of

<sup>11</sup> Gary Orfield, Erica Frankenberg et al., *Brown at 60: Great Progress, a Long Retreat and an Uncertain Future* (Civil Rights Project, 15 May 2014). See also Jonathan Kozol, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* (Three Rivers, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> For example, at P.S. 287 on the northern edge of Downtown Brooklyn, 28% of the children zoned to the school are white, but no white students attend (see "Why Are New York's Schools Segregated? It's Not as Simple as Housing," *New York Times*, 2 May 2018).

them “gifted and talented schools” or with G&T programs. But only 0.2% of students in these elite high schools come from 124 overwhelmingly black and Latino schools. This is educational apartheid with a vengeance *within* the public school system.<sup>13</sup>

*As revolutionary Marxists we fight for free, equal, high quality, secular public education for all.* Despite the screening of applicants for high school (as well as middle schools, grade schools and even kindergarten) by exams and interviews, along with the undermining of public education through charter schools and capitalist opposition to educational equality in general, even so working-class students are determined to get an education. The rationale for school closures and reduced funding relies on low standardized test scores and four-year graduation rates. In 2017, under two-thirds of African American students in New York graduated high school on time. However, *over three-quarters graduated in six years.* Graduation rates for Hispanic students are lower, mainly because many are English Language Learners (ELLs), only 40% of whom graduated in four years and 50% in six years. (A key way charter schools raise graduation rates and test scores is by excluding ELLs and special education students.)<sup>14</sup> This is a key issue for public education in New York City where 40% of the population is foreign-born, over half speak languages other than English at home and 53% of students are from immigrant families.

A key factor behind the attack on public education is raw

<sup>13</sup> New School Center for New York City Affairs, *Urban Matters*, 22 June 2016.

<sup>14</sup> For a lame attempt at justifying this exclusionary policy (but documenting its extent), see Marcus Winters, *Why the Gap? English Language Learners and New York City Schools* (Civic Report No. 93, October 2014),



Internationalist photo

**Internationalist Group and Class Struggle Education Workers protested co-location of Wall Street-backed Success Academy charter school in PS 123 building in Harlem, September 2009.**

racism, as it has been ever since the white backlash to *Brown v. Board of Education* over six decades ago. But not just from Southern white Republicans. From the first battle over charter schools in 2009, Class Struggle Education Workers denounced the “educational colonialism” of the invasion of black Harlem by charter schools, labeling the installation of Success Academy II in the building of PS 123 “educational

apartheid.” We noted how the United Federation of Teachers dodged the fight against charters. The CSEW called to “mobilize the full power of the UFT” together with the students, parents and working people of Harlem “in the effort to stop the encroachment of charter schools.” In subsequent years, the CSEW also repeatedly denounced the racism behind Mayor Bloomberg’s closure of almost 200 schools, overwhelmingly in black neighborhoods or with heavily African American and Latino students. But while opposing some of the school closings, the UFT leadership didn’t point to their racist character, nor did the reformist opposition in the union.

Much of the racism is officially sponsored, but not only. A number of conflicts over school zoning have flared up in recent years between newly-minted homeowners in Brooklyn’s hottest neighborhoods and black/Latino families living in close proximity. In 2016, there was a virtual white uprising when the Downtown Brooklyn Education Council voted to rezone the highly overcrowded predominantly white

*continued on page 44*

Internationalist photo



**At April 2014 protest against charter schools called by parents’ groups, CSEW denounced capitalist assault on public education.**

# Bed-Stuy: Stop the Charter Invasion!

The fight against gentrification and privatization has been in the forefront this spring at the Marcy Avenue high school building in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood. Bed-Stuy, an historic center of African-American life and culture, has been targeted by the rapacious NYC landlords whose high-priced renovations, high-rise projects and ever higher rents are driving out long-time residents and changing the demography of the area.

The historic red-stone Marcy Avenue building used to be Boys High School, but that school was reincarnated as "Boys and Girls High" and is now in another Brooklyn location. Since then, the building has been divided up into two "transfer schools" (Brooklyn Academy and Bed-Stuy Prep), where students who dropped out of high school could come back to get a diploma; the Brooklyn hub of Pathways to Graduation (P2G), offering young adults a chance to study for their High School Equivalency (HSE, formerly GED before that was privatized); and a LYFE center, offering child care for students going back to school. There is also a classroom for teenage students with special needs and severe disabilities.

All these schools and programs are vital to Bed-Stuy, addressing the obstacles of housing, poverty and racism that students face in getting a high school diploma. But the building is now prime real estate. Enter the charter invasion. The first to come in was a high school of the "Uncommon Schools" charter chain, which took over an entire floor. This year, Uncommon Schools wanted to move in its middle school, taking more badly needed space away from the other schools. (The middle school, Brooklyn East Collegiate, is currently located in the



Our Times Press

## The historic Boys High School in Brooklyn.

gentrifying Prospect Heights neighborhood in the building of PS 9, an integrated school, where parents wanted it out.) Teachers and students at Marcy were outraged, and they mobilized.

An article was published in *Our Time Press* (23 March), a popular weekly paper in Bed-Stuy, headlining "A GED Program to Be Cut in Half So Charter School Can Expand." The article pointed out that "P2G has been a lifeline for young adults in need of an assist and is particularly successful at servicing young adults facing a number of challenges." It noted that "P2G has been celebrated for its Bike Repair Program and Citibike just hired seven students from the program." It also underlined that P2G once had two floors, then was reduced to one floor, and the new cut would remove half of that floor.

Nicole Greaves, a teacher at Marcy who fought against the charter assault, said at one of the first community meetings that after living in the area for 15 years, "I have seen firsthand the drastic changes that are taking place in the community. It is disheartening to see long-term residents and businesses being pushed out and relocated due to the ills of gentrification. The same is happening here within the old Boys High School. Our program is being pushed out the same way tenants are being displaced. Over 20 years, our school has serviced hundreds of thousands of Brooklyn youth. The services and resources we offer are invaluable to our students and their families."

But the existing schools didn't have the politi-



Internationalist photo

Protesters outside April 25 meeting of PEP that rubber-stamped charter push-out of public schools.

cal clout that the charters have, including with the Brooklyn Democratic Party. Stock traders, venture capitalists, right-wing ideologues, union-busting outfits: these are the known wheeler-dealers chipping away at public education. So who is behind Uncommon Schools? The charter chain's board includes financiers from Lazard and Bain, from the Soroban Capital hedge fund and the former CEO of Time-Warner Cable. A few years ago, when Brooklyn East Collegiate first moved into PS 9, the *New York Times* (11 April 2011) wrote:

"Besides the \$13,527 per student in public money the charter receives, Uncommon Schools also receives millions of dollars in corporate donations from, among others, the Broad, Walton and Jack Kent Cooke foundations."

But the main player here is New York's Democratic mayor, Bill de Blasio. He first won election campaigning to end the "tale of two cities" and stand up to the charters. The United Federation of Teachers supported him and many teachers saw him as an agent of change. Class Struggle Education Workers, however, put out a leaflet at that time, saying "Despite the Hype, de Blasio Will Be 'Bloomberg Lite'." It's not so lite anymore.

Once in office, de Blasio caved within weeks to the charter attack by Eva Moskowitz, backed by Democratic governor Andrew Cuomo and Republican state lawmakers. Moskowitz bused several thousand school kids from her Success Academy chain to Albany to lobby. The United Federation of Teachers (UFT) could have brought far more, but it didn't. UFT leaders argued it would be illegal. So what? If Moskowitz could do it, they should have responded. Instead, union misleaders relied on backroom lobbying, to no avail. With bipartisan backing, the legislature passed a law requiring the city to provide space in public schools for the charters, or else pay for their rent in private buildings. So de Blasio is dutifully running out public schools.

New York City has "mayoral control" of the schools, meaning that they are run by a one-man dictatorship. To give a veneer of "community input" to the mayoral *diktat*, the DoE is required to hold hearings culminating in a vote by the 13-member Panel for Educational Policy (PEP), a majority of whose members are appointed by the mayor and the rest by borough presidents. The PEP routinely rubber stamps closing public schools and opening charter schools, of which there are now 216 in New York City.

At a PEP hearing on April 25, students from Marcy and other schools poured their hearts out. One young woman at Bed-Stuy Prep told how she came to the program at age 19 and now she would be attending college in the fall. "It seems to me that NYCDOE only cares about charter schools because charters have more money than schools like us," she told the panel. A student from a school in the Bronx that is being pushed out said: "Just because our bank accounts may not match your own is not an excuse for making us feel like slaves, begging our masters for a chance. The people in the South Bronx will not be privatized, and will not give up on education."



**Panel of Educational Puppets: After six hours of urgent appeals from students, teachers and parents to "save our schools," on April 25 the PEP voted to close Crotona Academy HS and to slash P2G Marcy hub in half. All seven mayor appointees voted for the charter school, the others voted against.**

Another young woman, a senior at Brooklyn Academy, addressed Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza: "We are not like regular schools. We accommodate children who need a second, third and fourth, and even a fifth chance at completing something and being better in life. Mr. Carranza, you said that you cared to empower us, and yet ... you don't look at us and our 70% graduation rate, you look at the charter school and their money that they are accumulating, and their students that they hand pick. We deal with racism, gentrification, discrimination. This is an outrage even being here tonight. I shouldn't even have to say this. I've been fighting every day in my school to make sure that this doesn't happen." But it did.

In the end, the mayor's cronies of the Puppets for Educational Policy voted to install the second charter at the Marcy Avenue campus, squeezing the public schools there. It was a heartbreaker for the young adults at the four Marcy schools who spent months organizing, publicizing, going to community meetings, writing protest songs and finally coming out to make powerful speeches at the PEP supporting their schools, their teachers, their community. It was also a heartbreaker for the students at Crotona Academy High School in the Bronx, who spoke eloquently at the hearing but whose school was closed down entirely to make way for a charter.

At the April 25 PEP hearing, Marjorie Stamberg, a UFT delegate from District 79 and spokeswoman for Class Struggle Education Workers, told the PEP that "You are trying to squeeze us out, bit by bit, school by school, because there is an agenda here. The agenda is that you are trying to undercut public education to put in the charters. Now this is happening under the Republicans, under Betsy DeVos, but it happened under the Democrats, with Arne Duncan." She ended her two minutes at the mike: "This is a guerrilla war against public education and we need to stop it now, with a mobilization of students, parents, teachers and all school workers."

The war on public education continues. The drive for privatization is the demand of capital. To defeat that drive we need to fight it politically, against all capitalist parties, mobilizing the full power of the union and all working people. ■

# Stop Blocking Immigrant Students From Graduating!

The biggest single gap in educational outcomes for students in New York City is between those for whom English is their first language and English Language Learners, who are about 140,000 or 12.5% of NYC students. Subtracting ELLs, the graduation rate for New York schools is over 80%, but only 50% of those who are struggling with a new language get a diploma. This is a problem created by the system. Studies show it takes five to seven years to master a second language. The answer is more bilingual and dual language programs, and schools that are geared up to handle this. Newcomers or the International schools in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens achieve phenomenal results. But overall, the opposite is happening. Under Part 154 of the NY State education law stand-alone English as a New Language classes are being shut down and instead ENL instructors “push in” to other classes. And by eliminating local diplomas, forcing everyone to take the Regents exam even when they lack the language skills to pass, they are producing a whole layer of immigrant youth denied a high school diploma.

On top of that they are slashing ENL programs in adult education and public colleges, so that federal grants are now overwhelmingly geared to “workforce development” not general education. It’s all part of the anti-immigrant offensive, along with the deportations and I.C.E. raids. Nor did this start under Republican Donald Trump but under the Democratic deporter-in-chief Barack Obama. It’s not that immigrants don’t want to learn English. If instead of cutting back, the number of English language adult ed courses were quadrupled, the classrooms would be filled. And if they reworked the TASC high school equivalency exam so that English language learners could pass it, these students could have a real future as high school graduates. These punitive measures undertaken in the name of “raising standards” are in part a peculiarly local issue: students with a similar level of English language skills can get a diploma in New Jersey, but not in New York with its “rigorous” (i.e., exclusionary) Regents exam.

## “Workforce Development” for Wage Slavery

But this does not just affect secondary schools, it is part of a broader offensive against education, as opposed to skills training, for immigrants, affecting adult education as well. The defunding of Adult Basic Education (federal funding has been reduced by 17% since 2010) in favor of workforce development represents part of a drive to place public educational funds in the service of corporations and their perceived needs rather than the educational needs of adult students and their families. In 2012 under Republican Michael Bloomberg, the Mayor’s Office of Adult Education was closed and folded into the Office of Human Capital Development. In 2014 Democrat de Blasio went even farther, renaming it the Office of Workforce Development.

The rationale for this shift of scarce resources to workforce training rather than basic education was the need to unify adult

education with the need for employment readiness. The “work-first” corporate shills within the adult education community talked about ridding the field of the “silos” of separation. Of course, it was only the adult ed silo that was burned down, while the workforce training silo expanded to distort the purposes and popular education tradition of adult education. It should be obvious that literacy and English language acquisition is job readiness. But that is not the program of “work-first” ideologies. They point to a “skills gap.” But that gap is belied by the considerable underemployment in the city. And they suggest training programs. But many of those programs require high-level English language proficiency and high school diplomas.

The 2018 federal/state proposal for grant-funded programs dumped the English Language and Civics Education program for a program that requires students to be concurrently enrolled in ESOL and job training.

The 1996 Clinton “welfare-to-work” reform that was racist and punitive at its core is the model for this “work-first” emphasis. It propagated the false assumption that recipients of public assistance were lazy, work averse “takers.” Parents on welfare, mainly mothers who wanted to feed their children, were ripped out of education programs and shoved into unpaid, dead-end WEP (work experience program) jobs. Despite all the talk about education as the generator of economic equality, the poor, the oppressed and immigrants are denied effective educational opportunity. Capitalist politicians are now trying to apply the work-first doctrine to Medicaid recipients. The defunding of Adult Basic Ed/High School Equivalency (ABE/HSE) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and the devastation of family literacy programs widen economic inequality and increase intergenerational poverty. Although parents’ literacy level has a proven determining affect on children’s academic success, the corporate “job-creators” want to hustle English language learners and basic education students into narrowly conceived “job training.”

Of course, contextualized curriculum can be an effective classroom strategy for learning. And the “world of work” can be an important context. ESOL and ABE classes have pioneered such pedagogy for years. But the measure of success was language learning and academic progress, not any immediate job. The study of work and labor is essential to education. More than a hundred years ago, educational philosopher John Dewey argued for such an emphasis for all students. He saw that almost every town had an academic school and on the other side of the tracks a training school to produce compliant workers. And unlike our current crop of workforce developers, Dewey understood the political consequences of leaving marginalized populations in the educational dust. “Democracy cannot flourish,” he said, “where the chief influences in selecting subject matter of instruction are utilitarian ends narrowly conceived for the masses, and for the higher education of the few, the traditions of a specialized cultivated class” (*Democracy and Education* [1916]). ■

# A Marxist Program to Fight for Integrated Quality Public Education

The sorry state of many urban schools today is the result of a bipartisan capitalist offensive against public education. State legislatures have for decades slashed expenditures on education, building jails instead of schools – a trend that intensified after the 2007-08 world economic crisis which continues to this day. Wall Street and the federal government pour money into charter schools, while pushing anti-union schemes to regiment educators (“merit pay,” tying teacher pay to student test scores). At the same time the combination of “school choice” policies and the gentrification of inner-city neighborhoods are major factors in the resegregation of the schools.

The struggle over public education cannot be separated from the overall class struggle against capitalism. The fight for school integration through busing came after the civil rights movement, the upheavals in the Northern ghettos and massive opposition to the U.S.’ war on Vietnam. Conversely, the Supreme Court decision that marked a turning point in ending busing (*Board of Education of Oklahoma City v. Dowell*) came in 1991, at the high point of the imperialist-led counter-revolution in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as U.S. president George H.W. Bush proclaimed a New World Order. Ever since, capital has been on a rampage against working people internationally, destroying social programs and union gains left and right.

The recent teacher revolts in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Arizona, Colorado and North Carolina are a response to this onslaught, in states where the cutbacks in school spending have been the greatest and teacher pay the lowest. But the united ruling-class offensive can not be defeated by spontaneous revolts, nor by the “business as usual” unionism of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National



Jeenah Moon for The New York Times

**Highly selective Booker T. Washington school (MS 54), on Upper West Side, one of top 10 NYC middle schools in exam scores. Located only blocks from Harlem, its students are 62% white, 8% black. Only 1.3% are English language learners.**

Education Association (NEA) or by the reformist “social justice unionism” of various union opposition groups around the country. What’s needed is a class-struggle counteroffensive to oust the bureaucrats, to break with the Democrats and all bourgeois parties and politicians, and to point the way to a workers government to bring down the dictatorship of capital.

In 1848, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were among the first to call, in the *Communist Manifesto*, for universal free public education. Today it is still the Marxists who are the most consistent defenders of the public schools, even as we fight for socialist revolution to transform them. In doing so we raise a series of **democratic and transitional demands**.

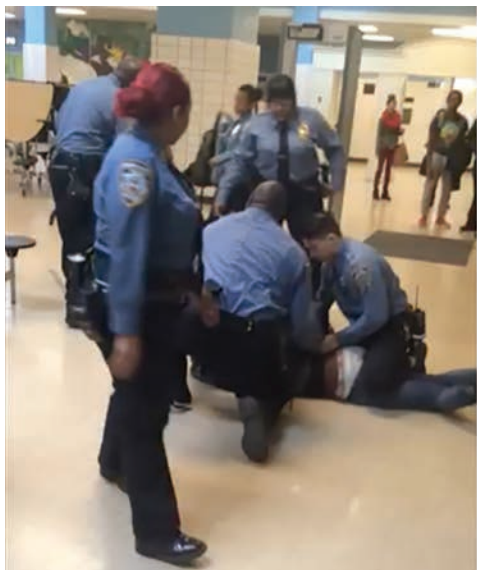
Residential segregation has always been driven by governmental action and business decisions, from “redlining” by the banks and “covenants” that excluded black people and Jews from wealthier areas, to the flight to white suburbs to avoid school desegregation, to the gentrification that is pushing many lower-income and even middle-class residents from historic black neighborhoods. In New York City, this has been facilitated by the deterioration of rent control. Calls to **expand rent control**<sup>1</sup> and for a **vast expansion of public housing** to be

<sup>1</sup> Which could include repealing vacancy bonuses (allowing up to 20% increases and deregulation above a certain level), preferential rent provisions and the expiration of rent ceilings accompanying tax abatements, among other measures.



stuyvesant.edu

**Stuyvesant High School auditorium. Selective specialized high schools are necessarily discriminatory. Only 10 black students were admitted in Stuyvesant’s September 2017 freshman class.**



(Left) Police arrest student at Park Slope Collegiate for having pin holding together his broken glasses, March 2015. (Right) School safety cop arrests eighth grade girl at PS 22 in the Bronx, May 2014. In 2016-17 school year, 880 students were arrested in school. **Shut down the school to prison pipeline!**

*built under union control* would greatly curtail gentrification. It would also point the way to resolve the housing shortage, end mass homelessness, expand union construction jobs and give stability to the 100,000 homeless students. In the meantime, there should be a call for the homeless to *occupy empty apartments* and to mobilize *workers action to stop evictions*.

On the educational dimensions of the fight against pervasive race and class segregation we are for the *unionization and expropriation of all private schools as well as semi-privatized charter schools and their inclusion in the public school system*. This includes *replacing religious schools with secular public schools*: Christian, Jewish, Muslim or other religious groups are free to impart religious instruction on their own. The absence of private schools would go a long way toward integrating the schools. Successful private schools such as the

Chicago Lab school could be reorganized as public schools with non-selective admissions.

In New York City fully *one-third of all high schools are selective*, requiring entrance exams, essays and interviews, using opaque algorithms and other mechanisms to screen applicants. We advocate the *abolition of competitive admissions for specialized high schools* and the *replacement of “gifted and talented” schools and programs with advanced placement and other quality academic programs in all schools*. Selective mechanisms necessarily discriminate against oppressed social groups (particularly African Americans, Latinos and immigrants), they foster a poisonous culture of elitism, and they are not necessary to realize the potential of the brightest students. Well-funded unitary suburban high schools are just as able to produce winners of science prizes or achieve high scores

on PISA exams and NAEP assessments as a Bronx Science, Manhattan’s Stuyvesant High, the Queens Baccalaureate School or Brooklyn Tech.

*We reject the mantra of “school choice.”* This capitalist criteria treats education as a commodity, to be regulated by a market, rather than a fundamental social right. In a system with a vast difference in the quality of schools, “choice” is guaranteed to produce “winners,” which will always be those with the most economic and social resources, and “losers,” which will necessarily be the most oppressed. “Choice” also undercuts local schools which can be and often are the organizing centers for social life in poor areas. We are for *unitary schools at all levels*, with the option of *thematically specialized high schools and programs* (performing arts, music, automotive, aviation, harbor, sci-



PS 188 on the Lower East Side. 52% of its students are homeless, 48% have family income below poverty level.

ence, technology, etc.) on a non-discriminatory basis.

Instead of militarizing schools, as the charters are doing with “no excuses” discipline and enforced silence in the hallways, and as the regular schools do with police posted inside the schools, we demand: ***Cops out of the schools! Shut down the school to prison pipeline!*** And while we’re at it, we call to ***abolish the DoE’s Office of Special Investigations.*** When they are not witch-hunting teachers and principals for communism,<sup>2</sup> the sinister sex-obsessed Savanarolas in the OSI are avidly seeking *New York Post* headlines by prosecuting women teachers for party pictures or intimate photos that were once on their Facebook pages because they couldn’t figure out the obscure privacy settings on Mark Zuckerberg’s tool for police/employer surveillance.

Above all, Marxists oppose the authoritarian capitalist forms of school governance, whether mayoral control or boards of education, calling instead for ***teacher-student-parent-worker control of the schools*** through elected assemblies, with educators in the lead. This democratic principle is vital to achieving genuine social integration. It can greatly stimulate involvement by all when decisions are collectively made and carried out rather than imposed from outside. This allows for a great variety of experimental school programs, curricula and evaluation.

Marxists are also for ***labor schools*** such as John Dewey propounded, in which instructional time is combined with exposure to and participation in productive labor in a range of activities. But this pedagogical principle, the democratic form of school governance by those actually involved in the education process and others of the above demands can only have, at best, an episodic and limited expression under the rule of capital, which will oppose them tooth and nail. The bourgeoisie limited Dewey’s pedagogical strategy to the Chicago Lab Schools (while perverting it into narrow vocational schools). It was only carried out on a large scale in the early Soviet Union after the Bolshevik Revolution.<sup>3</sup> We raise such democratic and transitional demands today in order to point the way to the revolution that will be necessary for the schools to serve the interests of working people.

Take the issue of how to concretely fight racial and class segregation in New York. Various liberals and reformists now call for “controlled choice.” This is a capitulation to the right-wing mantra of “school choice,” similar to the way feminists capitulated to anti-abortion bigots by dropping the “A-word” and talking only of a woman’s “right to choose.” But who is to control the choices? Elaborate formulas of low, medium and high achievers on tests, measures of poverty such as eligibility for subsidized school meals and the like are just a stand-in for racial criteria prohibited by the

<sup>2</sup> See “Anti-Communist Witch Hunt in NYC School,” *Class Struggle Education Workers* blog, 28 June 2017.

<sup>3</sup> See John Dewey, “New Schools for a New Era” (1929) in *Marxism and the Battle over Education*, special supplement to *The Internationalist* (January 2008). Yet the massive campaign of educational innovation begun under Lenin and Trotsky was halted by the conservative, nationalist Stalinist bureaucracy that usurped political power and resorted to authoritarian rule as it abandoned the goal of international socialist revolution.



CSEW

**CSEW at protest outside DoE headquarters against anti-communist, racist witch-hunt in Brooklyn school. Abolish the Office of Special Investigations!**

reactionary Supreme Court. This will achieve nothing. The issue will not be settled in the ed schools or the Department of Education but on the streets.

There is a real problem facing school integration in major cities in the U.S.: the small number of white students in the public schools. In New York City, 25% of school-age children (age 18 and under) are non-Hispanic whites, but only 14.8% of the students in the NYC school system are. Dissolution of private schools into the public system would be an essential part of any viable effort to integrate New York City’s schools. Busing to the suburbs, as the Trotskyists advocated in Boston in the 1970s? Not so easy in a vast metropolis like New York. There are areas where that could work: build a string of magnet schools along the northern city limits that could integrate students from the Bronx and Westchester County. Likewise with schools in the Far Rockaway ghetto, just over the line from Nassau County.

Manhattan is logistically simple: integrate schools of the Upper East Side with those of El Barrio (Spanish Harlem), and those of the Upper West Side with adjacent areas of Harlem – no need for busing. In racially and economically diverse areas like the Lower East Side, it’s even simpler: junk the school choice regime while assuring balanced populations of zoned schools, as the District 1 Community Education Council has advocated against the educrats at DoE headquarters in Tweed Courthouse. The technical aspects of school integration are not the problem. The real issue is the need for a sharp political fight against liberal racism and against the Democratic Party, which is why liberals and reformist pseudo-socialists won’t touch it. And it will take ***integrated workers defense guards*** to ensure that the schools are safely integrated.

Moreover, a successful integration effort is dependent on ***a massive expenditure on improving all schools***, so that the

result is better education for all. Plus facilitate travel with *free mass transit* – rip out the turnstiles! – tripling the number of trains at night and on the weekend, and *introducing modern signaling technology* to increase train frequency (and prevent transit worker deaths). Yet we are dealing with a subway system that is still using pre-World War II switches! All this underlines the basic fact that *any real struggle for integrated quality public education will quickly come up against the limits of decaying capitalism.*

The extreme segregation of New York City schools is a product of government action, capitalist market forces and unvarnished racism. It is the result of ending busing programs, of slashing education budgets, instituting “school choice” and promoting apartheid charter schools, while banks and real estate developers gentrify neighborhoods by taking advantage of tax breaks and weakened rent control. Plus the fact that schools are financed by local property taxes, and all backed up by Wall Street and Washington. It will take a sharp battle mobilizing the workers movement all of the oppressed to overcome those powerful forces.

What’s needed is a class-struggle leadership that has the program and determination to take on capital. The UFT leaders of the Unity Caucus, ensconced in their Wall Street office tower, are incapable of and opposed to waging such a struggle. When they had a chance, in the fight over charter expansion, they instead engaged in dead-end backroom horse-trading with the capitalist politicians. In every election, they endorse Democratic candidates from Obama to Hillary Clinton, Cuomo and de Blasio. These are the same bourgeois politicians who carry out the privatizing education “reforms” dictated by Bill Gates, the Walton family, Wall Street financiers and imperialist outfits like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the OECD.

Nor will you get such a fight from the various union reform groups such as the Movement of Rank-and-file Educators (MORE) in New York, the Caucus of Rank-and-file Educators (CORE) in Chicago or their equivalents in other major cities. Their ingrained reformism means ducking the issue of racism and refusing to fight the Democrats’ stranglehold over the unions. While talking “social justice” and including supporters of various ostensibly socialist organizations, they don’t challenge racist American capitalism. In NYC this reached the point that when black Democrat Al Sharpton called a march on Staten Island to protest the police chokehold murder of Eric Garner in the summer of 2014, while the UFT tops supported the march, MORE opposed the call for solidarity and issued a statement grotesquely calling for “unity” with the “brothers and sisters” of the PBA (Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association)!<sup>4</sup>

A leadership calling for unity with the repressive forces of capitalist state certainly cannot defeat the capitalist assault on public education. But these reformists don’t intend on fighting capitalism – they want to administer it. Which is why when they win office, they act just like the pro-capitalist bureaucrats they replace: witness CORE’s ignominious sellout of the 2012 Chicago

<sup>4</sup> See “MORE Takes a Stand ... With the Police,” in *The Internationalist* No. 38, October-November 2014.



Internationalist photo

**CSEW at August 2014 Staten Island protest against racist cop murder of Eric Garner. MORE opposed call for solidarity, instead issued statement calling for “unity” with police PBA.**

teachers strike.<sup>5</sup> Class Struggle Education Workers is radically different. We marched in the 2014 Staten Island demonstration, calling for workers mobilization against racist cop murder, and denouncing the Democratic Party. The CSEW is committed to “the fight for a revitalization and transformation of the labor movement into an instrument for the emancipation of the working class and the oppressed.” Its program calls to “Oppose resegregation of schools: separate is not equal. Stop discrimination and racist attacks against black, Latino, Asian and immigrant students.”<sup>6</sup> It calls for workers action against imperialist wars, and for a *class-struggle workers party to fight for a workers government.*

As materialists, we understand that, as Karl Marx insisted in *The German Ideology* (1847):

“The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production...”

So long as the bourgeoisie is the ruling class, with its economic and political power it will control the educational system, both ideologically and by reproducing the structure of the workforce and social classes. What Marxist educators must do is to join with the working class and oppressed sectors in building resistance to challenge that dominant power, organizing concrete struggles against the oppression it embodies, and raising revolutionary consciousness in the course of forging a vanguard to lead that struggle to overthrow it. We will only do away with segregation by a revolution to sweep away the capitalist system of racism, war and exploitation once and for all. ■

<sup>5</sup> See “Chicago Teachers: Strike Was Huge, Settlement Sucks,” *The Internationalist* special issue, December 2012.

<sup>6</sup> See Class Struggle Education Workers program on page 52 of this issue..

# Free Market Racism...

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P.S. 8 in District 13. Under the proposal, only students from the affluent white Brooklyn Heights would attend P.S. 8, while the children of *nouveau Brooklyn* yuppies in their lawyer lofts in the DUMBO (Down Under Manhattan Bridge) area would attend the predominantly black P.S. 307, which had been thoroughly renovated. In hearings, outraged DUMBO parents complained that their kiddies would suffer in a school with “low test scores.” But black parents of students from P.S. 307 were also concerned, that an influx of students from well-off families would spark a wave of gentrification in their neighborhood, driving out small businesses and some residents.

Currently a heated battle has erupted on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, where the District 3 Education Council voted to offer a quarter of the seats in the district’s middle schools to students from other attendance zones in the district (i.e., Harlem) who had lower scores on state reading and math exams. An NY1 video went viral “showing mostly white parents complaining that their children wouldn’t receive coveted middle school spots after excelling on state tests” (Chalkbeat, 25 April). The furor increased when the new schools chancellor Richard Carranza retweeted the video with the (accurate) headline, “Wealthy white Manhattan parents angrily rant against plan to bring more black kids to their schools.” Carranza has subsequently questioned why school children are being screened at all. He will soon find that he has stirred up a hornets’ nest of liberal racism that de Blasio wouldn’t touch, as this along with Brooklyn’s Park Slope is the core of his white support. Among the defenders of Upper West Side school exclusivity is one Cynthia Nixon, the *Sex in the City* star who is running for the Democratic nomination for governor.

De Blasio won office promising to stop the expansion of charter schools, but he soon capitulated to the privatizing pro-charter forces in the Democratic Party itself, from Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton (the former Wal-Mart board member) down to state governor Andrew Cuomo and the Wall Street hedge fund operators behind Democrats for Education Reform. But for all the millions of dollars spent on propaganda blaming the “achievement gap” on “bad teachers” and teachers unions, after one failed teacher-bashing “reform” after another, the education *deformers* reject “one tool that has been shown to work: school desegregation,” wrote David Kirp in the *New York Times* (4 March 2012). Kirp, a senior fellow at the Learning Policy Institute, noted that numerous studies showed:

“The experience of an integrated education made all the difference in the lives of black children – and in the lives of their children as well. These economists’ studies consistently conclude that African-American students who attended integrated schools fared better academically than those left behind in segregated schools. They were more likely to graduate from high school and attend and graduate from college; and, the longer they spent attending integrated schools, the better they did. What’s more, the fear that white children would suffer, voiced by opponents of integration,



**Cynthia Nixon, star of *Sex in the City*, candidate for for governor of New York on Working Families Party ticket (pressure group on the Democratic Party). Shown here speaking to the Alliance for Quality Education. In 2008, Nixon was spokesman for keeping exclusive Center School in predeominantly white PS 199, the epicenter of the current Upper West Side revolt against school integration.**

proved groundless. Between 1970 and 1990, the black-white gap in educational attainment shrank — not because white youngsters did worse but because black youngsters did better.”

Right-wing and liberal education “reformers” are constantly talking of a generalized crisis of the schools, in order to justify their agenda of privatizing and corporatizing public education. This “crisis” is manufactured: if you consider only public schools with less than 10% of students eligible for subsidized meals — a simple measure of low income — on the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) test scores, U.S. schools would be No. 1 in the world in science and technology education, No. 1 in reading and No. 5 in math. The fundamental problem facing urban schools is entrenched poverty, which is far greater in the United States than in any other advanced industrial country. But that is well-nigh impossible to overcome under decaying capitalism, when everything from schools and hospitals to public transportation is becoming prohibitively costly while falling apart. The challenges of urban education have been studied to death. The solutions to school segregation, achievement gaps and the rest are relatively simple. The impediment is the rotting capitalist system and the noxious politics that go with it.

Marxists — and indeed anyone who has thought seriously about the obstacles to achieving high-quality, critical education for the mass of poor, oppressed and working people — might seem caught in an apparent contradiction. It’s obvious that the education system is rigged. We know that in capitalist society, schooling sorts by race and class and gender to fulfill unequal social and economic roles. We know the working class gets little quality education by design and economic circumstance. Forty years ago, economists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (*Schooling in Capitalist America* [1976]) confirmed that education is a key component in an elaborate process of the social reproduction of labor power and the translation of labor to

profits. Schooling not only mirrors the economic and social order, but also reinforces patterns of class domination and racial oppression. Yet we nevertheless loudly and rightly demand and organize for access to that rigged system as a democratic right.

The school system supplies the workers and tries to legitimate the inequalities of the class structure, but in the process it must produce workers with cognitive and technical skills required for suitable job performance. For our class, work is the only game in town – the other option being extreme material poverty. Access to the tools of capitalist culture is a requirement for economic survival. Denying access to education has long been a strategy to constrain the working class from fighting in its own interests. Crucially, some of the knowledge, culture and technical skills acquired in school can become weapons in the hands of our future class leaders. Class Struggle Education Workers demands free quality lifetime public education under teacher-student-worker-parent control as part of the wider class struggle for the reorganization of society on an egalitarian socialist basis that can only come about through revolution. The need for such struggle is particularly acute in this period of sustained capitalist attack on public education. ■

## Lillian Pollak...

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from Trotskyism who, as Lillian put it in a somewhat wry understatement, “influenced Shanker.” In fact, Shachtman’s wife Yetta Barsh became Shanker’s secretary. Asked in the interview about a story that she had had a big argument with Yetta Barsh about Vietnam, Lillian replied that she didn’t have an “argument” but a “confrontation,” when she and other UFTers were protesting the fact that the union had refused to oppose the Vietnam War. Lillian said she yelled at Barsh: “I remember you when! I remember when you were a socialist, and you had a position against war – capitalist war!”

Many decades after that confrontation, in our, Lillian said she never stopped fighting against capitalism and its wars,

## CUNY Students and Faculty Demand: CIA Out of CUNY Now!



Internationalist photo

### Protest outside John Jay College during CUNY Board of Trustees Meeting, March 19.

Members of the Class Struggle Education Workers, CUNY Internationalist Clubs and Revolutionary Internationalist Youth (RIY) have been carrying out a campaign at the City University of New York for ousting the Central Intelligence Agency from Baruch College. A memorandum of understanding was quietly signed between the CIA and Baruch in August 2017, establishing a basis for the Agency to conduct recruitment and “simulation” activities on campus.

This direct attack on the students, faculty and workers of CUNY has been met with significant opposition. The CUNY Internationalist Clubs and RIY distributed thousands of copies of a leaflet titled “CIA Out of CUNY Now!” at Baruch and other CUNY campuses. On April 24 a teach-in was organized by the Baruch chapter of the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), the faculty and staff union at CUNY. The leaflet can be viewed at [www.internationalist.org](http://www.internationalist.org) or in *The Internationalist* No. 51.

from participating in an antiwar singing group to showing solidarity with the Palestinian people. This included going onto one of the “Gaza Freedom Flotilla” boats – at the age of 95 – when it was docked on the East River in 2010. The flotilla was attacked by Israel in international waters, with nine activists on one of the ships killed during the raid. Reflecting on nearly a century’s worth of life and struggle, Lillian reaffirmed in our 2011 interview, “Yes, I’m still a socialist.”

The interview is available on the Class Struggle Education Workers website, <http://edworkersunite.blogspot.com/>. The CSEW Newsletter No. 3 can be read at: <http://a.nnotate.com/docs/2012-05-11/WoamqIBX/1204-05%20CSEW%20Newsletter%20No.%203.pdf> ■

# Teacher Revolts...

*continued from page 7*

Whether coming from corporate rightists or fake leftists, what these arguments all have in common is that they equate the unions with the union leadership. The West Virginia teachers strike was not a wildcat – it was in fact authorized by all three education unions, both at the state level and in formal votes at the county level. That continued to be so after the strikers said “no” to the February 27 deal, and the union tops still managed to focus the strike on winning the 5%, which hadn’t been the main demand. What is true is that *the strike came from the ranks* and it *partly escaped from the stifling grasp of the labor bureaucracy* that is terrified of class struggle (which it is incapable of waging), as that would upset its cozy class collaboration.

Militant strikers were instinctively aware of this, particularly as they nixed the deal with the governor. Rather than denouncing unions, they chanted, “We are the union bosses!” (*Jacobin*, 1 March). The militants then organized the opposition through the unions at the county level, and the state leaders acquiesced. While labor bureaucrats typically seek to maintain tight control over a strike, or any union action, this was made difficult by the fact that WV public sector unions are prohibited from collective bargaining. In the past, the authorities have tried to play the WVEA and AFT/WV off against each other. But here in order to organize a walkout or strike, all the unions had to get together at the county level, along with non-unionized employees. That was the backbone of the strike, but it was largely informal. The next time there should be an *elected mass strike committee based on assemblies of all strikers*.

Wildcat? Anyone who had any experience with a real wildcat strike could see the difference. In the West Virginia coalfield wildcats of the mid-1970s, strikers burned effigies of UMW leader Arnold Miller. Mark Lance of the CSEW, who covered the great 1977-78 coal strike for *Workers Vanguard*, then the voice of revolutionary Trotskyism, noted that workers shouted down and drove off union reps while burning the contract. Here, however, when union leaders spoke – even national AFT and NEA leaders – they were often well-received. Understanding that this was a rebellion against the union *leadership*, not against the unions, is key to realizing the potential for the West Virginia teachers strike to lead to a revival of class-struggle unionism.

**Lesson Two: The West Virginia teachers strike is the answer to Janus.**

The strike comes just as the U.S. Supreme Court is considering the case, *Janus v. American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Council 31* which conservatives are pushing in order to break the power of public employee unions, the last bastion of a once-strong U.S. labor movement. If, as is likely, the Court rules against the union, it would eliminate the “agency shop” whereby unions receive fees from non-members who enjoy the benefits of union-negotiated wages, benefits and job protections. The response of the labor bureaucracy to this existential threat has been to intensify calls to vote Democratic. Class-struggle unionists, in contrast, call to *mobilize labor’s*

*power to bust the union-busters.*<sup>8</sup>

The union tops are quite explicit about their role in clamping down on union struggle in order to maintain “labor peace,” at least when talking to the bourgeoisie. An *amicus curiae* (friend of the court) brief submitted by the AFT in the *Janus* case argues that eliminating the agency shop would “impair the collaborative relationship,” and lead to a “more confrontational, less cooperative relationship” between the union and management. During the strike, AFT president Randi Weingarten said that backers of *Janus* should “look at West Virginia for what will happen if they get their way.... In West Virginia, which lacks collective bargaining, ... thousands of teachers mobilized and took on the governor and legislature” (*Washington Post*, 5 March).

For labor fakers like Weingarten, the West Virginia teachers strike is not an example to be followed but a specter to be waved about in order to scare the bourgeoisie into keeping class collaboration safe and sound; class-struggle unionists, in contrast, see the teachers strike as a harbinger of what a combative labor movement could achieve.

**Lesson Three: The strike showed it is possible to break through strike bans.**

Asked by the media early on whether a strike would be illegal, WVEA president Lee responded, “probably, yes.” He added that, after explaining the legal consequences to educators, “This is an action that they overwhelmingly voted for us to call, and we called it.” Shortly before it began, state attorney general Patrick Morrissey declared that “the impending work stoppage is unlawful,” and that he was “prepared to act.” This was based on a state supreme court decision dating back to the last West Virginia teachers strike in 1990, when a Democratic attorney general asked to court to declare that “any strike or concerted work stoppage by the public teachers of this state is illegal.” The court agreed, ruling that “Public employees have no right to strike.”

Striking teachers were well aware of the court ruling and the attorney general’s threat, but they weren’t intimidated. Teachers in the capitol had signs noting that unions were once illegal. A math teacher from Calhoun county commented to us, “What Rosa Parks did was illegal; what the suffragettes did was illegal.” Under New York’s Taylor Law and in 23 other states, strikes by teachers and other public employees are expressly illegal, subject to jail sentences and/or fines. The labor bureaucracy hides behind this legal prohibition. The NYC United Federation of Teachers has used this excuse

<sup>8</sup> The agency shop is closely tied to the dues check-off, where the employer deducts union dues from employee paychecks and then passes this money onto the union. This arrangement is the ultimate in class collaboration, guaranteeing the union leaders a steady income while giving the boss control over it. Class-conscious unionists do not support the dues check-off, calling instead on the unions to collect their own dues, which also makes for stronger unions. At the same time we call to smash this attempt at union-busting with sharp class struggle. See “UFT Tops Won’t Fight Union-Busting ‘Right-to-Work,’ Endorse Democrat de Blasio,” *Class Struggle Education Workers*, 12 February 2017; and *Class Struggle Workers – Portland*, “It Will Take Hard Class Struggle to Defeat ‘Right to Work,’” reprinted in *The Internationalist* No. 48, May-June 2017.

on several occasions to rule out of order proposals for union action by a delegate who is a member of Class Struggle Education Workers. The CSEW calls to *shred the Taylor Law with massive strike action*.

West Virginia teachers just showed that this can be done. Since the state was not prepared to jail 30,000 strikers, especially in the face of broad public support for the teachers, the attorney general's declaration and the supreme court ruling became dead letters.

**Lesson 4: *The strike underscored the need to break from all capitalist parties and politicians and to build a workers party that fights for all the oppressed.***

The West Virginia teachers strike exploded the myth spread by the Democratic Party that white workers who voted for Trump in 2016 were nothing but anti-union racists. In fact, Obama got far more votes in West Virginia than Hillary Clinton, and West Virginians have far more trust in organized labor (43% in a recent opinion poll) than the rest of the country (28%). The fact is that the Democratic Party's economic policies and economic desperation due to the devastating loss of coal mining jobs pushed workers into the arms of Trump. Clinton became *persona non grata* in WV for her statement that "we're going to put a lot of coal miners out of business." As for Trump, 49% no longer believe he is bringing back coal jobs, as promised in his presidential campaign (*Register-Herald* [Beckley], 21 January).

Now we have Governor Jim Justice elected as a Democrat with union backing promising to raise teachers' pay, then once in office proposing a 1% raise that amounted to a pay cut, while slashing benefits and upping the cost of health insurance. Justice is the owner or CEO of over 50 mining companies, worth \$1.6 billion according to *Forbes*, making him the richest man in the state. Meanwhile, the leading Republican contender for U.S. senator is Don Blankenship, former chairman and CEO of Massey Energy, who was found guilty of conspiracy to willfully violate mine safety and health standards leading to the death of 29 miners in the 2010 Upper Big Branch mine disaster. For this he got a slap-on-the-wrist one-year sentence in a country club prison.

Both Democrats and Republicans represent big business, no matter what they may say on the campaign trail. During the strike, Democratic state senator Richard Ojeda was lionized by the liberal media and many teachers for supporting a pay increase. Yet Ojeda, who supported Bernie Sanders in the 2016 primaries and is now running for U.S. Congress, was elected proclaiming his support for Trump. He boasts of his military record of participating in the brutal U.S. occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, and while now claiming to support DACA and a "path to citizenship," he hailed Trump's call to "take benefits away from people who come here illegally." This typical double-talking capitalist politician is no friend of labor or the oppressed. Class-struggle unionists call to *defeat U.S. imperialism's wars, for full citizenship rights for all immigrants and for workers action to stop deportations*.

In many ways, the West Virginia teachers revolt recalls

the 2011 outpouring of labor protest in Wisconsin against the union-busting bill of Republican governor Scott Smith. That, too, was sparked by teachers. It was even bigger – 30,000 workers ringed and occupied the state capitol daily, over 100,000 rallied on weekends – and it lasted longer, almost a month. It brought the state to the brink of a general strike.<sup>9</sup> This scared the hell out of even the "progressive" labor leaders, who capitulated as the union tops called off the marches. Instead they told protesters to look to the courts and a recall election – i.e., to vote for Democrats. The recall fizzled, the courts did nothing, the anti-labor law passed, state workers lost the right to collective bargaining, teachers' wages fell, education unions lost over half their members, and teachers fled the state (12% of high school teachers left in the last year alone). Those are the wages of betrayal.

The union misleaders' chaining of the workers movement to the partner parties of U.S. capitalism and imperialism is central to their sabotage of workers' class interests. Democrats governed West Virginia on behalf of the coal bosses for generations, from the 1930s until 2014, presiding over endless mine disasters and closures, and slashing taxes on the energy giants.<sup>10</sup> The Democratic nomination of billionaire mine boss Justice is nothing new: West Virginia Democrats elected Jay Rockefeller, first as governor and then as senator, from 1977 to 2015. Class-conscious labor militants in West Virginia should instead follow the example of the Portland, Oregon Painters Local 10 that in 2016 declared:

"Whereas, Democrats and Republicans are and have always been strike-breaking, war-making parties of the bosses, and "Whereas, so long as the labor movement supports one or another party of the bosses, we will be playing a losing game, therefore be it

"Resolved, that IUPAT Local 10 does not support the Democrats, Republicans, or any bosses' parties or politicians, and ...

"Resolved, that we call on the labor movement to break from the Democratic Party, and build a class-struggle workers party."<sup>11</sup>

**Lesson 5: *The WV teachers strike showed the need to dump the sellout bureaucracy and build a class-struggle opposition fighting to replace the dictatorship of capital with workers rule.***

The CSEW has written, "like the tango, it takes two to class-collaborate, and the Trump Republicans aren't interested in that dance." As for the Democrats, with barely one-third of the seats in the West Virginia legislature, they have nothing to offer. Up against hard-nosed union-busters, WV union officialdom caved. It didn't want the strike, reluctantly went along with it because of the insistence of the ranks, and tried to end it at every opportunity. But it's not enough to call to replace one set of leaders with another:

<sup>9</sup> See "Wisconsin Unions Vote to Prepare a General Strike – The Time to Act Is Now" (22 February 2011) and "Wisconsin: For a General Strike Now!" (13 March 2011), and other articles in *The Internationalist* No. 33, Summer 2011.

<sup>10</sup> See "Capitalism Killed West Virginia Miners," *The Internationalist* No. 23, March-April 2006 on the Sago mine disaster.

<sup>11</sup> See "To Hell with the Bosses' Parties – For a Class-Struggle Workers Party!" in *The Internationalist* No. 45, September-October 2016.

the labor bureaucracy is a parasitic layer sitting atop the unions, seeking to cooperate with management, and more broadly with capital and its state. A mobilized membership was able to overcome sabotage at the top this time, but that won't cut it next time around. To really defend educators, students and public education generally, it's necessary to forge a leadership with a program to wage the class struggle through to victory.

This requires a hard struggle to raise consciousness about the scope of the struggle, and across the board. We must be clear, first of all, as to *who are our friends and who are our enemies*.

Many strikers saw police as allies and did not object to the linking of teachers' pay with that of the cops. Yet the West Virginia State Police is a paramilitary force that was established in 1919 to put down miners in the mine wars. In 1921 state police joined with company gun thugs to confront the march of some 15,000 armed miners protesting martial law in Mingo County that set off the Battle of Blair Mountain, leading to the arrest of almost 1,000 mine workers on bogus murder and treason charges. In 2018, police would have been used to arrest teachers in this strike if a government agency ordered it, as the attorney general threatened. The cops are not fellow workers, they are the armed fist of capital. Class-struggle unionists call for *cops out of the unions* and for *workers mobilization against racist police murder*.

Also, strikers chanted "thank you, supers" after county superintendents met with the Senate March 2, asking the legislators to grant the pay increase. Yet superintendents are bosses and next time could seek injunctions to enforce a strike ban. Likewise, there was a lot of support for the strike from the media, such as the *Charleston Gazette*. In other situations, such as the 2005 New York transit strike, the big business press has been positively rabid, denouncing "selfish" strikers and baying for union leaders' blood. In a fight for a real pay hike – like the \$10,000 increase in teachers' starting salaries from the present \$33,000 to "at least \$43,000 by fiscal year 2019" that was promised in the 2014 budget – strikers will likely face a viciously anti-union press.

In short, the kind of leadership that's needed to fight and win a real class battle must have the program and determination to take on the capitalist ruling class down the line. That requires joining with other sectors of the working class that have the power to shut down the state (such as the CWA workers now on strike against Frontier Communications). It means reviving the miners unions in a struggle to expropriate the energy giants rather than just calling to tax them. It means fighting against corporatization and privatization of public education, and for labor action not only to fully fund the PEIA but to demand free, quality health care for all. It means calling, in the words of the Class Struggle Education Workers program, <sup>12</sup> "For a class-struggle workers party to fight for a workers government." ■

<sup>12</sup> Class Struggle Education Workers Formed (2008).

## I.C.E. Cops in Courts...

*continued from page 29*

hearings in the immigration court in solidarity.

The outrage at the ICE agents planted at the city's courts is not limited to Legal Aid attorneys and activists. Members of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 1070, part of AFSCME District Council 37, representing court, county and Department of Probation Employees, have also protested. DC 37's *Public Employee Press* (April 2018) reports that court interpreters took the initiative to pass a motion at a Local 1070 meeting, and then brought it to the floor of the the DC37 Delegate Assembly on February 20, calling for the exclusion of I.C.E. from city courthouses. It was passed overwhelmingly.

The ALAA is calling on the Office of Court Administration and Chief Judge Janet DiFiore to prohibit I.C.E. from entering the courthouses and to stop coordination with the feds. However, the courts no less than the immigration cops are part and parcel of the apparatus of state repression that serves to enforce the racist injustice that is and always has been a mainstay of American capitalism. OCA officials defend the "right" of the I.C.E. agents to make arrests in the courts, and accuse the Legal Aid attorneys of trying to obstruct "justice." It will take an independent mobilization of working people, immigrants, African American, Asian and Latino activists and all defenders of democratic rights to stop the I.C.E. marauders.

Rapid response networks and immigrant defense groups which have been springing up at schools, hospitals and on the City University of New York campuses are important. Class Struggle Education Workers and CUNY Internationalist Clubs have undertaken such initiatives. What's needed is to bring out the power of labor, from such unions as the UFT, PSC and hospital workers DC 37 and 1199 who work with immigrant students and their families to stop the I.C.E. with mass action. The action by the dedicated attorneys of Legal Aid is an important first step. ■

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# The Taylor Law: What It Is and How to Smash It

We reprint below the main article from *The Advance* (April 2018), newsletter of CUNY Contingents Unite (CCU), an organizing group for contingent academic employees at the City University of New York. Class Struggle Education Workers activists helped found the CCU in 2008, seeking to build a “functional entity” to give a greater voice for adjuncts and other contingent (so-called “part-time”) academic staff at CUNY while participating actively in the faculty/staff union, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC). (For more information, see the CCU site: [cunycontingents.wordpress.com](http://cunycontingents.wordpress.com))

In 2014, the CCU launched a campaign against adjunct poverty which was then codified in the demand for minimum starting pay of \$7,000 per three-credit course (“7K”) at CUNY, which was endorsed by the international conference of the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor held in New York in August of that year. The history of this campaign is detailed in the October 2017 issue of *The Advance*, also available on the CCU site. Growing support and agitation for the demand led to the PSC officially adopting it as part of the union’s “bargaining agenda” in its current contract campaign. At the same time, the union leadership continues to rely on lobbying and illusions in supposed “friend-of-labor” Democrats.

The article reprinted below takes up these issues, together with New York State’s vicious anti-labor Taylor Law. The April issue of the CCU newsletter also pushed for a “Yes” vote on a resolution for “7K or Strike” in the PSC, which wound up being approved overwhelmingly at a meeting of the union’s chapter at the CUNY Graduate Center. Other items included a report on the struggle against the CIA incorporating CUNY’s Baruch College into its sinister “Signature Schools Program”; and a piece on the terrible conditions and pay of the mainly African American and Latino workers in campus cafeterias throughout the CUNY system.

In mid-March, CUNY management finally came to the table to formally start negotiations for a new contract with our union, the Professional Staff Congress. Key for the “contingent majority” at CUNY is the demand for “\$7K” – a minimum of \$7,000 per three-credit course for adjuncts – and real job security. Current poverty pay for adjuncts averages around \$3,500 per course.



Internationalist photo

At 14 December 2017 union contract campaign march.

The formal adoption of the \$7K demand by the PSC is an important step – but it must be put into practice, and that means ***fighting to win it***. In previous issues of this newsletter, CUNY Contingents Unite has discussed what this would mean. The union’s adoption of the \$7K demand is a result of years-long efforts by adjunct activists, going back to the campaign the CCU initiated in 2014. Unable to live on CUNY’s poverty pay, adjuncts and other “contingent” employees were fed up with the ever-increasing inequalities enshrined in, and *deepened* by, each successive contract agreed to by the leadership of the union. We stressed that the \$7K demand must be ***“a bottom-line point in the contract fight.”*** What would a real fight to win this demand require? Up against powerful opponents, arguments about justice, equity and the obvious rightness of our case for \$7K would not bring victory. It’s a question of ***power***.

Thus, we argued that winning requires “bring[ing] in ***large numbers of undergrads from across the CUNY system*** ... connecting the push for 7K to the fight for no tuition, for open admissions, and against the racist and anti-immigrant repression that targets large numbers of CUNY students and their families.” It requires actively “link[ing] up with ***HEOs, CLTs and other sectors*** of the PSC, fighting the two-tier system’s divide-and-conquer logic all down the line.” It requires mobilizing “together with ***campus workers*** who are mainly members of DC37, UNITE-HERE and other unions.” And it requires rejecting the ivory-tower outlook imbued by academia, and actually connecting up with the power and

struggles of the working class and oppressed throughout the city and beyond. This is especially crucial given that a real fight for \$7K “would inevitably come up against the New York State *Taylor Law*.” (See “Fighting to Win the Struggle for \$7K,” *The Advance*, October 2017.)

Instead, the union leadership’s primary strategy for \$7K presently centers on lobbying state representatives in Albany on April 24. The history of labor struggle shows that lobbying Democratic politicians falls flat on its face as a strategy, failing to mobilize labor’s power in the quest to win crucial demands.

At the December 4, 2017 contract campaign march called by the PSC, a contingent of CCU and student activists led militant chants of “7K or Strike!” and “Smash the Taylor Law!” After the march reached Baruch College, where CUNY’s Board of Trustees was meeting, the contingent led a large part of the crowd in chanting the “7K or Strike” slogan. The union leadership was clearly unsettled by the chant, which cuts against the strategy of requesting elected officials to “do the right thing.” Moreover, the anti-strike Taylor Law is administered by both the Democratic and Republican parties. This was shown in the 2005 NYC transit workers strike, when Republican mayor Michael Bloomberg worked with Democratic state attorney general Eliot Spitzer to jail the striking union’s president and impose heavy fines and penalties on the union and its members.

### A Weapon in Bosses’ Anti-Labor Arsenal

New York is one of 24 states with laws “illegalizing” public employee strikes. New York State’s Taylor Law grew out of a previous anti-strike law, the Condon-Wadlin Act, which failed to prevent the victorious transit workers strike of 1966. In that historic battle, jailed strike leader Mike Quill famously declared: “The judge can drop dead in his black robes. I don’t care if I rot in jail. I will not call off the strike.” Hanging tough, the workers brought the city to a standstill – and won.

The very next year, the ruling class rolled out the Taylor Law as a new and improved weapon against public employee strikes. Section 210, “Prohibition of Strikes,” begins: “No public employee or employee organization shall engage in a strike, and no public employee or employee organization shall cause, instigate, encourage, or condone a strike.” It further states: “For the purpose of [the law], an employee who is absent from work without permission, or who abstains wholly or in part from the performance of his duties in his normal manner without permission, on the date or dates when a strike occurs, shall be presumed to have engaged in such strike on such date or dates.”

Yet labor leaders have essentially made a devil’s bargain regarding the Taylor Law, often arguing that it’s not so bad after all as



Internationalist photo

**Part of the CCU and student contingent at the 4 December 2017 PSC contract campaign rally outside Baruch College.**

it contains provisions making it easier to bring in new membership sectors, collect dues and “stabilize” labor relations. Additionally, the 1982 Triborough Amendment to the Taylor Law mandates public employers to maintain the terms of expired contracts until new ones are negotiated. Thus, when CUNY contract negotiations continued for years without a settlement, the old contract remained in effect, as pressure built to sign something, anything.

By buckling under to the prohibition of public workers’ most fundamental weapon – the strike – the labor officialdom helped cement the subjugation of the working class to the capitalist state, reinforcing this with loyal political subordination of labor to the bosses’ Democratic Party.

At CUNY, the Taylor Law helps back up the grotesque two-tier labor system, which management uses to divide and conquer us all. The truth is there is no way to dismantle that system within the boss-dictated “rules of the game,” in which the Taylor Law looms large. The fight for \$7K, and to do away with the adjunct poverty that is the foundation for two-tier labor, cannot be won within the framework of “regular” trade unionism, or simply at the bargaining table.

### What West Virginia Teachers Taught

The labor movement has been electrified by the teachers strike in West Virginia. It’s a state whose supreme court declared “Public employees have no right to strike” in 1990, after a Democratic attorney general asked it to declare illegal “any strike or concerted work stoppage by the public teachers of this state.” After a revolt inside the union led to the strike, the state’s rulers faced the prospect of jailing 30,000 teachers – and decided not to try. The WV teachers won a real (though still limited) victory – not least because they showed you can wage an “illegal” strike and win. This example has helped helping inspire walkouts and struggles in Oklahoma, Kentucky and Arizona, as the impact continues to spread.

Here in New York, to take on the Taylor Law is a serious

## **Is There Such a Thing as a “Just Contract”? Demolish the Two-Tier Labor System!**

*The following opinion piece is excerpted from the October 2017 issue of the CCU newsletter.*

In this short opinion piece I would like to argue the following:

We face powerful enemies in this fight, so only by mobilizing a greater power will it be possible to win. That means a class-struggle orientation, bring-ing in powerful sectors of the city’s multiracial work-ing class in alliance with large numbers of CUNY un-dergrads, immigrants, and oppressed communities. This is doubly important given the Taylor Law’s “illegalization” of strikes by public employees.

The two-tier system can never be made “just” or “fair.” The burning, urgent demand for 7K must be fought for as part of the struggle to disman-tle and demolish the entire two-tier labor system. That will not be accomplished within the framework of “normal” labor-management negotiations.... It can only happen as part of a major upheaval against the whole set-up through which the hand-picked representatives of the ruling class lord it over everyone who works and studies at CUNY.

As we have just about all seen for our-selves, the union bureaucracy is a central obstacle to the struggle. For them, the time is never right for a real attack on the two-tier system. Adjuncts are sup-posed to adjust their expectations eternally to the logic and framework set by that system. If we don’t, then all too often we’re treated like ingrate no-goodniks who should sit down, shut up and wait for better times. Meanwhile, the bureaucrats endlessly aver, better times will come only through more of their eternal subjugation to the Democratic Party that administers the Taylor Law in NY State, racist “broken windows” in NYC, and paved the way for Trump. Forget about it.

In a sharp struggle, political clarity is cru-cial. And

here I would like to challenge slogans about a “just” or “fair” contract, “the contract you deserve,” etc. It’s no accident that the labor bureaucracy – and management – use the language of “fair” and “just” contracts. The whole framework is false; to put it an-other way, it’s the ideology of capitalism itself.

Any contract negotiation consists of haggling over the price of labor power – and those of us who depend on a paycheck to survive have little choice, so long as this social system continues. So yes, unless we can do this “bargaining” collectively, we’re pretty much helpless. Some contracts are better, or worse, than others. But there’s nothing fair or just about the bargain.

So why does the labor bureaucracy go on about fair and just contracts? Because its social function is to serve as “mediators” of labor’s struggle with capi-tal. It sees that as natural and eternal. It is this social role that leads to its eternal sellouts.

Not for nothing did Karl Marx call “A fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work” a “conservative motto,” in his classic *Wages, Price and Profit* (1865). While fighting for higher wages and better conditions, he ar-gued, the working class should “instead inscribe on [its] banner the revolutionary watchword: ‘Abolition of the wages system’” – that is, of capitalism.

Why does this matter now? It matters because a strategy for winning needs to be genuinely radical, that is, to get to the root of the problem. James P. Cannon put it like this in a classic article from the ’30s: a struggle between labor and capital is “decided by power; ‘justice’ has nothing to do with it. The workers will not have justice until they take over the world.” And our chance of winning this particular battle depends on placing it squarely in that context. ■

proposition. It requires the will to wage a hard struggle. It requires a real study of the history and lessons of past struggles. It requires in-depth organization, preparation, and systematic winning over of large numbers of adjuncts and others throughout the bottom tiers of CUNY’s labor system. This can lay the basis for gaining significant numbers of those further up in the scale to helping win the fight. Winning requires serious, principled and savvy work in the union, without being bound by its bureaucratic structures, while firmly rejecting anti-union schemes or reliance on the bosses’ politicians and government. A winning strategy means working to build class-struggle leadership.

As some West Virginia teachers pointed out, unions themselves used to be illegal. The way you win the right to strike is by striking, and doing so with enough power to prevail. To defeat and smash the Taylor Law, we need to connect with the power of those who make this city run. The ruling class can go a long time without college essays being graded. It can’t go

without construction, phone service, subways and buses, taxis, restaurants, domestic workers and the rest of the multiracial, largely immigrant working class.

Pie in the sky? Hardly. Thousands of construction workers are rallying against union-busting at Hudson Yards. Spectrum workers have been on strike for over a year. Verizon workers have struck repeatedly in recent years. NYC taxi workers are up in arms against the destruction of their livelihood. Immigrant restaurant and warehouse workers have waged inspiring struggles from the Hot and Crusty bakery to B&H Photo. Subway and bus workers – and riders! – are fed up with the predations of the MTA. The daughters and sons of this working class are the quarter million students at CUNY.

Adjuncts can’t win \$7K on our own. But we can win it. It requires a full-on upheaval at CUNY, spilling well beyond the university, helping bring out the power of the workers and oppressed against the lords of capital who run roughshod over us all. It’s about time. ■

# Class Struggle Education Workers: Who We Are and What We Stand For

As we wrote in the first issue of the CSEW Newsletter: “Class Struggle Education Workers was formed in September 2008 by activists in two New York City education unions: the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), representing public primary and secondary educational personnel, and the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), which represents faculty and staff at the City University of New York. We also seek to involve campus and school administrative staff and maintenance workers who are in the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) as well as other unionized and non-unionized workers. Those initiating the group played leading roles in fights against merit pay and in defense of ‘excessed’ teachers in the NYC schools, in opposition to the ‘two-tier’ labor system at CUNY, in defense of immigrant students and in solidarity with striking teachers in Mexico and Puerto Rico.” Since that time, we have grown to include members in the health and hospital fields organized in AFSCME District 37 and also from the California Faculty Association (CFA). As we wrote: “The felt need was for a grouping to help provide a clear orientation and leadership in the struggle to defend and transform public education in the interests of working people and the oppressed. This intersects almost every crucial social and political issue of the day and ultimately means bringing down the rule of capital. As this requires a thoroughgoing break from the entire framework of ‘business unionism’ and the outlook of the union bureaucracy, general calls for more militancy and union democracy alone only lead to a dead end. Instead, the Class Struggle Education Workers is based on a class-struggle program, presented below.

## Class Struggle Education Workers Program

We have formed Class Struggle Education Workers (CSEW) as part of a broader fight for a revitalization and transformation of the labor movement into an instrument for the emancipation of the working class and the oppressed. The CSEW defends unions and unionism against the ongoing attacks of the capitalist class while we wage programmatic struggle against the class-collaborationist labor bureaucracy that seeks to use the unions as an instrument for the disciplining of labor in the interests of capital. The subservience of organized labor goes beyond the PSC, UFT and AFSCME, and we look forward to a class-struggle tendency encompassing militants in a number of unions. We support the basic positions expressed in the Internationalist pamphlets *Stop CUNY’s Anti-Immigrant War Purge* and *Marxism and the Battle over Education*. We stand for:

1) Free public education from kindergarten through graduate school. Abolish corporate-dominated Boards of Trustees and mayoral control of the schools: students, teachers and workers

(together with parents at primary and secondary schools) should democratically control schools and universities.

2) Stop education privatization and making the City University of New York into “Walmart U”! For militant action against deepening inequality at CUNY and throughout the school system. Abolish the two-tier academic labor system that pays adjunct and other contingent education workers poverty wages. Job security, parity and full health coverage for adjuncts and all “part-timers,” including graduate students: equal pay for equal work. Unite against the drive to gut public higher education and turn it into a “platform” for making profits.

3) Defend and transform public education in the interests of working people and the oppressed. Oppose capitalist corporatization. Cancel all student debt. Living stipend and free housing for students. No to “charter schools” as an opening wedge to privatization. Down with “merit pay” in any form. In the UFT: Full-time positions for all teachers “excessed” or “reorganized” out of their jobs (ATRs). Defend tenure, restore seniority, abolish “rubber rooms” that penalize teachers subject to unjust accusations.

4) Oppose resegregation of schools: separate is not equal. Stop discrimination and racist attacks against black, Latino, Asian and immigrant students. Fight budget cuts, tuition hikes, exclusionary tests and all anti-working-class, anti-minority measures. Restore open admissions, no tuition. Down with the anti-education “No Child Left Behind” act. Stop anti-immigrant “war purges” (like the one CUNY launched in 2001) against undocumented students and workers. Full citizenship rights for all immigrants.

5) Mobilize the power of labor together with minorities, immigrants and students in an all-out fight to smash the Taylor Law. Keep bosses’ courts out of the unions. Police and military recruiters out of the schools. No cops, prison or security guards in the unions. For a single union of all university workers. Oust the sellout bureaucrats, for a class-struggle leadership.

6) Parental leave for all. Free childcare on campus, available around the clock for students and employees. Full reproductive rights, including free abortion on demand and full availability of contraceptives; no to reactionary campaigns against sex education.

7) Defend the rights of labor, minorities, immigrants, women, gays and lesbians. Make PSC defense of Mumia real – mobilize workers’ power for his freedom. Solidarity with teachers and all workers in Mexico, Puerto Rico and elsewhere.

8) End union support to capitalist politicians (Democrats, Republicans, Greens, et al.). For workers’ strikes against the war – Defeat U.S. imperialism. Oppose U.S. war threats against Iran, Cuba, China, North Korea. For a class-struggle workers party to fight for a workers government. ■

# The Crime of Medical Deportations

*The following was published on the CSEW website on 22 March 2017, and reprinted in The Internationalist No. 47.*

The fact that American society is gravely ill is now taken for granted even by its own pundits. Its acute political and social crisis is a symptom of the advanced decay of capitalism, a system long overdue for extinction. Today, political “debate” in Donald Trump’s Washington is focusing on how to ramp up the capitalist assault on health care, while escalating deportations even beyond the record number carried out under Barack Obama.

What American capitalism does to health care is shown by a particularly sinister form of deportations that has been taking place for over a decade. Cynically dubbed “medical repatriation,” the practice involves deporting undocumented immigrants – many of them workers injured on jobs with little-to-no safety standards – to their countries of origin while in a comatose or non-responsive state. While private hospitals “dumping” poor patients onto public ones has led to some widely-reported scandals, this deadly dumping-by-deportation has largely flown under the radar.

A 2012 report shed light on the practice that, at the time of the report’s release, accounted for “more than 800 cases of attempted or successful medical repatriations across the United States in the past six years.” Among the cases it documents are those of:

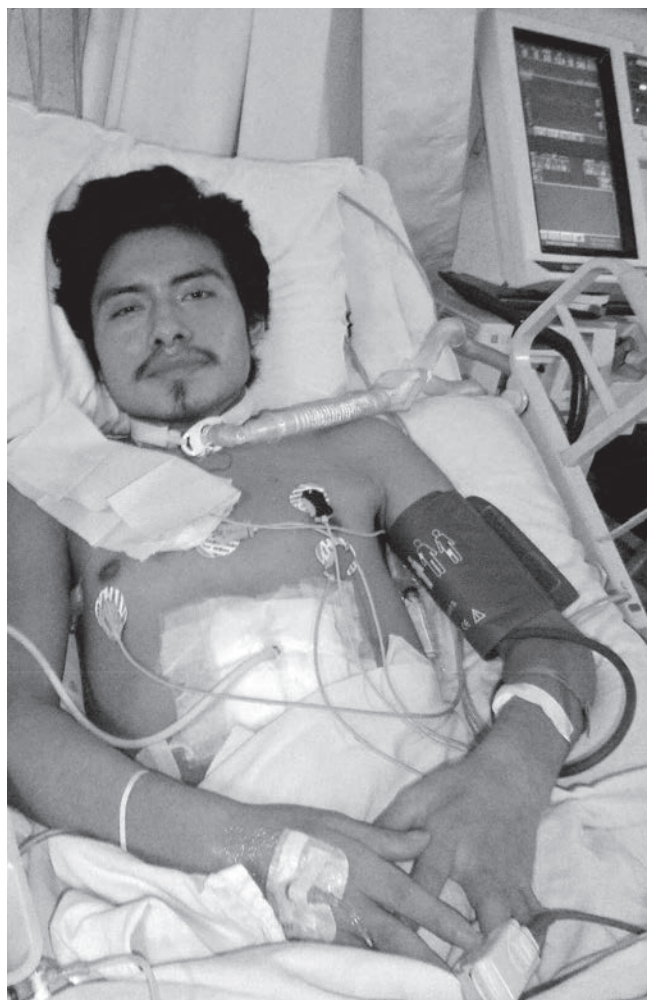
“a nineteen-year-old girl who died shortly after being wheeled out of a hospital back entrance typically used for garbage disposal and transferred to Mexico; a car accident victim who died shortly after being left on the tarmac at an airport in Guatemala; and a young man with catastrophic brain injury who remains bed-ridden and suffering from constant seizures after being forcibly repatriated to his elderly mother’s hilltop home in Guatemala.”

– Center for Social Justice at Seton Hall Law School and the Health Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, *Discharge, Deportation, and Dangerous Journeys: A Study on the Practice of Medical Repatriation* (December 2012).

The figure of 800 is certainly a vast underestimation, since a single hospital in Arizona, “St. Joseph’s in Phoenix, with a focus on keeping down the rising cost of uncompensated care, repatriates about eight uninsured patients a month,” or about 100 patients a year (*New York Times*, 9 November 2008).

Most instances of medical deportation are carried out by private firms that specialize in colluding with hospital administrators to tear undocumented patients from the long-term care they need, and send them back to their countries of origin where specialized care is either non-existent or out of reach. One company, “Mexcare,” boasts of a network of 28 hospitals south of the border, promising “significant saving to U.S. hospitals” seeking to get rid of “unfunded Latin American nationals.” A social worker at Mt. Sinai Hospital in Chicago reported that “We’ve done flights to Lithuania, Poland, Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico” (“Immigrants Facing Deportation by U.S. Hospitals,” *New York Times*, 3 August 2008).

The Seton Hall/Health Justice report notes that “when



**Quélino Ojeda Jiménez in Chicago hospital in 2010. Hospital disconnected him from equipment and deported him three days before Christmas. He died a year later in horribly underequipped Mexican hospital.**

critically ill or catastrophically injured immigrant patients are transferred to facilities abroad, their lives and health are often jeopardized because these facilities cannot provide the care they require and the transfers themselves are inherently risky, resulting in significant deterioration of a patient’s health, or even death.” A particularly horrifying case was that of Quélino Ojeda Jiménez, a 20-year-old construction worker from Mexico who in 2010 fell from a twenty-foot roof on a job site in Chicago. Having gone into a coma for three days, Jiménez woke up paralyzed and on a ventilator.

“The hospital cared for Quélino for four months before deciding it was ‘best to return him close to his family,’ although his family contested his repatriation. Three days before Christmas, hospital staff disconnected him from equipment and rolled him away on a gurney as one of his caregivers pleaded for them to stop. Crying and unable to speak, Quélino could do nothing.... Quélino languished for more than a year in a Mexican hospital that had no rehabilitation services and

lacked the funding for new filters needed for his ventilator. After suffering two cardiac arrests and developing bedsores and a septic infection, Quelino died there on January 1, 2012.”

Countless more undocumented workers have been left for dead because of the foul practice of literally throwing patients out of hospitals. According to a CBS News report (23 April 2013), some hospitals lie to patients, saying their families want them home, and lie to their families, saying the patient wants to return home. All this to extort a consent for deportation. And if there is none? Well, the hospital can just make it up!

The New York *Daily News* (25 June 2013) reported on the case of an undocumented Polish immigrant who, after living in this country for 30 years, “fell unconscious after a stroke in the U.S. and woke up back in Poland” without ever giving consent, after a New Jersey hospital had him dumped “like a sack of potatoes” onto a plane operated by Air Escort Medical Flight.

Juxtaposed to this macabre picture is the practice of “red blanket” or “pavilion” treatment for wealthy patients. This includes “private hotel-like rooms on the top floor, which come with gourmet food, plush bath robes and small business centers,” together with doting attention from hospital staff, according to an indignant op-ed by a young Boston physician (“How Hospitals Coddle the Rich,” *New York Times*, 26 October 2015). The author reports that of the 15 top hospitals, as rated by *U.S. News and World Report*, at least 10 offer such luxury treatment “options.”

In 1894, the French novelist Anatole France wrote with bitter irony that “the law, in its majestic equality, forbids rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal their bread.” As the horrific stories of the health-care industry’s cruelty for profit illustrate, U.S. capitalism can boast that it gives rich and poor alike the “freedom” to pay up or die.

### “DSH,” Deportations and Capitalism’s Death Spiral

Hospitals are legally required to admit and treat patients in need of urgent care, regardless of immigration or insurance status, under the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act of 1986. Facilities categorized as “disproportionate share hospitals” in terms of the percentage of uninsured and low-income patients they treat receive additional funds from Medicaid, known as “DSH” payments. However, hospitals are not required to keep patients after they stabilize. Since most long-term care facilities will not accept uninsured and undocumented patients, hospital administrators are eager to ship these undocumented patients off – out of sight and out of mind.

Today, as Republicans scramble to “repeal and replace” Obamacare, praising “Obama’s signature achievement” is *de rigueur* for Democrats. While Obamacare increased eligibility for Medicaid, it included many regressive measures, including the tax on the better health coverage (derisively dubbed “Cadillac” plans) won by some unionized workers. It also provided a billions-rich trough of new profits for the insurance companies. Meanwhile, employers were not required to offer company health plans to employees working less than 30 hours a week – so in response, many bosses responded by cutting workers’ hours (see “Obamacare Screws Workers,



Josh Haner/New York Times

**Chinese immigrant Kong Fong Yu being wheeled into court in September 2008 as NYC hospital sought to deport him over objections of court-appointed guardian.**

Windfall for Insurance Companies,” *The Internationalist* No. 41, September-October 2015).

Under Obamacare, hospitals received less from DSH payments: since the number of uninsured people dramatically decreased, the federal government cut the DSH funding it gave to the states, which then cut the DSH funds disbursed to hospitals. Public hospitals were hit particularly hard. The result for undocumented immigrant patients? The Seton Hall/Health Justice report predicted that under Obamacare, “the reduced allocation of federal funding ... will lead to more medical repatriations as hospitals, particularly those that provide a disproportionate amount of care to uninsured and publicly insured patients, face additional financial strain.”

The anti-immigrant drive ramped up by Obama, now being escalated even further by Trump, has devastating effects on health, as noted in “The Health Implications of Deportation Policy,” a study published in the *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved* (May 2015). Authors Juliana E. Morris and Daniel Palazuelos note:

“Physicians and public health professionals are growing increasingly concerned about the effects of U.S. deportation policy on human health. Children who lose their parents to deportation are at increased risk for behavioral, mental, and physical health problems. Immigrant communities that have experienced raids and deportations have higher rates of stress, fear, and decreased health care utilization.”

Immigrants held in detention often face “inadequate medical attention” as well as the effects of isolation and acute stress. Having carried out extensive research in Central America, the authors note that “the effects of deportation extend well beyond the individual and family unit,” often with devastating consequences for entire communities, and for poor countries dominated by U.S. imperialism.

# NYC Health Care Workers Say: Mobilize the Power of Labor to Defend Muslims and Immigrants

*The following motion was adopted by AFSCME DC 37 Local 768 (NYC Health Care Employees) on February 6. The resolution is also available on the Local 768 web page at: <http://www.local768.org/>.*

WHEREAS, the crisis of the undocumented in the United States has deep roots in a system of oppression and colonialism in which the U.S. played a major role; and  
WHEREAS, some Local 768 members have been given instructions to decrease the population of undocumented immigrants in their facilities by 40%; and  
WHEREAS, Local 768 members, like health care providers and other workers, have grave concerns over threats to this desperately needed safety net coverage; and  
WHEREAS, Local 768 believes we have a basic ethical obligation to defend undocumented immigrants in need of health care from round-ups, jail and deportation by ICE; and  
WHEREAS, any attempt to have Local 768 members identify patients for such discriminatory treatment would violate not only our professional obligations but NYC law and NYC Health + Hospitals' stated policy; and  
WHEREAS, this situation is made even more urgent by Trump's attacks on "sanctuary cities" and NYC regulations limiting cooperation with federal immigration authorities; and  
WHEREAS, we join with NYC-area building-service,

education, Teamster, construction trades and other unionists in standing up for the rights of us all in opposition to attacks on our Muslim and immigrant sisters and brothers; and

WHEREAS, solidarity is a matter of life or death for labor, which is now under attack by anti-union "right to work" legislation and court cases (Friedrichs); therefore be it

RESOLVED, that Local 768 formally and publicly states the following:

- 1) We will continue to serve all those in need and oppose any attempt to use immigration status against them, or to collect such information.
- 2) We will not go along with demands to cut care to undocumented patients, which would violate our most basic ethical responsibilities.
- 3) We also reject any attempt to undermine the federally mandated right to treatment of all those seeking emergency care.
- 4) Local 768 will establish a committee to defend the rights of immigrant patients, families and staff.
- 5) We advocate that the unions of the NYC metropolitan area come together in a massive protest showing the power of labor to stand up against any and all anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and other racist attacks in line with the labor motto, "AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL."

## **"We Will Continue to Serve All Those in Need"**

Today, with Donald Trump vowing to deport people for even the smallest of legal infractions (like smoking in a public park), the ante has been upped. Capitalism in its decaying, imperialist stage throws into sharp relief the disjunction between the vast wealth and luxury of the parasites who exploit workers like Quelino Ojeda Jiménez, and the savagery which is required to sustain that wealth. While hospital administrators cry poverty, billionaire capitalists amass vast profits at the expense of the working class. The only way out of this junction is through a socialist revolution, in which the working class – of all national origins and races, with or without "papers" – seizes the means of production and establishes a planned economy in which production is for *social need*, not profit.

While the crisis of health care is inextricably linked to the crisis of capitalism and the need for revolution, militant workers and defenders of immigrant rights can do something about this *now*. Obstacles to effective action must be overcome, centrally the chaining of labor's power to the Democrats – like NYC mayor Bill de Blasio, who just expanded the number of offenses for which the NYPD will cooperate with immigration cops to 170. The *social power* of the working class needs to be unchained and

mobilized to fight against deportations – medical and otherwise.

With pressure mounting to slash the number of undocumented patients, an important example has been set by NYC Health Care Employees Local 768 of AFSCME DC 37. In early February, the local unanimously passed a motion resolving that it "will not go along with demands to cut care to undocumented patients," but instead will "continue to serve all those in need and oppose any attempt to use immigration status against them, or to collect such information." It also called for NYC-area unions to organize "a massive protest showing the power of labor to stand up against any and all anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and other racist attacks" (see box above).

As we have repeatedly emphasized, the organized power of the multiracial, multiethnic working class is key to jamming the wheels of the capitalist deportation machine. Health-care workers throughout New York and nationwide should take up, pass and put into practice the kind of motion approved by the sisters and brothers of Local 768, standing in defense of their undocumented patients. And if an emboldened ICE tries to target medical facilities, all defenders of immigrant and labor rights should join with health-care and other city workers to stop the immigrant-hunters – and as part of this struggle, fight to put an end to medical deportations. ■

# Capitalist Rulers Take a Wrecking Ball to CSU

*The following article was Part of a leaflet issued by the the Internationalist Group in Los Angeles in January 2017.*

At one time California could claim, with some justification, one of the best public higher education systems in the world. Public colleges and universities were in theory to be tuition-free. While that was increasingly eroded through ever-increasing “fees,” access to quality higher education was relatively available to the middle class and sections of the working class and poor. Enrollment in the University of California (UC) expanded to the point where today it has a quarter million students on ten campuses, while California State University (CSU) has almost half a million students on 23 campuses and California community colleges enroll 2.4 million students on 72 campuses. Even so, the system was rigidly tiered, and therefore inherently discriminatory.<sup>1</sup> And now it is being gutted as the goal of free, quality public higher education for all becomes increasing remote and unattainable under the rotting capitalist system.

The existence of a system of mass public higher education in California was the result of several historical factors, including the dominant position of U.S. imperialism coming out of WWII unscathed and the Cold War against the Soviet Union, a bureaucratically deformed workers state whose very existence was a threat to world capitalism. In California, the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education called for a vast expansion of post-secondary education, in large part in response to the Soviet launching of Sputnik, the first satellite to circle the earth, a few years earlier. But with the destruction of the USSR by counterrevolution in 1989-92, the devastation of trade unions in the U.S. under “neoliberal” economic policies of Democrats and Republicans alike, and a world capitalist economic crisis from 2007-08 on, the reasons for subsidizing public higher education no longer exist in the eyes of the ruling class.

As entire industries have been closed down in the United States and shipped overseas to raise profit rates, capital no longer sees the need for a generally technically savvy workforce. Instead, big business wants a sharply segmented labor force, divided between a highly educated elite (Silicon Valley) and low-paid service workers (McDonalds). The crisis of

<sup>1</sup> Under the tripartite California system, the top one-eighth of California high school graduates could go to the UC system, the top one-third to the CSU system and the rest would be eligible for community colleges, if deemed “capable of benefitting from instruction” on the basis of their scores on standardized SAT and ACT tests.



**Students protest proposed tuition hikes at the California State University system, November 2014.**

Rachael Garner/The Daily Californian

higher education mirrors the hollowing out of the middle class throughout American society. Retailers catering to a middle-income clientele (Sears, J.C. Penny’s) lose out to upscale (Nordstrom) and low-end (Walmart) marketers. And as U.S. social structure increasingly resembles that of Latin America, you have an expansion of paramilitary police forces to keep the impoverished masses down. These broad social changes have led to the steady erosion of California’s system of higher education over the past three decades. Hardest hit has been the CSU system.

An important recent report, *Equity Interrupted*,<sup>2</sup> put out by the CSU faculty union, the California Faculty Association (CFA), makes a number of key observations, but offers no program for fighting these trends. The CSU receives far less state support per student today than it did 30 years ago. Adjusted for inflation, California spends 41 percent less on a CSU student today than it did in 1985. The gutting of funding for the CSU has been steady, although the post-2007 depression accelerated the general trend. The CSU has attempted to make up for the loss of state funding partly by shifting the burden onto students, which has meant astronomical tuition increases. Just from 2001 to 2011 tuition increased by 383%. The reduction of spending has inevitably resulted in a lowering of the quality of education, despite the often heroic efforts of faculty who struggle against great odds to provide their students with a decent education.

The gutting of state support has far reaching implications beyond tuition increases. It has also led to more and more reliance on contingent faculty, who have no rights, no job security, and are paid poverty wages. This fosters a climate of fear and subservience, of regimentation and a caste system within the faculty that is poison to any notion of academic freedom, contributing to the intellectual impoverishment of the CSU. Along with the reduced funding for faculty and

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.calfac.org/item/equity-interrupted-how-california-cheating-its-future>

students is a turn toward “business models.” As state funds dry up, there is a turn to private donors, and more bureaucratism in the system. As full-time faculty positions evaporate, administrators multiply like rabbits. A parasitical layer of administrators who neither teach nor do research take home two or three times what tenured faculty members make.

On top of this, students are forced to work more hours to support themselves (and often their families) while they study, which reduces the quantity and quality of the time they can devote to study. There is a shocking level of deprivation, including homelessness and hunger, among the student body. According to a study commissioned by the CSU itself, *one in ten students are homeless*, and fully *one in five* do not always have enough to eat. Food insecurity among CSU students has reached such a level that many campuses have had to initiate official programs to address the problem. *Fresno State has a link on its official website to an app that alerts students whenever catered events have leftovers!* So after administrators have their swanky get-togethers, their hungry students can scrounge for the scraps.

All of this has been taking place alongside seismic demographic shifts in California and the CSU. In 1985 over two-thirds of CSU undergraduate students were white; in 2015 barely a quarter were white. This is a reflection of the changing California population as a whole, which was 61% white in 1985, and 39% white in 2015. However, the drop in the percentage of white student enrollment in the CSU has been greater than the drop in the percentage in the state generally, as white students tend to have greater opportunities to attend more elite colleges. As one faculty member aptly put it, “As the student body of the CSU became darker, funding became lighter.” In short, *the cutting of state funding in the CSU is also driven by racism*. This goes back to 1978 when white middle-class resentment was key to the Reaganite “taxpayer revolt” culminating in the passage of Prop 13 that sharply limited money for public education.

An important point not mentioned in the CFA report is that along with declining state support for education, there has been a growth of spending on prisons. In fact, there has been an almost dollar for dollar match of money going *out of* higher education and *into* the prison system. According to a report by the UC,<sup>3</sup> the state prison population increased by 554% in the three decades from 1980 to 2010, outstripping the 76% growth of the population of California by more than 7 times. In the same period, the share of the state general fund going to prisons *increased* from 2.9% to 10.3% while the share going to the UC and CSU systems *decreased* from 9.6% to 5.2%. Capitalism, in its death agony, cannot provide even the most basic needs to the population, and instead throws the unwanted “excess” in prisons.

Year after year the legislature, governor and Board of Trustees all come back with the same reason for why the budget must be cut, or can’t be restored to previous levels. In lean years or fat, the constant refrain is: There is no money! This plea of poverty is a cynical lie. California has the resources

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/infocenter/california-expenditures-corrections-and-public-education>

necessary to provide everybody with a decent education (not to mention health care, jobs, etc.). Indeed, California by itself has the seventh- or eighth-largest economy in the world and is home to more billionaires than any other state and more than all but two countries in the world! It’s not that they don’t have the money. The drying up of state funding for public education is a result of the *drive to privatization* and *because the ruling class wants an educational system more stratified along racial and class lines*. As V.I. Lenin pointed out a century ago:

“[E]very old institution, however barbarous and rotten it may appear to be, is kept going by the forces of certain ruling classes. And there is *only one* way of smashing the resistance of those classes, and that is to find, in the very society which surrounds us, the forces which can – and, owing to their social position, must – constitute the power capable of sweeping away the old and creating the new, and to enlighten and organize those forces for the struggle.”

–V.I. Lenin, “The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism” (March 1913)

Today people are rightly alarmed at the threat posed by the incoming Trump administration which has declared war on public education. But this war has been carried out by Democratic and Republican administrations alike. The expansion of public education in California began under Democratic governor Pat Brown, and the tearing down of that system has been presided over by his son, Governor Jerry Brown. In fact, throughout this entire period, the Democrats have controlled the state senate by wide margins, and they controlled the state assembly for all but two years in the mid-1990s when the Republicans had a slim majority. *It is the Democratic Party that has been carrying out the destruction of the CSU system*. Yet in every election, the CFA has invariably pushed its membership to vote for whichever Democrat is running.

We will get nowhere by arguing with capitalist politicians, whether they have an (R) or a (D) before their name, to adjust their priorities. Republicans and Democrats are the partner parties of the ruling class, the bourgeoisie. They do not represent the workers, and especially not the sons and daughters of black and immigrant working people. The fact is that the gutting of the CSU is a *bi-partisan attack on the working class*. All around the country and around the world, the capitalists and their politicians are slashing away at public education at every level. The attacks on the CSU illustrate in a very clear way the racist and anti-working-class nature of these attacks. Tens and hundreds of thousands of young people who want to study are being told, “Forget it, you’re not wanted.” That alone is a stark indictment of this society and the entire capitalist system, where the drive for profit is *counterposed* to the most basic human needs.

The fight to make quality education available to all can only go forward as part of the struggle against the irrational and decaying profit system of racism and oppression. It is necessary to ***break with the Democrats*** and ***build a class struggle workers party*** to lead the fight for ***socialist revolution***, which is what it will take to secure genuine access to free, quality public education from preschool to university. ■

# Class Struggle vs. Dead End of Pressuring Democrats Fight Capitalist Assault on Public Education!

*The following article was part of a leaflet issued by the the Internationalist Group in Los Angeles in January 2017.*

We have entered a turbulent new political period in the United States and worldwide. The election of the raving, bigoted clown and woman molester Donald Trump sparked a wave of racist, anti-immigrant and homophobic attacks. Taking office on January 20 despite losing the popular vote by almost 3 million ballots, a sneering Trump in his inaugural speech wasted no time in launching his reactionary agenda. As CEO of U.S. imperialism he announced a trade war under the watchword “America First.” That same day the White House under new management proclaimed a “law and order administration” that would “empower our law enforcement officers.” This is a green light for violent police repression of Black Lives Matter protests.

Republican Trump declared war on working people and all the oppressed. The next day well over a million people took to the streets across the U.S. declaring “Not My President.” But the reality is that *Hillary Clinton and the Democrats are no less enemies of the world’s workers.* Clinton, the career representative of Walmart and Wall Street, would have continued the Obama administration’s massive deportations. She would have backed the Democratic mayors who are the bosses of the racist killer cops, and she was pushing for war with Russia. With its anti-worker economic policies, the Democratic Party pushed workers into the arms of Trump. *You can’t defeat Trump with Democrats – we must build a workers party to overthrow the rule of capital.*

Otherwise we’re just going to get more of the same racism, poverty and war. Count on it: it’s built into capitalism. And it’s up to us – workers, students and educators, African Americans, Latinos, Asians and immigrants – to put an end to this American nightmare.

First up in Trump’s line of fire are blacks and Latinos, young and old, and immigrants, with or without documents. In the face of threatened provocations by the hooded fascists of the Ku Klux Klan and the endless murders by trigger happy police (over 1,150 civilians killed by cops last year, three a day so far in 2017), we must mobilize the power of the multiracial, multiethnic, multinational working class.



**CSU students protest tuition hike at Cal State, 22 March 2017.**

Last September 1, the Internationalist Group at Cal State L.A. held a speakout against killer cop repression, from Mexico to the U.S. Our banner called to “Mobilize Labor/Black/Immigrant Power Against Racist Police Terror!” In October, the IG mobilized support among Cal State students and faculty for a protest at the U.S.-Mexico border to defend Haitians against exclusion and deportation. We must take concrete steps now to prepare for mass mobilizations of students, faculty and workers to stop deportations and racist attacks while insisting: “Only Revolution Can Bring Justice!”

Capitalism is decaying. A symptom of this decay is the systematic, bi-partisan dismantling of the public education system. Now Trump & Co. have declared war on public education. Among the Wall Street speculators, Duck Dynasty racists and antediluvian (before the flood) science deniers making up Trump’s cabinet is Betsy DeVos for Secretary of Education. DeVos is the billionaire heiress to the AmWay fortune, whose only “qualification” for the job is that she hates public schools and wants to get rid of them altogether (see article on p. 6).

Yet Trump/DeVos is only the culmination of Clinton, Bush and Obama/Duncan – privatizers all. The difference between the Democrats and Republicans is tactical. The Democrats have tried to undermine public education from within, with the collaboration of the misleaders of the teachers unions. DeVos and her co-‘thinkers’ will take a wrecking ball to the entire system of public education in this country. The Democrats will “feel your pain,” and then stab you in the back; the Republicans will just shoot

**To Defeat Trump, Break with the Democrats  
We Need a Revolutionary Workers Party**



**CUNY Internationalist Clubs call to abolish tuition at 12 November 2015 rally of Million Student March.**

you in the face. With charters or vouchers, their aim is the same.

Already in 1848, the *Communist Manifesto* called for “free education for all children in public schools.” Communists fight for freely available public education at all levels as a gain for the working class, even as the content of that education under capitalism inevitably reflects the dominant bourgeois ideology. Marxism is based on the highest scientific achievements of capitalist society, and we demand that the exploited and oppressed have access to these achievements as necessary tools in our fight for emancipation.

### **A Communist Program for Free, Quality Education for All**

In March, the Board of Trustees (BoT) that oversees the Cal State (CSU) system plans to introduce yet another tuition increase. This attack on youth and working people must be defeated! We in the Internationalist Group say that students and faculty of the CSU should prepare to **strike to block any tuition hike** at the same time as we call to **abolish tuition** and for **open admissions** to higher education. In addition, there should be a **state-paid living stipend for all students**, to enable poor and working-class students to attend, and **special programs** to overcome the effects of years of educational deprivation suffered by students in run-down, understaffed, underfunded primary and secondary schools.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of the drive to starve public colleges and universities of funds there has been an enormous expansion of contingent faculty who receive poverty pay and have no job security. In mobilizing against a tuition increase, students and faculty should call to at least **triple the salaries of adjuncts** and provide **stability of employment**. At the same time we have had the growth of a parasitical layer of administrators. We fight to get rid of them not as a solution to the fiscal problems the CSU faces, but because the BoT and the campus administrators are the

<sup>1</sup> As a direct result of the 1978 Prop 13 “taxpayer revolt” cutting off funds for local education, California schools went from tops in the nation to 48th out of 50 states in terms of student achievement in the space of a few years.

representatives of the capitalist class on campus. Their interests are not our interests. The universities should be run by those who learn, teach and work there. **Abolish the Board of Trustees and CSU administration! For student/teacher/worker control of the university!**

Not only should CSU be a sanctuary for immigrant and other students against threats of deportation and racist attacks, universities should be free of the military and repressive apparatus of the bourgeois state. The IG calls for **all cops, security guards, ROTC and military recruiters off campus!** In addition to fighting for full and free access to public education at all levels, against elite secondary schools, and against discriminatory stratified (two- or three-tier) college systems, against those who would further privatize higher education, we call for **expropriation of private colleges, universities and technological institutions**. Today as in the past, communists defend public education while the capitalists seek to limit, deform and ultimately destroy it.

*Free public education is a basic democratic right*, not inherently incompatible with capitalism. Even in some capitalist countries, such as Germany, education is generally free at all levels. Where free higher education has been achieved, this is usually because of specific historical circumstances. Nordic European countries with small populations have tried to carve out a niche in world capitalism as providers of high technology, from warplanes (Saab in Sweden) to cellphones (Nokia in Finland). In Mexico, education was made free and public as a gain of the aborted revolution of 1910-1917. But in decaying capitalism even basic democratic rights like access to education and health care are being eliminated.

*Today it will take a social revolution to achieve free higher education for all* – or simply to defend public schools against the Democratic and Republican privatizers and corporatizers who would destroy them. Cuba, where capitalism was overthrown by the Cuban Revolution, living under the gun of U.S. imperialism and hobbled by a sadistic economic blockade going on six decades, with a tiny fraction of the resources the U.S. has, managed to provide quality, free education at all levels. American students from ghettos and barrios who can’t possibly afford med school go to Havana to get a top-notch medical education. And Cubans are understandably proud of the medical aid they provided to hurricane-devastated Haiti, while Washington dispatched Navy destroyers and the 82nd Airborne to repress Haitians.

In the United States, the richest country on earth, higher education has become increasingly restricted and class-stratified, and hugely expensive. Even those who manage to overcome the enormous obstacles to make it to university and graduate end up with mountains of crushing student debt. In the recent election campaign, Democratic Party “socialist” Bernie Sanders picked up student and youth support when he came out for tuition-free public college education. Obama then proposed a plan for free junior college. Hillary Clinton came back with a plan to reduce student debt. These campaign promises were no more credible than Obama’s talk of immigration reform. Marxists fight instead

for *free public education from pre-K to grad school* and to *cancel all student debt!*

And education cannot be separated from overall social conditions. In the U.S. the kind of education you get is a direct function of wealth and poverty. The two best predictors of test scores are family income tax brackets and zip codes. The quality of the schools varies enormously depending on whether you come straight out of Compton or live in Beverly Hills. Upscale suburban schools with low student-teacher ratios are, within the bourgeois framework, often quite good, while crowded inner city classes sometimes meet in bathrooms, basketball courts and trailers. But the U.S. has all the resources necessary to completely abolish poverty tomorrow, and to make colleges and universities, technical institutes and art and music schools available to all. The *only* thing standing in the way is the system of production for profit rather than human need.

### How to Do It: Ally with the Working Class in Powerful Strike Action

Pie in the sky in the sweet bye and bye? Not at all. But how can this be achieved? There is a huge amount of discontent among the faculty and student body. A 2015 survey conducted by CFA found that *less than one in five faculty members* would recommend their job to students or to colleagues at other institutions. In 2015, CSU faculty voted 94% in favor of a strike. Student groups stage regular protests at the office of the chancellor. But the strategy has invariably been to pressure the administration and Democratic party politicians, as if these agents of the capitalist ruling class can be convinced to act in our interests. The CFA has spent enormous resources year after year lobbying Congress and appealing to the BoT to invest more in the CSU. All to no avail.

This less-than-useless strategy is based on the illusion that the administration is part of a university “community” and that there is some sort of “dialogue” about educational policy going on, when the reality is an unadorned class war. As a matter of principle, not one penny of union money should ever go into the coffers of a capitalist politician. The dollars that are thrown away at the Democrats should be going toward building the strength of the union, through, e.g. strike funds.

The way forward was indicated in the preparations for a system wide strike of the CSU in early 2016. This was always intended as a pressure tactic by the CFA leadership, whose slogan, printed on thousands of T-shirts, was “I don’t want to strike, but I will!” But, given the intransigence of the BoT to grant even the minimal 5% raise the union was asking for, its leaders were compelled to organize for a strike. The CFA leadership, to its credit, mobilized the faculty, and got labor unions around the state to sanction and support the strike. There was a real possibility that the entire CSU system could have been shut down. The administration was forced to back down



Internationalist Group “Speakout Against Police Terror From Los Angeles to Oaxaca,” at Cal State L.A., September 2016.

Internationalist photo

and grant the modest salary increases that CFA was asking for.

Key to that partial victory was the broad support of labor. To win real victories will take a real strike, on a different program. Instead of demanding a 5% pay raise, which did not even bring faculty back to 2006 levels, CFA should be striking for a *big, across-the-board raise for all faculty and staff*, massive raises and job protections for adjuncts, elimination of tuition, expansion of academic programs, and stipends for students. That program would win massive support. But it will not happen with a union leadership that always plays by the bosses’ rules. Far from upholding the basic class-struggle principle of “one out, all out” and the solidarity that demands, the CFA leadership legalistically accepted the contract provisions designed by the employers to prevent solidarity among various unions representing different workers on campus.

By themselves, students and faculty have little economic power. In Marxist terms they are part of the *petty bourgeoisie*, not part of the two great contending classes in capitalist society: the capitalists who own the means of production, and the workers who create all the wealth of this society but own little more than their own labor power, which they must sell in order to survive. The government can wait out a university strike – it’s saving money by not paying salaries – while industrial workers can stop the flow of profits by striking. A walkout by L.A. dock workers, who control one of every five containers moving through U.S. ports, in support of public education would be hugely more effective than the CFA’s lobbying of capitalist politicians.

Even though last year’s strike threat was called off when the administration gave in to some pretty minor demands, it did show the power that students and faculty have *when they ally with the working class*. And we have ties. The CSUs are working-class campuses – they are where the black and white, Latino and Asian working class sends their sons and daughters to get an education. Labor can and must be mobilized to fight for free, quality education for all. But while we fight for what



**Students protesting tuition hike at CSU, 22 March 2017.**

immediate gains are possible, we recognize that any such gains are always partial and reversible as long as the private property system exists. Under capitalism, the objective of education is inevitably determined by the interests of capital. As Marx wrote in *The German Ideology* (1847): “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.”

The unions should be militant champions, not only in words but in action, of the democratic rights of all. We must mobilize to defend immigrant students, oppose vouchers and other privatization schemes, and fight to defend workers’ rights. No doubt the Trump administration will attempt to do throughout the country what the Republicans succeeded in doing in Wisconsin, namely gut the unions and destroy collective bargaining and job protections. The fight to rescue what is left of public education in this country is connected with the fights against the broader attacks against the working class, all of which are connected to the struggle against the system that breeds racism and war: capitalism.

As the capitalist system is an international system, carrying out similar attacks on public education worldwide, the fight to defend public education must rely on the power of international solidarity. American educators could learn a lot from Mexican teachers who have been waging inspirational, militant battles in defense of public education. When our international brothers and sisters are under attack, it is our duty to come out in solidarity. In Mexico and Brazil, comrades of our League for the Fourth International have intensely participated in teachers strikes over the last year that have shut down entire states (Oaxaca and Rio de Janeiro) for months. We are fighting there to forge the kind of revolutionary leadership needed to win these battles, and we are fighting here to mobilize students, faculty and workers to take a side and become part of an international struggle against the worldwide system that oppresses us all.

While Donald Trump is the immediate threat, the central obstacle to unleashing the power of the working class in the U.S. is the pro-capitalist leadership of labor with its ties to the Democratic Party. What is needed is a leadership that bases

itself on the logic of the class struggle, not futile and counter-productive calls on some mythical “progressive” wing of the bourgeoisie. The bankruptcy of the labor bureaucracy was vividly shown in the last election, as the AFL-CIO called to back Clinton and the Democrats with their anti-worker policies. The parasitical bureaucratic layer must be swept away through a struggle to break the chains binding the unions as well as the Black Lives Matter, civil rights and immigrants’ rights movements to the capitalist Democratic Party. We need to build a revolutionary workers party.

For longer than we can remember, the American bourgeoisie has praised education as the path to social mobility. Always an exaggeration, today that is less and less true. This is first generation in U.S. history where children will be worse off than their parents. High school graduates can’t find industrial jobs, and even college grads are offered unpaid internships and those with doctoral degrees can only look forward to post-doc fellowships or adjunct positions paying little more than the minimum wage. This was behind the Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States and the *Indignados* who occupied the squares of southern Europe in 2011. Yet those movements disappeared without achieving anything.

Many young people are coming to the conclusion that capitalism is the problem, and express interest in socialist ideas. The effects of decaying capitalism are all around us. Who today believes in the “American Dream,” which as Malcolm X said was always a nightmare for black people? Yes, “the whole damn system is guilty as hell.” But that system has a name – capitalism – and it’s necessary to consciously organize the force that can overthrow it, the working class. Revolutions are prepared with painstaking work, as the Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky did leading up to the Russian Revolutions of 1917 that put an end to World War I, served as a beacon to workers and colonized peoples the world over, and which we celebrate a century later.

Combining militant activism in the class struggle with serious study of Marxism, the Internationalist Group is working to win class-conscious workers and thoughtful and militant-minded students and educators to the fight for international socialist revolution. When the dictatorship of capital is replaced by workers rule leading to a genuinely socialist society (not the capitalist “welfare state” Bernie Sanders and a lot of reformist fakers talk about) education can be a truly liberating force. It is with the creation of a classless society that, in the words of the *Communist Manifesto*, we can achieve “an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”

To get there, we’ve got a lot of hard work ahead. We invite you to roll up your sleeves and join us. We have a world to win. ■

# McCarthyism in the Universities: What It Is and How Not to Fight It

By Tyler McMillen

The election of Donald Trump in November 2016 gave a fresh impetus to the recrudescence of McCarthyism that had been bubbling in American society for many years. McCarthyism is the toxic combination of rightist witch-hunting and political repression aimed at silencing and expelling radical leftists, and even the stray liberal who runs afoul of the thought police. In the universities a number of academics have been targeted, including George Ciccariello-Maher, suspended by Drexel University and then forced to resign at the beginning of 2018; Johnny Eric Williams, a tenured professor of sociology at Trinity College placed on forced leave; and others, including Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor (Princeton), Randa Jarrar (Fresno State University) and Rochelle Gutiérrez (University of Illinois) who have been hounded by Twitter storms and right-wing media “exposés.”

In addition to David Horowitz’s FrontPage website devoted to targeting leftist faculty, there are now Campus Reform and the Professor WatchList, which has around 200 professors on its list for promoting “anti-American values.” The WatchList is a project of Turning Point USA, a well-funded (\$8 million in 2017) operation that claims a presence on 300 campuses. After these outfits name names, they are then trumpeted by right-wing media including Fox News, Breitbart, The Blaze, etc., generating an avalanche of hate mail to the individuals and the schools where they teach. And the witch-hunting is not limited to universities or right-wing outfits. In New York City, a public school principal, Jill Bloomberg, has been investigated on charges of being a communist.<sup>1</sup> More and more, decaying capitalism can tolerate less and less dissent.

The issue posed point-blank is how to respond to the organized campaign of provocation and intimidation aimed at silencing the left in academia. The response to the McCarthyite witch hunt of the late 1940’s and early ’50’s provides us with textbook examples of how *not* to fight a witch hunt. McCarthyism was spawned by the onset of the anti-Soviet Cold War. U.S. imperialism fired the first shot by incinerating and torturing to death by radiation poisoning some 300,000 human beings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Cold War picked up steam after the 1949 Chinese Revolution, the testing of an atomic bomb by the USSR in the same year, and the Korean War of 1950-53. The existence of the USSR, which had smashed the Nazi war

<sup>1</sup> See “Anti-Communist Witch Hunt in NYC School,” on the Class Struggle Education Workers website, edworkersunite.blogspot.com.



**Witch-hunting senator Joseph McCarthy (left) and his chief counsel Roy Cohn, a longtime mentor to Donald Trump.**

machine, the spread of “communism” to China and the inability of the imperialists to wipe out the North Koreans were seen as a mortal threat to capitalism by Washington and Wall Street.

The bourgeoisie needed to stamp out any sympathy for the USSR, communism and Marxism. It proceeded to do so, very effectively. In a few years, U.S. rulers were able to purge reds from the unions and the entertainment industry, and to decimate left-wing activism in the schools and on the campuses. Certainly, the repression pales in comparison to the right-wing terror imposed by U.S. imperialism in its neo-colonies. Ellen Schrecker, in her excellent history, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (Oxford University Press, 1986), notes that “only a few hundred went to jail.” But: “By the time the investigative furor that characterized the first stage of McCarthyism abated in the late fifties, thousands of people had lost their jobs.” Most were blacklisted, their careers destroyed. The result was a society marked by fear, racial segregation, stultifying conformity and rigid patriotism. All in the name of freedom and liberty, of course.

The popular conception of McCarthyism is of a kind of mass hysteria stoked by right-wing reactionaries. The name-sake Senator Joe McCarthy made his reputation promoting fantastical accusations of communists and Soviet spies (which he equated) under every bed, in every corner of society up to the highest levels of power, all plotting to bring down the government by force. It was obvious to all but the most hardened professional witch-hunters that McCarthy was an unhinged liar and maniac. But the sinister inquisitorial apparatus marched on. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)

held hearings around the country to ferret out local “commies.” McCarthy’s downfall came when he and his chief counsel, Roy Cohn (a mentor of Donald Trump), picked the wrong target: the U.S. Army. After the televised Army-McCarthy hearings of 1954, McCarthy was discredited and ruling-class support for the inquisition waned.

But the witch hunt was not just – or even mainly – the work of maniacal right-wingers. What is seldom discussed is the role that the liberals, social democrats and Stalinists played in carrying out the purges. In fact, whatever misgivings liberals later had about “excesses” and “abuses” of McCarthyism, with few exceptions, they shared the fundamental premises and aims of the Cold War against the Soviet Union and the patriotic drive to rid the country of communists. The post-WWII “red scare” was begun by Democratic president Harry Truman’s 1947 order to ferret out “subversives” among government employees. The 1947-49 “red purges” in the unions were led by Democrats. In the drive to “cleanse” society of Communists or sympathizers (“comsymps”), the liberals were on board from the get-go. It was the liberals who made anti-communist witch-hunting mainstream. This is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the universities.

The groundwork for the McCarthyite repression was prepared years earlier, under liberal Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt with the creation of the HUAC in 1938. Under FDR, J. Edgar Hoover created the FBI’s index file system of people deemed a threat to national security and who could be detained indefinitely without charges. Our political forebears in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) – which at the time represented revolutionary Trotskyism – were on that list. SWP leaders were the first victims of the 1940 Smith Act, which enlarged the categories of subversive acts for which one could be jailed. Under the Smith Act, 18 leaders of the SWP were convicted of advocating the overthrow of the government by force and sent to prison. The SWP had neither advocated the overthrow of the government by force, nor engaged in sabotage. The real “crime” of the Trotskyists was to oppose World War II as a war between imperialist powers in which workers had no stake except to defend the Soviet Union.

The Stalinist Communist Party criminally supported the Smith Act prosecutions of the Trotskyists and union militants. The CP had been working overtime to bring public support to the “antifascist cause” – that is, the inter-imperialist slaughter – and called the Trotskyists a “fifth column,” little better than the fascists themselves, for opposing the war effort. The CP leadership not only declared that the leaders of the SWP “deserve no more support from labor ... than do the Nazis,” it worked with the capitalist state to frame the Trotskyists. The CP leadership even prepared a dossier of 14 documents it handed over to the U.S. Department of Justice, and a 24-page brief for the prosecution titled, “The Fifth Column Role of the Trotskyites in the United States.”<sup>2</sup> Such betrayals of the working class and subservience to the bourgeoisie by the Stalinists set the stage for what was to come later. A decade later the Smith Act was to

<sup>2</sup> From an account by Philip Jaffe, the former national secretary of the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, a CP front, as recounted in *The Militant* (23 May 2005).

be used against the CP itself.

Ellen Schrecker’s *No Ivory Tower* documents how the witch hunt in academia began in the 1940s, long before Joseph McCarthy came on the scene. To carry out the purge of universities, the witch-hunters had to trample all over core principles of academic freedom: the freedom to pursue and teach ideas and facts without fear of repression, the notion that professors should not be targeted for their political activities outside the classroom, and the prerogative of the faculty to choose its own members. By the late 1940’s, a consensus had been reached in academia that such principles did not apply to communists, and that communists were unfit for membership in academia by virtue of being communists. A vote of faculty at Rutgers in 1952 is illustrative – faculty at Rutgers voted 90% (520 to 52) to endorse the Board of Trustees policy of excluding communists from the faculty.

Universities are often portrayed rather fancifully as a bastion of free thought and rationality. In fact the institutions of higher education are an integral part of bourgeois society, administered in the interests of the bourgeoisie, and thus dominated by the ideas of the ruling class. Schrecker makes the point that throughout the McCarthy period, there wasn’t a single case of a professor being found “guilty” of “indoctrinating” students in communism or Marxism. It was their ideas for which they were purged.

In the beginning of the witch hunt, the main “crime” was being a member of the Communist Party. That alone was enough to get you kicked out. The process of purging communists took place in two stages. First, allegations would be brought by some governmental committee, HUAC or one of its clones at the state level. An elaborate network of professional anti-communists sprung up to give “evidence” at such committee hearings. These hearings, however, often did not lead directly to punitive action. That was left up to the employer: in the case of academia, it was the schools that carried out the purge. In this effort, it was mostly liberals who sat on the committees to “try” suspected communists. And with very few exceptions, these committees accepted as fundamental that communists should be purged. The two-stage purge process *required the cooperation of the liberals*.

As the witch hunt picked up steam, the net widened from Communist Party members to anybody suspected of sympathizing with the CP *or its ideas*. This included those who refused to surrender their intellectual integrity and refused to deny CP membership. Dozens of faculty members of the University of California were fired for refusing to sign a loyalty oath. W. Lou Tandy, an economist at Emporia State Teachers College, was fired for signing a petition requesting clemency for the Smith Act defendants. Tenure and prestige did not protect you. Well-respected physicists like David Bohm and Frank Oppenheimer, and the mathematician Chandler Davis, were all purged.

The main difference between the tenured and non-tenured faculty was that the non-tenured faculty were summarily dismissed once communist sympathies were alleged; the tenured faculty were accorded a hearing before they were dismissed. The dismissals of the tenured professors were typically done after all sorts of due process were afforded. But the end result

was the same. Hundreds lost their jobs and leftists were blacklisted, unable to find jobs in the U.S. Some, like the historian Howard Zinn, were able to find positions at black colleges, which were desperate for qualified instructors, and willing to flout the blacklist. Everywhere else, the blacklist was total. Again, it was the willing cooperation of the liberals that made the firings and blacklisting effective.

As the net widened there were some protests: letters, petitions, a few demonstrations against firings. Faculty did support their colleagues financially – as Schrecker wryly puts it, many faculty members were more willing to sign checks than petitions. But there was no organized response. There were no strikes or walkouts against the purges, no national movement. All of the limited protest that there was stayed within the boundaries of academic respectability. Many refrained from acting out of a belief that the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) would intervene to bring justice. They did not want to embarrass their institution, and so waited for the AAUP to act. The AAUP was (and is) the largest and main organization of academics in the U.S. Its stated purpose is to defend academic freedom.

But the AAUP did not act. To be sure, throughout the entire period, the AAUP maintained the position that being a communist did not disqualify one from employment in academia. On paper, the AAUP stood for the right of academics to choose their own members. It regularly paid lip service to academic freedom and condemned the witch hunt. But the AAUP was all talk and no action. One of the seminal academic freedom cases came at the University of Washington in 1948 when two professors were fired for “admitting” to being members of the CP, and one other was fired for refusing to answer questions about his politics. It took the AAUP *seven years* to issue a report on the Washington case. The AAUP maintains a censure list of schools that violate academic freedom. But throughout the McCarthy period, the AAUP did not censure a single school for violation of the principles it stood for on paper.

Despite pressure to act, the AAUP leadership dragged its feet. It was unable and unwilling to stand up to the witch hunt. The association’s president during the period, Ralph Himstead, explained that, were the AAUP to act against McCarthyism, “it would end the Association’s usefulness to the profession and would probably end the Association.” The AAUP, when confronted with a crisis, when it was necessary to act, decided to pull its hands out of the boiling water in order to protect the organization. Far from protecting the organization, however, its failure to fight the witch hunt nearly destroyed it.

The response to the McCarthyite repression points again to the crisis of leadership. The revolutionaries of the time, the SWP, did what they could to resist, and were rewarded with repression and jail sentences. Yet the SWP was dwarfed by the CP, which not only refused to join in united action with the Trotskyists against the witch hunt, but instead egged on and participated in the prosecution – barely a year after Trotsky was assassinated by Stalin’s agent. When a few years later they were targeted under the same anti-communist legislation, the Stalinists tried to maneuver and avoid confrontation rather than fighting the inquisitors head-on and waging a class struggle against the bourgeoisie. There is no guarantee that a strong

fight from the beginning would have succeeded, but the lack of resistance, as always, guarantees defeat.

So what are the lessons for today? True to form, liberals are once again siding with right-wing reactionaries against left-wing radicals. Last year there was an outcry from academics accusing leftist protesters of violating the “free speech” of ultra-rightists who seek to trigger a government crackdown on universities, accused of harboring undocumented immigrants and “un-American” leftist professors. As *The Internationalist* noted at the time:

“What’s going on, not only in California but nationwide, is a push for a new McCarthyism on campus. And whereas in the 1950s the threat came mainly from state legislatures and Senator Joseph McCarthy’s House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), this time around the well-financed witch-hunters are trying to mobilize squads of student informers, and will have the backing of the White House, both houses of Congress and, soon enough, the Supreme Court. Those who delude themselves into thinking that the Yiannopoulos affair is about freedom of speech for a kooky reactionary are missing the big picture. This is the spearhead of a broader assault and a potentially mortal threat to academic freedom at institutions around the country.”

–“Milo Yiannopoulos, ‘Free Speech’ and the Assault on Universities,” *The Internationalist* No. 47, March-April 2017

In the face of “trolling” and online bullying of professors by rightist witch-hunters, the AAUP issued a statement noting, “Since the [November 2016] election, we have seen a resurgence of politically motivated witch hunts against academic scientists....” The AAUP’s answer was to declare that, “Governing boards of colleges and universities have a responsibility to defend academic freedom and institutional autonomy ... by resisting calls for the dismissal of faculty members and by condemning their targeted harassment and intimidation.” Fat chance of that happening.

Ellen Schrecker herself wrote a letter to *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (14 December 2016) in which she laments the “lack of backbone on the part of the administration.” She writes, “Wake up, administrators. Unless institutions stand up against such outrageous attacks on their faculties, we are going to have huge, huge violations of academic freedom that will make McCarthyism look like a picnic.” So what should be done? Her answer: “The proper response to such irresponsible and dangerous activities as the Professor Watchlist is to ignore them.... If universities and other established institutions had only ignored the attacks of the witch-hunters during the 1950s, McCarthyism might not have been so virulent.” This flaccid call for *inaction* flies in the face of the evidence in her own book that “the academy could no longer ignore the political pressures that the congressional committees had generated.”

The responses of the AAUP, Schrecker and many others to the new McCarthyism, looking to campus administrations and boards of trustees to defend and even “champion” academic freedom reflect a dangerous illusion about the nature of academia. As the *Internationalist* article quoted above noted: “Campus administrations are agents of the ruling class and its state – epitomized by University of California chancellor

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# Assault on Academic Freedom (Almost) Claims Another Victim

The election of the bigot Donald Trump as president has put the wind in the sails of fascists, fascist types and culture warriors, intensifying attacks on democratic rights and academic freedom in particular. From the White House on down, a campaign is underway to “cleanse” campuses of dissident elements. Gangs of right-wing students are being used to carry out harassment campaigns, attacks and provocations. The intent is to drive out or intimidate liberal and leftist professors and students. These campaigns are often carried out with the connivance of campus administrators, who run the colleges on behalf of the ruling class. Fending off such attacks will take class-struggle methods.

A case study in how the operation works was seen at the campus of Cal State Fullerton (CSUF) in Orange County in the spring of 2017. In brief: A group of rightist students with close ties to big campus donors set up and attacked an adjunct faculty member, Eric Canin, an anthropology professor at CSUF. The attackers then claimed that Dr. Canin attacked them, whereupon the university immediately suspended him and initiated an “investigation,” i.e., frame-up. So the victim of the attack – the faculty member – was then fired based on the word of his attackers! Fortunately, in this case the attempt failed and the faculty union was able to win back the faculty member’s job.

On February 8, 2017, Dr. Canin was surrounded and provoked by College Republicans (CR) counter-demonstrators at a February 8 protest against Trump’s immigration policies. Several videos of the event surfaced, showing the CR taunting Canin and yelling things like “Professors are just liberal trash.” In the videos one can see CR carrying numerous signs with depictions of walls, slogans like “Can we build it, yes we can!”, as well as recognized symbols and slogans of race hate. Canin was accused of striking a student and seeking to grab another’s sign. But among the many photos and videos of the event, none show any violence from Canin. Instead, they clearly show Canin being put in a headlock by the president of the College Republicans, against whom no action was taken.

Various right-wing media outlets (including Breitbart) quickly seized this case to push the fairy tale that College Republicans are being denied free speech and safety.

The day following the incident, the university released a



**Dr. Eric Canin assaulted by College Republicans at California State University at Fullerton, 8 February 2017.**

Katie Albertson for the Daily Titan

press statement announcing that Canin had been suspended, essentially declaring his guilt. There followed a slipshod, biased investigation. An administration investigator interviewed Canin without the benefit of legal counsel, and the report contains numerous falsehoods and inaccuracies. The investigation resulted in a decision to fire Canin, announced on February 22.

The decision to fire Canin was undoubtedly taken, at least in part, in an effort to placate campus donors. One of the main supporters of the College Republicans on campus is Steven G. Mihaylo. Mihaylo is a telecom millionaire, as well as a Trump supporter notorious on campus for personally attacking students on Twitter. Mihaylo paid the university \$4.5 million to put his name on a fancy new building, and has been a long-time donor to the university. Mihaylo has threatened on several occasions to pull his funding based on comments of students on Twitter. But however the decision was made to fire Canin, once it was made, all levels of the administration fell into line and did their best to concoct a case against him.

Fortunately for Canin, he is a member of a union – the California Faculty Association (CFA) which represents faculty throughout the California State University system. Were it not for this fact, he would currently be out of a job, despite 20 years of service to the university, service that was, by all accounts, exemplary. To the administration, he was just another box to check off to please their masters, to be thrown out like a piece of trash.

The CFA immediately expressed outrage about the decision to suspend and then fire Dr. Canin. It vowed to stand with



**The absurdity of looking to campus administrations to defend immigrants and leftists under attack is shown by the example of Janet Napolitano (above), the former head of the Department of Homeland Security, now president of the University of California.**

him against this ominous attempt to silence leftist professors in the current right-wing political climate which could lead to a recrudescence of McCarthyism. Hundreds of faculty members on the campus and other campuses in the CSU system signed a petition demanding that Canin be immediately reinstated. The faculty petition noted:

“Firing a faculty member speaking out against Donald Trump’s immigration policies – which have been repudiated by scores of academic institutions, including CSUF – on the basis of nothing more than the accusations of those supporting such policies creates a McCarthyite atmosphere that threatens basic democratic rights. This attack on a respected long-time faculty member can only encourage forces that seek to stifle academic freedom, and can further silence those who would stand against the onslaught against immigrants, Muslims and other targets. It will have a chilling effect on faculty who favor diversity if they know that challenging messages of racial and religious hatred could cost them their job based solely on the words of those purveying this ideology.”

The petition made no impact on the administration, which doubled down on its decision to fire Canin, despite a total absence of any photographic or video evidence that he did anything at all inappropriate. The entirety of the evidence against him consisted of unsubstantiated allegations of the College Republicans.

Were it not for the union, the matter would have ended there. However, under the collective bargaining agreement between the union and the administration, faculty have a right to appeal such decisions to arbitration. Canin appealed and was represented by lawyers from CFA. At the arbitration hearing, the administration’s case completely fell apart. The arbitrator quickly returned a ruling in favor of Canin on 9 July, 2017, reversing the decision to terminate, and reinstating him in his job. The decision noted that there was no evidence that Canin intended to hit anybody, and if there was any contact, in his judgment, it was incidental. Nevertheless, in a sop to the administration, the arbitrator said that Canin “probably” did “something,” and so instituted a fine of two months pay. But the fact that Canin got his job back is a victory.

Unfortunately, it appears that the extent of the union leadership’s activism on behalf of Canin was legal representation through the arbitration system. They made no attempt to publicize his case, or build support for their union brother. Although the local campus chapter made public statements on behalf of Canin, and despite appeals for strong action from Fullerton faculty, the statewide leadership made no statement whatsoever regarding his case until after the arbitration decision came down. With the decision safely in hand, only then did they declare a great victory, and assert that Dr. Canin was, after all, innocent.

This attack was a harbinger of the new McCarthyism on campus. This was a case where the whole union, representing some 22,000 members throughout California, could have been mobilized to fight against this ominous threat to their profession and livelihoods. There was potential to galvanize the membership to stand up to the fight against the right wing offensive. Yet, the union bureaucracy resisted doing anything outside the legalistic channels. This passivity reflects the political orientation of the leadership, which is thoroughly pro-capitalist and deeply tied to the Democratic Party. It’s up to the union membership together with students and staff to fight the witch-hunters now, before it is too late. ■

## McCarthyism...

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Napolitano, the former head of Homeland Security – which exists to repress the working class and oppressed.” University authorities and “established institutions” won’t fight assaults on academic freedom today any more than they did during the 1940s and ’50s, because that’s not their job. Instead, the real answer to the assault on the universities is to fight, as Class Struggle Education Workers does, to *abolish administrations and governing boards* and establish *student-teacher-worker control of the universities*.

Precisely because universities and colleges are not “ivory towers,” set apart from the rest of capitalist society, the struggle against the witch-hunters and for democratic control of public education by those who teach, study and work in it must be part of a broader revolutionary struggle to bring down the dictatorship of capital and establish workers rule. Just as the original McCarthyism was the “home front” of the anti-Soviet Cold War, the current attacks on academic freedom are part of the drive to regiment American society for the U.S. imperialists’ “war on terror” – as are the U.S.A. Patriot Act and the assault on civil liberties in general. To defeat this requires mobilizing the power of labor together with oppressed sectors. What ultimately broke the McCarthyite stranglehold of fear and conformity of the 1950s was the civil rights movement, from 1954-55 (Brown vs. Board of Education and Montgomery bus boycott) on.

And what finally broke the ability of the House Un-American Activities Committee to intimidate was the defiance of the red-hunters by International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 10 members, professors and students from Bay Area universities who effectively broke up HUAC’s hearings in San Francisco in 1960 as hundreds of supporters picketed outside. It is that kind of powerful class struggle that we must seek to organize to drive out the Trump-era inquisitors today. ■

# Occupation of Hundreds of Schools Blocks Threatened Closures

## Student Revolt Shakes São Paulo, Brazil

*The following article was published as a CSEW/UFT leaflet in December 2015.*

4 DECEMBER 2015 – For the last three weeks, the city of São Paulo, Brazil has been convulsed by a combative upheaval of high school students protesting the state government’s plan to close 92 schools and order hundreds of thousands of students to change schools. After announcing the school reorganization plan at the end of September, Governor Geraldo Alckmin of the right-wing PSDB (Brazilian Social Democratic Party) sought to ram it through without any consultation with teachers, students and parents. The students responded by occupying 192 schools. When the government this week sent in

the military police to retake the schools, students blocked key intersections and highways in the city of 12 million people, the largest in the Southern Hemisphere. This explosive struggle should receive active solidarity from the working class, students and all defenders of public education throughout Brazil, and internationally.

Faced with the mushrooming revolt and his falling popularity in opinion polls, this afternoon (December 4) the governor “suspended” the reorganization. This does not end the struggle, as the students have announced that they will continue the school occupations until the reorganization plan is definitively canceled. At the same time, the entire country has been in turmoil for months over a corruption investigation, the “Lava Jatos” (carwash) scandal, targeting the semi-privatized state oil company Petrobras. And two days ago right-wing forces in the federal Congress moved to begin impeachment proceedings against President Dilma Rousseff of the Workers Party (PT), supposedly for using accounting tricks to delay budget payments. Meanwhile, key sectors of the working class have been fighting against the anti-worker austerity policies implemented by the PT-led popular-front government, including a national strike by Petrobras workers last month.

The São Paulo schools have been a battleground for months against the authoritarian Alckmin government. A 92-day strike by the APOESP (state teachers union), the longest in its history, was defeated due to the failure of the rest of the labor movement to back it up in action. Then came the



Folhapress

**Students in São Paulo protesting school reorganization plan that would close 92 schools, October 2015.**

abrupt announcement by the state education department of its reorganization plan that would change the schools of at least 300,000 students and affect several million more. The plan was based on policies of international financial agencies and experiments in the United States by corporate education “reformers” aiming at increasing the “productivity” of schools. An immediate result would be to greatly increase the numbers of students per class in the already overcrowded schools (one of the reasons for the teachers strike). Education departments at state universities denounced the plan is a move to prepare the schools for privatization.

Students started protesting in mid-October. When a school in an upscale neighborhood of São Paulo city decided to occupy it on November 11, Alckmin decided he had had enough and sent a hundred military police to surround it. Instead of intimidating the students, this set off a wildfire of school occupations, with dozens of schools joining the movement every day. The government sought a court order for police to evict the occupiers, but a panel of judges unanimously turned it down, saying the students were just asking for dialogue. The governor refused, and the beginning of this week dispatched squads of police to clear out some of the schools. Last Friday, a top state official declared “war to the end” against the students. Foreseeing this possibility, student activists put out a guide on how to tie up traffic. When the cops showed up and began firing tear gas grenades, the students took chairs and tables and set up class in the middle of busy intersections and highways.



**Students occupy highway in São Paulo, December 4.**

The student mobilization in Brazil is a dramatic example of how the international capitalist offensive against public education should be fought – by mass action in the streets, bringing out students, teachers, parents and mobilizing the power of the working class. São Paulo students chant, “this is going to turn into Chile,” recalling the 2006 rebellion by Chilean high school students, dubbed the “Revolt of the Penguins,” that eventually paralyzed the country. In Brazil, our comrades of the Class Struggle Committee (the trade-union tendency linked to the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil) are calling for the state teachers union of Rio de Janeiro, the SEPE-RJ, and other unions, to prepare to carry out work stoppages in solidarity with the São Paulo students and against “school reorganization” plans nationally. But even left-led unions like the SEPE are loath to defy the bosses’ laws, which has led to one defeat after another for educators and the whole of the working class.

In the U.S., Class Struggle Education Workers (a tendency, politically supported by the Internationalist Group, active in education unions in New York City) has called for militant action such as has periodically been undertaken by unions in Brazil and Mexico. Faced with the wave of racist school closings ordered by ex-mayor Michael Bloomberg, the CSEW called to mobilize teachers, students, parents and staff to occupy closing schools. That is now being done on a mass scale in São Paulo, Brazil. Faced with high-stakes testing linked to teacher evaluations (ordered by the Democratic Obama administration) aimed at firing teachers, we have said “opt out” movements are not enough and the union must take the lead in refusing to give the tests. In Brazil the SEPE repeatedly called strikes, shutting down schools when tests were scheduled. And in the present struggle, São Paulo students massively refused to take a high-stakes test.

Whether it is sending heavily armed military police

to fire on protesting students in Brazil, or using laws to prohibit strikes such as the New York state Taylor Law, the ruling class will always use its state apparatus – the police, courts, jails and, if necessary, the armed forces – to attempt to prevent militant workers struggles. But if workers take the lead in defending all discriminated and oppressed sectors of society – mobilizing workers action against racist police murders and deportations, demanding full citizenship rights for all immigrants, defending abortion clinics against attack – we can shred anti-labor legislation and overcome repression. Yet that requires a political struggle against capitalism, against the

Democrats, Republicans and all capitalist parties, and a fight to build a workers party based on a program of intransigent class struggle. Otherwise, even promising struggles, such as in Brazil, cannot achieve lasting victory. ■

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# Mexico 2016...

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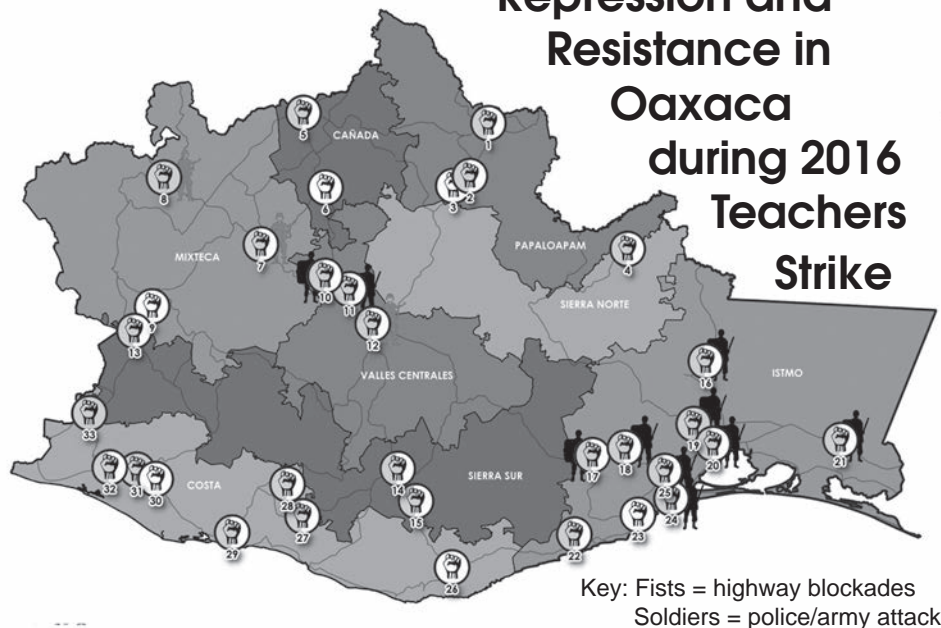
the education sector nationwide, and from there to key sectors of the industrial proletariat. This was the perspective of the Grupo Internacionalista, which intervened at every stage of the struggle, both in Oaxaca and in the national capital (Mexico City), arguing for a class-struggle program. When the capitalists took aim at public education and tried to finish off an important stronghold of “independent” unionism in Mexico, they were attacking all the exploited and oppressed. There were, and still are, other sectors under government attack, like the oil workers, health workers, etc., who represented the potential for a working class counter-offensive, at the head of the urban and rural poor, against their repression and starvation at the hands of the bourgeoisie.

But this road was blocked by a number of obstacles. First among them is that in most of the country, the education workers are still regimented under an apparatus of *corporatist* control: the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE), a government organization dedicated to preventing independent workers unions. Under the now-deposed chief Elba Esther Gordillo and her designated successor Juan Díaz de la Torre, the SNTE has been the government’s main weapon in imposing and carrying out the education counter-reform. This “labor” front for the capitalist state actively blocked the mobilization of teachers in central and northern Mexico, while in Oaxaca and Chiapas it deployed thugs and paramilitary forces (the infamous gangsters of “Section 59”) to break the strike.

Another important factor was that the “independent” unions, despite occasional empty words of “solidarity,” did nothing to join with the teachers’ struggle. This is a direct result of their leaders playing by the bosses’ rules: not only do they restrict themselves to the narrowest kind of business unionism, but they adapt to the dictates of corporatist labor law whose function is to prevent proletarian mobilization. Instead of overcoming these barriers, the leaders of the “independent” unions form class-collaborationist alliances with politicians and parties of the bosses, particularly with the PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) and its offspring MORENA (the National Regeneration Movement) of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, directing unrest in the rank and file into the sterile channels of bourgeois parliamentarism. It was these popular-front alliances that undermined and finally buried the struggle to defend the SME electrical workers union against President Felipe Calderón in 2009.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See “Life and Death Struggle for Independent Unions in Mexico,” *The Internationalist* No. 30, November-December 2009.

## Repression and Resistance in Oaxaca during 2016 Teachers Strike



Finally, there is the class-collaborationist program of the leadership of the CNTE itself. At the end, the leadership pushed to end the strike on the basis of some vague, verbal promises by the Secretary of the Interior not to go forward with the layoffs called for under the education counter-reform – all made in private meetings with the union leadership of Section 22 in Oaxaca and Sections 7 and 40 in Chiapas, with nothing in writing. This position was consistent with the program of subordination to the bourgeois-populist MORENA, especially in Oaxaca: just as in 2006 when Section 22 backed the same López Obrador (at that time, presidential candidate of the PRD) while state legislators of the PRD called for the intervention of the federal police against the teachers strike; also when [in 2010] the section called for a vote for Gabino Cué [candidate of a coalition including the PRD] for governor, who ended his term under the sign of mass repression and the dead of Nochixtlán; and once again [in June 2016] when it backed Salomón Jara, MORENA’s candidate for state governor.

The teachers’ courageous struggle has at least blocked the implementation of key elements of the counter-reform: in Oaxaca and Chiapas the famous “teacher evaluations” have not been applied, and the threats to fire striking teachers were not carried out. But it was not enough to defeat the attack from the bosses, their parties and their government.

The need to draw a balance sheet of the recent struggles is deeply felt by many teachers. In Section 22, the new state leadership’s idea of a critical evaluation of the experience of the past year is to conclude that demonstrations, work stoppages and strikes are ineffective. In the framework of their strategy of “mobilization-negotiation” they want more “negotiation” and less “mobilization.” This conclusion is false: what is needed is to overcome the limits of localized, trade-union struggle and mobilize the heavy forces of the working class, not to beg the capitalists but to defeat them.



**Elba Esther Gordillo (La Maestra) in 1989 with Mexican president Carlos Salinas de Gortari when he appointed her president of the corporatist SNTE teachers pseudo-union in the basement of Los Pinos, Mexico's White House. In 2013, she was arrested by the current president Enrique Peña Nieto on charges of corruption. Under Gordillo, SNTE gunmen assassinated scores of dissident teachers. Grupo Internacionalista called for her to be released so that she could be tried by a teachers' tribunal for mass murder.**

And this is perfectly possible.

The courageous teachers, who time and again have resisted riot clubs, tear gas and bullets from police and paramilitary death squads that have killed scores of their comrades, *need a program* for class struggle that points toward international socialist revolution. This is the program embodied in the Russian October Revolution of 1917 whose centenary we celebrate this year, Leon Trotsky's strategy of *permanent revolution* that the Grupo Internacionalista fights for today. The GI mobilized to bring this program to the teachers in struggle, at the same time as we addressed other sectors with the perspective of a nationwide strike. The struggle over the anti-education, anti-union "reforms" began with the teachers strikes of 2013. The great battle of 2016 was the second, but still inconclusive act. Now we must prepare a victorious third act, when we finally bury the imperialist-capitalist assault.

### **Two Lines in the Teachers Strike: Class Collaboration vs. Class Struggle**

Faced with the government's cruelty, the teachers' mobilization in Oaxaca was not limited to the capital, but shook the entire state. For weeks, almost 40 highway blockades cut the state off from the rest of the country. Federal Police convoys that sought to dislodge the teachers' *plantón* (strike encampment) in the center of Oaxaca were stalled for days. When the police finally broke through using live ammunition in Nochixtlán, teachers and poor townspeople flooded the streets to resist. In spite of the massacre, the police encountered mass resistance every ten miles or so, in Huitzo, in Hacienda Blanca, in Viguera, in San Lorenzo. Against the assault rifles of the municipal, state and federal police, the teachers resisted

with barricades, sticks and stones. They refused to be cowed by the massacre.

Government repression galvanized the determination of the teachers to fight: they blockaded the airport in the capital and besieged the offices of the state Education Department, the IEEPO. They also blockaded the Santa María del Tule fuel depot of the state oil company, PEMEX, for several days. The examples of joint action with the embattled state health care workers were also important, as they carried out work stoppages inspired by the teachers.

From the beginning, CNTE leaders knew that they faced a government that wanted to smash the teachers movement. But the strategy of the leadership was not based on mobilizing a powerful national teachers strike, much less a nationwide strike by the workers. In their speeches, the leadership talked of "walking out together and going back together," but they settled for a strike limited to Oaxaca and Chiapas, accepting that in Guerrero and Michoacán there would only be intermittent work stoppages, to prevent the militant teachers from being fired. Even though the strike inspired teachers to stop work in Tabasco,

Veracruz and even in SNTE strongholds like Monterrey, Nuevo León, the CNTE had no coherent plan for extending the strike.

Harassed and threatened by the government, the CNTE leadership, rather than trying to strengthen the strike, instead sought refuge in alliances with a sector of the bourgeoisie. It undertook discussions with representatives and senators from the PRD, which went nowhere. Later, in desperation, it held out its hand to López Obrador. On the eve of the Oaxaca state elections of June 5 last year, the Executive Committee of Section 22 put out a position paper calling for support to MORENA and López Obrador as the only ones who supposedly "supported" the teachers in their struggle against the education reform.

And how would López Obrador "support" the teachers? By promising that he would modify the "education reform" once he was elected president in 2018. In fact, he publicly called on the CNTE not to seek the "repeal" of the education counter-reform. A little later, in mid-July, he insisted that "repeal would be a failure of the government.... [T]his is not good for anyone... We don't want to build the new Mexico on top of ruins. There must be order and we need to get to 2018 with stability, with social peace... [I]f Peña Nieto is thoroughly beaten, there won't be stability, there won't be government" (*El Universal*, 14 July 2016).

The result of the June 5 elections was a disaster. Within days, the emboldened federal government unleashed open repression, breaking the blockades and arresting the leaders of Section 22. On June 16 the attacks began on highway blockades in Jalapa del Marqués, Juchitán, and Salina Cruz, on the Pacific coast of Oaxaca state. Finally, federal troops tried to break the barricades in Nochixtlán, where they encountered fierce resistance from the primarily Mixtec

population. The troops fired indiscriminately. The massacre of Nochixtlán on that bloody Sunday of June 19 left eleven dead and 200 wounded.

The cruelty of the repressive forces immediately sparked the anger of the population, who reestablished the barricades within hours. On the next day, tens of thousands marched in the state capital to condemn the government's crimes. The bourgeoisie then proceeded with caution. To cool off the struggle, the government proposed to establish "round tables for dialogue" to seek a "political solution to the conflict" with the CNTE. With the leaders of Section 22 still imprisoned as hostages, the government played at negotiation for weeks, waiting for the movement to wear itself out, so that it could then break off talks and condition their resumption on ending the strike.

The problem wasn't a lack militancy or capacity to keep the strike going on the part of the teachers. The problem was the leadership, more precisely its program of class collaboration and prostration before the bourgeoisie. For them, the enormous combativeness of the ranks only served to motivate a return to "negotiations," where they never got anything. The lack of a revolutionary leadership capable of pursuing a strategy of class struggle, seeking to broaden the movement to the rest of the workers movement and to unleash a working-class counteroffensive, was alarmingly obvious. And this was no coincidence: the CNTE leadership applied the same strategy in 2013. Although Section 22 is constantly reshuffling its executive posts, the change in personnel does not guarantee any change in the union's policy.

### The Struggle Against Corporatism Requires a Revolutionary Leadership

The hard experience of the 2016 teachers strike is another demonstration of the need for a class-struggle program to break the shackles of corporatist "unionism."

The SNTE is headed by the *charro*<sup>3</sup> Juan Díaz de la Torre, who was installed at the head of this state-controlled outfit by the very same PRI president Peña Nieto, just as his predecessor and mentor *La Maestra* Elba Esther Gordillo was by then-president Carlos Salinas (also of the PRI) in 1989. To dismantle public education, the Mexican bourgeoisie must annihilate the CNTE and reestablish the unquestioned authority of the SNTE over all education workers. Hence the government's praise of the role played by the SNTE throughout the process of imposing the education reform: for example, Juan Díaz de la Torre's presence at the pompous ceremonies announcing the triumph of the reform alongside Secretary of Education Aurelio Nuño, as well as the funding of the SNTE by the Education ministry to the tune of hundreds of millions of pesos for promotion of the reforms ("Secretariat of Education Gives 550 Million Pesos [US\$33 million] to the SNTE to Promote Reform", *El Universal*, 4 April).

This is neither an accident nor an occasional anomaly: the SNTE was created in 1943 by decree of President Manuel Ávila Camacho as a government apparatus to control the teachers, who at the time were organized in several dozen education unions. Its founding congress was presided over, funded and organized by the same Ávila Camacho. Its creation

<sup>3</sup> *Charro* = cowboy. At the beginning of the Cold War, in 1946-48, the Mexican government completed the state takeover of the unions, expelling the "reds" from union leadership positions (jailing many for years), seizing union offices at gunpoint and firing hundreds of union militants. Henceforth, union leaders were directly appointed by the government. The emblematic figure for this corporatist takeover was Jesús de León, who was installed at the head of the railroad workers union and who liked to dress up in Mexican cowboy (*charro*) outfits with big sombreros and silver decorations. Thereafter the corrupt leaders of these state-controlled *corporatist* labor organizations, whose task is to prevent the rise of genuine workers unions, were known as "*charros*."

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was announced in the Mexican Federal Register and applauded by the then-secretary of education Jaime Torres Bodet for embodying “the spirit of unity that all of us Mexicans long for.” Its first general secretary was the former secretary of education, Luis Chávez Orozco. Since then, all its leaders have been imposed directly by the government.

There have been various attempts to organize independently against the SNTE’s corporatism, like the Revolutionary Teachers Movement led by the communist teacher Othón Salazar at the end of the 1950s. These efforts met with little success, but in 1979 dissident teachers joined together to form the CNTE in the course of a wave of strikes that reached every region of Mexico. Since then, the CNTE has acted as a dike holding back – sometimes only partially – attacks against education and the teachers. Despite the obsequiousness of CNTE leaders before their executioners, the Mexican bourgeoisie is not satisfied with the political game of give and take that, in part, undercut the insurgent teachers struggles of the 1980s. Now the bourgeoisie is ready to free itself from any hint of resistance to its privatization plans.

Many of the most militant teachers know that they will soon have to return to the streets. But this time resistance will not be enough. What’s needed is a program of *class* struggle against the bosses, their state and their politicians, based on complete political independence from the bourgeoisie. The current leadership of the CNTE is very far from this perspective. In spite of the attack looming against the teachers, it concludes that the road of mobilization is not to be taken. In the perspectives document for the state convention of the CNTE, in preparation for the national convention held this

## Protest Torture Attack on Labor Activists’ Family in Mexico



**March in the city of Oaxaca, May 10, to denounce the gangster attack on the family of Arturo Villalobos (speaking with microphone) and Patricia Méndez.**

Around midday on Monday, May 7, thugs entered the house of Dr. Arturo Villalobos Ordóñez and his wife, Patricia Méndez Jiménez, in Oaxaca, Mexico. Both are prominent activists in the struggle of medical workers against government “reforms” gutting the public health system, as well as opponents of Mexico’s corporatist system of state control of labor. Not finding the parents there, the attackers brutally tortured the couple’s adolescent son, Nizván, both physically (dragging him by a rope around the neck and submerging his head in water) and psychologically (threatening to maim him and kill his father). After ransacking the house, they slashed the teenager and beat him unconscious. After being released from the hospital, Nizván is recuperating.

Arturo Villalobos is a well-known spokesman in Oaxaca for the Grupo Internacionalista, Mexican section of the League for the Fourth International. The attackers were looking as well for two other family members who are also members of the GI. Arturo has been a target of repression since courageously leading a medical team that defied a government cordon around the town of Nochixtlán, Oaxaca to treat survivors of a police massacre in June 2016. Soon after, the state government began threatening legal action. Last year Patricia was arrested and an arrest order issued against Arturo on trumped-up charges. Recently Arturo and other GI comrades were prominent in a two-month strike by health workers that defied the corporatist regiments of labor.

A press conference was held in Oaxaca on May 8 to denounce this torture of a 16-year-old, which was carried out to strike at labor and left activists. The press conference was held by the militant teachers union, Section 22 of the National Coordinating Committee of Education Workers (CNTE). Articles appeared on the same day on a number of news portals in Oaxaca and Mexico City reporting this vile crime. The attackers were clearly professionals. As a press statement by the Grupo Internacionalista noted, whoever carried out the attack, everything points to one conclusion: *fue el estado* (it was the state), as protesters chanted about the 2014 disappearance of 43 teachers college students from Ayotzinapa.

In the face of escalating state terror, we urge defenders of democratic and workers rights to send declarations of support for Dr. Arturo Villalobos and his family to the Grupo Internacionalista/México at: [grupointernacionalista@yahoo.com.mx](mailto:grupointernacionalista@yahoo.com.mx). **An injury to one is an injury to all.**



**Grupo Internacionalista study circle outside Section 22 headquarters during teachers strike, 2 June 2016. During weekly study groups and nightly film showings, GI warned against support to the populist MORENA of López Obrador. Banner reads: “Against Bourgeois Repression, Class-Struggle Mobilization!”**

past March, the leadership of Section 22 declared:

“The experience of the recent days of struggle is constantly moving; it is urgent that we critically revise the forms of struggle that we have put in practice for over 36 years, some of which, due to the duration of the struggle itself and the enemy’s attacks, have become worn out, so that we must proceed together to revise the forms of struggle that we might use in coming days of struggle.”

This summing up dismisses as outworn the “forms of struggle” employed by the dissident teachers’ movement since its organizational foundation as the CNTE nearly four decades ago. Despite being a conveniently ambiguous declaration, the critique is clearly aimed against mass mobilization and labor strikes. In fact, spokespeople of Section 22 openly declare that the struggle must be “moderated” and that militant mobilizations must be abandoned. The problem, however, is not rooted in the actions characteristic of teacher militancy, but on the contrary in the *program* that guides them.

In Oaxaca a new mood of struggle can be felt, with a new union leadership that isn’t compromised by the repeated sellouts and betrayals of its predecessors. However, the new leadership wants to justify a program based on canceling (or at least diminishing) mass mobilization, and steering a course of conciliation with the class enemy. When the new state leadership was seated, it began a series of round-table “discussions” with the newly-elected PRI governor Alejandro Murat (son of PRI strongman and former governor José Murat). So what has been the result of these “discussions”?

On December 1 [2016], a mobilization of Section 22 prevented Murat Jr. from being sworn in before the state legislature: he had to do it from the state radio and television studios. Despite the union’s denunciation of his inauguration as illegitimate, as

in the past, the teachers’ militant action only served as a prelude to negotiations behind closed doors. The governor agreed to regularize the situation of nearly 3,700 education workers in the face of the refusal of the Secretariat of Education under “Porky Pig” Aurelio Nuño to pay their wages. However, in exchange the union agreed “not to affect the school calendar,” and that the “regularized” employees would first be subjected to the fraudulent “teacher evaluations” that provoked the strike in the first place (*Proceso*, 7 December 2016). Thus, they offered to let the new governor work in “peace” in exchange for some limited concessions.

For the teachers, the mobilization of key sectors of the proletariat is not an extra luxury, but a necessity. The government is well-known for wearing down the teachers by attrition in order

to beat them. This is a product of the social character of the teachers: they are not part of the industrial proletariat, and a strike of education workers does not paralyze the system of capitalist production, nor does it threaten, in itself, the profits of the capitalist class. Contrast the swiftness with which the government moves to cut off strikes in industrial sectors, for example, the strike by steel workers in Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán in March 2016.<sup>4</sup>

## Forge a Revolutionary Workers Party!

From the beginning of the teachers strike, the Grupo Internacionalista fought for a perspective of extending the strike to the entire education sector and into the workers movement. In the encampments in Mexico City and Oaxaca (where we organized study groups, film screenings, forums, etc.), we brought dozens of striking teachers to appeal to workers of other labor organizations and trade unions to mobilize their power in a joint strike with the teachers. We uniquely defended the need for political independence in relation to the bourgeoisie and its parties PRI, PAN (the clerical-rightist National Action Party), PRD, MORENA, PT (“Labor” Party), etc. From the beginning of the strike we fought against illusions in MORENA, and when the leadership turned to openly using the strike as a vehicle for MORENA’s state electoral campaign, we denounced this as a betrayal.<sup>5</sup>

This earned us attacks from MORENA loyalists inside the union, who absurdly accused us of being “PRIista provocateurs.” Despite the campaign against us, events proved us right and many teachers who had doubts about the correctness of their leaders began to take our arguments more seriously. Many teacher unionists accompanied us on

<sup>4</sup> See “The Mexican Steel Workers Strike and the Struggle Against Corporatism,” *The Internationalist* No. 47 (March-April 2017).

<sup>5</sup> See “Mexican Teachers Strike Braves Murderous Repression.”



**Women teachers in the front line facing riot police during CNTE blockade of Oaxaca airport, 26 May 2016.**

brigades that we organized to make contact with various sectors of the working class to put into effect our program for the broadening of the strike, against the leadership's strategy of keeping the strike isolated and limited to negotiations with bourgeois Congressmen and the fictitious "dialogues" with the state ministries.

Our daily work included polemicizing not only against the partisans of MORENA, but also against fake leftists (who even call themselves "communists") who are instrumental in carrying out the program of collaboration with the bourgeoisie. One of the most influential political forces in Section 22 is the Union of Education Workers (UTE), led by the Stalinists (by definition, defenders of class collaboration with the bourgeoisie) of the Communist Party of Mexico (Marxist-Leninist). The union leadership's line is almost always a blurred carbon copy of the UTE's program.

The truth is that the teachers' struggle, along with that of the oil workers, miners, steel workers and other trades still under the iron heel of corporatism, as well as the auto workers, telephone workers (now facing a union-busting drive) and all the oppressed, if they are to be victorious, cry out for the forging of an authentic communist vanguard, the nucleus of a workers party armed with a program of internationalist struggle against imperialism, and not another version of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois nationalism that has failed time and again since the failed Mexican Revolution of 1910-17.

To defeat the attack against the teachers, and not simply to trade blows, it is necessary to field a powerful proletarian counteroffensive. The attacks on education and health care, elementary democratic rights, have been sponsored and implemented by the entire Mexican bourgeoisie, the ever-obedient lackeys of the imperialist financial institutions like

the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. This shows the impossibility of guaranteeing a free, high-quality education to the whole population within the framework of the rotting capitalist system of our epoch. The workers can – and must – defeat the exploiters.

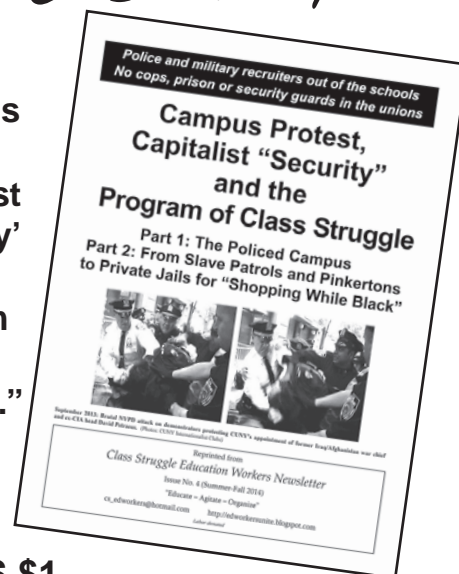
This makes indispensable the theory and program of *permanent revolution*, formulated and advocated by Leon Trotsky, and confirmed by the Russian Revolution of 1917: in this epoch of decaying imperialism, only the struggle for workers power, for a workers and peasants government, can achieve the most elementary democratic gains, as part of an international socialist revolution. Only a Leninist

and Trotskyist revolutionary workers party, a section of a reformed Fourth International, will be capable of leading the workers' struggles to victory, extending the revolution to the south and the north, into the very heart of the imperialist beast.

The courageous teachers who have fought with determination for years and decades – and who continue to do so today – deserve a leadership with a program to win. ■

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# Mexico Teachers Strike: CNTE-SNTE, What's the Diff? And Why It's Important

*During the bitter three-month Mexican teacher strike in 2016, Class Struggle Education Workers and the Internationalist Group organized solidarity actions in the United States, notably after the June 19 police massacre in Nochixtlán, Oaxaca and in the August 17 Tri-National Day of Solidarity (see article on page 77). Many educators in the U.S. were unfamiliar with the existence of “corporatist,” or government-controlled, “unions” in Mexico, which act as labor police to repress independent workers unions. Addressing this issue, which was at the heart of the strike, as well as the nefarious role of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) misleaders internationally, Marjorie Stamberg, a member of CSEW and a delegate in the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), posted the following note on the CSEW website (<http://edworkersunite.blogspot.com/>).*

I want to comment here on a point that came up at the AFT convention last month, about teachers struggles in Mexico. Jia Lee in her report-back noted that there was confusion sown by the AFT leadership concerning the CNTE (National Coordinating Committee of Education Workers), which has been leading that struggle, and the SNTE (National Union of Education Workers) which has been a key support for the government that is repressing the struggle. We need a clear understanding of this, because it directly impacts on the struggles of teachers everywhere.

I recently returned from six-months sabbatical in Oaxaca, Mexico. I had the opportunity there to join with teachers in solidarity with their struggle against the so-called “education reform” which seeks to privatize public education and victimize the combative teachers and their union, the CNTE. This is the same corporate “reform” model being foisted on teachers here and throughout the world. In the United States it is being pushed by the likes of Bill Gates, the Walton family (owners of Wal-Mart) and other leading capitalists. Internationally, these plans are sponsored by the World Bank, the OECD and other outfits controlled by the U.S. government.

The teachers in Mexico have been on strike since May 15. This has been a huge struggle, with thousands of teachers camped out in tent cities in Oaxaca and Mexico City. They have faced constant repression and violence. Teachers and parents in Chiapas have been bombarded by tear gas dropped from helicopters and have been attacked by paramilitary squads organized by the ruling PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party). The anti-strike violence came to a head on June 19, when an army of 1,000 federal and state riot cops opened fire on a bloqueo (barricade) in the town of Nochixtlán, Oaxaca blocking the superhighway from Mexico City. In the Fathers’ Day



**Striking teachers of Section 22 CNTE march in Mexico City, 29 May 2016. The SNTE scabbed throughout the strike and supported government repression of the CNTE strikers.**

massacre, police killed at least ten protesters, both teachers, community activists and youths, and over 100 were injured.

So the stakes are very high. And the teachers have successfully held out against these seemingly overwhelming odds. They have effectively cut off highway communications to Mexico City for weeks, with dozens of barricades, blocking trucks for Wal-Mart, Coca Cola and Pan Bimbo, as well as commercial buses. When I returned from Oaxaca, I traveled on the Autobus Magisterial (Teachers Bus), which was basically the only way to get to the capital. Last year, the governor complained that he couldn’t run the state because he only had 3,000 police against 82,000 teachers! So they brought in the army and the *gendarmes* (a paramilitary police unit), but it didn’t stop the teachers.

So what about the SNTE? It’s important to understand that the SNTE is not a workers union but a government-controlled outfit to prevent the rise of real unions, and to help repress them when they do arise. It is a “corporatist” labor agency, a heritage from the seven decades when the PRI ruled Mexico as a one-party state, whose labor laws were taken word-for-word from Mussolini’s fascist Italy. The SNTE has historically had squads of gunmen who have killed over 150 teachers who were dissident members of this pseudo-union. The SNTE is financed directly by the government, and its leaders are named by the president of Mexico, personally.

In 1989, the then-president of the SNTE, Carlos Jonguitud, who was also a top leader of the PRI, was removed by PRI president Carlos Salinas de Gortari and replaced by Esther Elba Gordillo in a private meeting in the basement of the

presidential residence at Los Pinos. Salinas had agreed with the international financial agencies to push through an anti-teacher “education reform” and wanted someone more pliant in the SNTE to impose it on the teachers. Both Jonguitud and Gordillo were assassins, up to their necks in killing the members of the SNTE. The CNTE was born at the beginning of the 1980s out of a rebellion against the killer SNTE.

Then in early 2013, the current PRI president, Enrique Peña Nieto decided to enact a new “education reform” aimed at breaking the CNTE. To whip up public support, he ousted Gordillo and had her jailed in order to tar all teachers with the notorious corruption of the SNTE. (This was accompanied by the Mexican version of the anti-teachers-union propaganda film, “Waiting for Superman,” called “De Panzazo”.) Gordillo’s deputy, Juan Díaz de la Torre, was summoned to Gobernación, Mexico’s Interior Ministry, to swear that he would support the reform and go after the CNTE, before he was installed as SNTE president.

At the AFT convention, a teacher from California objected that if the union supported the SNTE, the blood of the striking CNTE teachers would be on the hands of the AFT. This is quite accurate. AFT vice president Mary Cathryn Ricker responded, saying that “the SNTE is not responsible.” Oh yes they are.

For starters, from the beginning of the strike, the SNTE has been scabbing. In Oaxaca, after the teachers and indigenous population rose up against a murderous PRI governor in 2006, the SNTE set up its own shadow Section 59, which took over the few schools it controls at gunpoint. Those schools have been working, while the overwhelming number of schools staffed by the CNTE’s Section 22 are shut down.

Early on in the current strike, the federal education minister Aurelio Nuño threatened to fire 24,617 striking teachers, saying he had replacements lined up. And where were those would-be scabs coming from? The scab-herding SNTE offered to supply them. The fact that this hasn’t happened is due to the tenacity and militancy of the CNTE teachers, and the massive support from the parents and working people in general. The government badly miscalculated the effect that its deadly repression would have. Instead of intimidating, it galvanized the teachers and their supporters.

Then when on May 21 hundreds of teachers in the Mexico City *plantón* (tent city) were rounded up by cops and put on buses to be sent under police escort back to their home states, the SNTE leadership supported this repression. The SNTE met that same day with the top command of the Army High Command, which handed out individual awards to teachers who had participated in the punitive teacher “evaluation” exams, which the CNTE is boycotting.

As the strikers dug in, their example inspired teachers in other states outside of the CNTE strongholds of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero and Michoacán. Teachers in Monterrey marched in defiance of the governor’s threats to arrest them and in defiance of the SNTE. They then struck on June 29 for the first time ever in support of the CNTE. Seeing its support crumbling in the SNTE, the government struck back.

When SNTE Section 34 in the state of Zacatecas held a convention on July 14, CNTE had a two-to-one majority



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**CNTE mobilized for “total rejection” of privatizing education “reform”; the state-controlled SNTE supports the government attack on public education.**

of the delegates. Thereupon, the SNTE tops surrounded the building with hundreds of state police and brought in dozens of cops masquerading as private security who started beating up teachers with metal chairs, sending several to the hospital. The SNTE leadership then declared its candidate, a bourgeois politician, the new head of the section.

From the very beginning, the SNTE has functioned not as a union but as an adjunct of the state in trying to break the strike. This has been its role for decades, the same as other corporatist pseudo-unions, which frequently order the police to smash oppositionists, as was done in Zacatecas. This is not a jurisdictional dispute between two unions, or a fight between two factions of a union. The struggle of Mexican teachers for union independence from state control is a struggle directly against the SNTE.

Class-struggle unionists and supporters of the teachers’ struggle in Mexico must support the CNTE against the labor cops of the SNTE.

It is not surprising that the AFT supports the SNTE. Teachers and others should be aware of the sinister role that the AFT has played in aiding the CIA and the U.S. government in smashing left-led unions around the world. In 1973, the AFT International Affairs Department played a key role in promoting the pseudo-unions used by the CIA in the overthrow of the Allende government in Chile. For more detail, see the pamphlet by George Schmidt, “The American Federation Teachers and the CIA” (1978).

In the 1980s, the UFT was a channel for U.S. funding of the anti-Soviet, Polish nationalist Solidarność pseudo-union that played a key role in the counterrevolution in Poland.

In 2009 there was a coup in Honduras. It was organized right out of the U.S. State Department, under Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. My group, Class Struggle Education Workers (CSEW), made contact with the Honduran teachers who were under siege by the coup plotters. We raised over \$1,500 including from teachers in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil to help them out in their difficult moment. The UFT, on the other hand, sent money to the fake-union supporting Hillary’s coup. It is vital for oppositionists in the teachers union to understand the role of the UFT and AFT in aiding the repression of teachers around the world.

—Marjorie Stamberg, August 13, 2016

**No More Ayotzinapas! No More Nochixtláns!  
Workers to Power from Brazil to Mexico and the U.S.!**

## ***Tri-National Day of Action***

# **Solidarity with Mexican and Brazilian Teachers**



Revolución Permanente

**Oaxaca, Mexico: Two hundred teachers of the CNTE Section 22 shut down the state education department on 17 August 2016 and held a meeting in solidarity with the teachers union of Rio de Janeiro. Signs say “Teachers Struggle Is International” and “From NY to Oaxaca and Rio de Janeiro, Workers to Power.”**

*The following article is reprinted from The Internationalist No. 44, Summer 2016.*

On Wednesday, August 17 [2016], demonstrations were held in three countries and four cities in solidarity with the Mexican teachers who have been waging a courageous strike for more than three months. They are fighting against the bogus “education reform” which in fact is a capitalist attack on public education and teachers unions, not only in Mexico but around the world. In Rio de Janeiro, Oaxaca, Mexico City and New York City, teachers, students, trade unionists and activists demanded “Stop Repression of Mexican Teachers.” During the strike of the CNTE (National Coordinating Committee of Education Workers), teachers in the southern Mexican states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero and Michoacán have braved murderous repression. At least a dozen teachers, parents and activists were killed by the police in mid-June in Oaxaca, notably in the June 19 massacre of Nochixtlán, Oaxaca.

**Rio de Janeiro:** In Brazil, the leadership of the Rio state teachers union, the SEPE-RJ, passed a motion calling for a solidarity action in support of the Mexican teachers. The motion was put up by the Comitê de Luta Classista (CLC – Class-Struggle Committee), a union opposition tendency linked to the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil (LQB – Fourth Internationalist League of Brazil). The Rio teachers have just come off a determined strike lasting more than five months (21 weeks, 147 days), the largest and longest in the SEPE’s history. Their tenacity won important gains, including back pay for strike days going back to 1993, the election of school principals by teachers, students and parents, and the elimination of the high-stakes exams which teachers have refused to administer. However, some of the strikers’ key economic demands (including for a 30% raise) have not yet been met. While the strike was “suspended” over the opposition of almost two-fifths of the strikers



**Over 100 teachers and students protest outside Mexican Consulate in Rio de Janeiro, 17 August 2016. LQB signs say “Smash Privatization Offensive of the Bourgeoisie with International Socialist Revolution.”**

(including the CLC), teachers are still “on strike footing,” and in the middle of the Olympic games the SEPE initiated the tri-national day of solidarity action with the Mexican teachers.

On Wednesday more than 100 teachers, students and their supporters marched to the Mexican consulate in Rio to demonstrate their solidarity with the CNTE and the combative teachers of Oaxaca in particular. A union banner proclaimed “SEPE-RJ and CNTE-Mexico in the International Struggle Against the Privatization of Education.” Signs of the LQB called for a “National Strike Against the Criminal Mexican Government,” “Workers Revolution Will Avenge Our Dead” and “Smash the Privatization Offensive of the Bourgeoisie with International Socialist Revolution.” A contingent of 40 students joined the protest, reflecting the fact that during the strike 92 schools were occupied by the students, which was a major reason that the teachers were able to hold out so long. After the students arrived, the Shock Battalion of the Military Police was called in. Well-aware that the police are the armed fist of capital, the demonstrators refused to be intimidated. A telephone connection was established so that the speeches in Rio could be heard simultaneously by demonstrators in Oaxaca and Mexico City.

**Oaxaca:** Some 200 teachers of Section 22 of the CNTE blockaded entrances to the Oaxaca State Institute of Public Education (IEEPO), shutting it down, as they have done daily since the beginning of the strike last May 15. For months, the teachers and parents have maintained up to three dozen

barricades on highways around the state, as well as shutting down shopping malls where they have targeted “multinational” chain stores, such as Walmart. The local newspaper *Noticias*, which has kept up a steady barrage of anti-union propaganda, carried a headline, “CNTE – A Category 5 Hurricane.” Another story emphasized that a new army plan, DN-III, has been prepared “to attend any contingency.” At the solidarity meeting outside the IEEPO, called by Section 22, a number of strikers spoke as did members of the Grupo Internacionalista. GI speakers emphasized that the supposed education “reform” that teachers are fighting against was designed by the imperialist financial agencies and implemented not only by the *gobierno asesino* (murderous government) of Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto but in Brazil and the United States. Strikers were

also able to hear the speeches being given in Rio de Janeiro, making the international connection real. Signs hung from the gates of the shuttered IEEPO declared, “From NY and Oaxaca to Rio de Janeiro, Workers to Power!”

**Mexico City:** Simultaneously, a protest was held in Mexico’s capital at the *plantón* (tent city) of striking teachers from the various states. Some 60 teachers attended the meeting, where half a dozen strikers of the CNTE spoke, sending greetings to their fellow teachers in Brazil, as well as chanting, “*SEPE-CNTE, una sola lucha*” (it’s all one struggle). Signs declared, “Oaxaca, Ferguson, Rio de Janeiro, Only Revolution Will Bring Justice” and “Mobilize Workers’ Power Against the Racist Terrorist Police.”



**Sixty striking teachers at the Mexico City plantón joined in solidarity meeting with Brazilian teachers, 17 August 2016. Signs say: “Oaxaca, Ferguson, Rio de Janeiro: Only Revolution Will Bring Justice.”**

A Mexican student in Brazil and a Brazilian student in Mexico, supporters of the League for the Fourth International, spoke, emphasizing the need for international socialist revolution to defeat the capitalist drive for privatization. Speakers from the GI stressed the need to fight for the political independence of the workers against all the capitalist parties, not only the governing PRI and the rightist PAN and nationalist PRD, all of whom voted for the teacher-bashing education “reform,” but also the populist MORENA, which claims to support the teachers but opposes the call for abrogating the privatizing counter-reform.

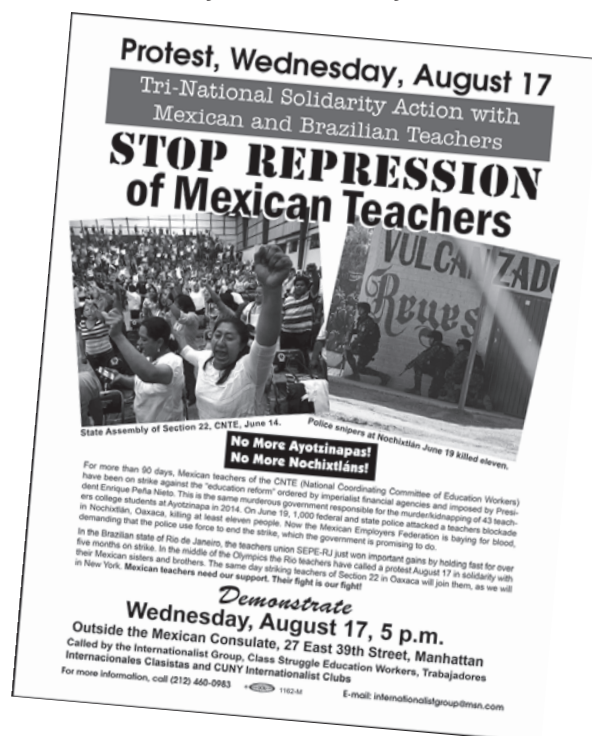
**New York City:** A few hours later some 40 protesters picketed outside the Mexican Consulate in NYC in solidarity with the protests in Rio, Oaxaca and Mexico City. The action was called by the Internationalist Group, Class Struggle Education Workers, the Internationalist Clubs at the City University of New York, and the newly formed Trabajadores Internacionales Classistas (TIC – Class Struggle International Workers). The leaflet for the protest demanded, “No More Ayotzinapas! No More Nochixtláns!” A father of one of the 43 disappeared Ayotzinapa students thanked the teachers, both in Brazil and Mexico, for continuing to struggle against the criminal state. A student who recently traveled to Mexico with a delegation of Internationalist Club members emphasized that racist cop terror was not only endemic in Mexico and the U.S., but rooted in capitalism. The student delegation gave talks at the National University of Mexico and at the teachers’ encampment about the struggle against police murders of African Americans in the U.S. Speakers from the TIC included an immigrant woman worker and a worker from the B&H warehouses, who said that their successful struggle for union representation showed the power of united workers action. Protesters chanted “¡Luchar, vencer, obreros al poder!” (Fight, win, workers to power!).

A teacher-activist from the CSEW, recently returned from several months in Oaxaca, explained how the CNTE’s fight for union independence from state control is a fight directly against the SNTE, a fake “union” totally controlled by the government, which is scabbing during the bitter teachers strike and offered to supply scabs to replace the thousands of strikers the government intends to fire. Speakers from the Internationalist Group emphasized that teachers in Oaxaca and Rio have shown exemplary militancy, but even their courageous and inspiring refusal



Internationalist photo

**Immigrant workers, educators, students and community activists picketed the Mexican Consulate in New York demanding an end to the repression of striking teachers of the CNTE. Protesters chanted “No to Democrats and Republicans, Build a Revolutionary Workers Party.”**



to bow before massacres and state terror is not enough to win. The CNTE’s call for “dialogue” with the murderous government is a trap, and what is urgently required is a struggle to forge a revolutionary workers party, which the League for the Fourth International is seeking to build, notably in playing an important role in international workers struggles such as the August 17 Tri-National Solidarity Action with Mexican and Brazilian teachers. Speakers warned that if the Mexican government tries another bloody crackdown, there will be hell to pay, in Mexico, here and everywhere. ■

**Despite Exemplary Militancy, Failure to Spread to the Industrial Proletariat Resulted in a Draw**

# **Mexican Teachers Strike of 2016: The Struggle Continues**

Revolución Permanente



**The battle at Hacienda Blanca on 19 June 2016. Even after the massacre at Nochixtlán that day, in which cops killed eleven, teachers and their supporters fought the federal police in every town on the road to Oaxaca.**

**Defeat the Imperialist Assault on Public Education  
With Internationalist Workers Mobilization!**

*The following article is translated from Revolución Permanente No. 7, April-May 2017, published by the Grupo Internacionalista, Mexican section of the League for the Fourth International.*

The teachers strike that lasted from May to September of 2016 has been one of the sharpest class confrontations in recent Mexican history. On one side, the federal government sought to impose the “educational” counter-reform dictated by imperialist financial agencies. Its purpose was to annihilate public education, eliminate the labor rights of teachers and destroy what it sees as the prime obstacle to these designs: the National Coordinating Committee of Education Workers (CNTE). On the other side, hundreds of thousands of teachers organized in the CNTE in Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guerrero, Michoacán and other states put up a determined resistance, even against brutal state repression that reached its peak on Bloody Sunday, 19 June 2016, in Nochixtlán, when federal and state police used live ammunition

to try to break through one of the highway blockades that had paralyzed the state of Oaxaca.<sup>1</sup>

As on other occasions, the self-sacrifice and combativeness of the teachers were an example for education workers and other sectors, and not just in Mexico but also beyond its borders. It was truly an epic class struggle. Even before the strike began, the government of President Enrique Peña Nieto of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) thundered ultimatums, echoed by the mass media and spokesmen for big business. Soon it went over to open repression. The striking teachers were demonized as terrorists, privileged and ignorant, but in spite of the avalanche of slander against them, the firm support of the parents, indigenous communities, and in general of the “common people,” gave the teachers the strength to persist and survive.

There was an enormous potential to *extend the strike to*  
*continued on page 69*

<sup>1</sup> See “Mexican Teachers Strike Braves Murderous Repression,” *The Internationalist* No. 43, May-June 2016.