

Marxism & Education

Journal of
Class Struggle
Education Workers

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**Teachers, Health Care Workers, Teamsters Say...
For Workers Action to Stop Deportations**

I.C.E. Out Now!



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Socialist schools are conceivable only in specific social conditions, for they are made socialist not by the fact that they are directed by socialists but by the fact that their objectives correspond to the needs of a socialist society.

—Nadezhda Krupskaya

In This Issue of *Marxism & Education*

In this issue of *Marxism & Education* we publish articles on the drive by the administration of Donald Trump to deport millions of immigrants (p. 3) and the struggle against this in New York schools (p. 4). Other articles concern the Israeli/U.S. genocide in Gaza (p. 88) and the neo-McCarthyite witch-hunting of academia and public education (p. 88), slanderously equating anti-Zionism with antisemitism (p. 78).

This issue appears after a hiatus, affected by the illness of our comrade and co-founder of Class Struggle Education Workers, Marjorie Stamberg, who died in May 2024 after a three-year battle with ovarian cancer (p. 39). Marjorie had been active in the New Left, was a pioneer of the fight for women's liberation, a Trotskyist activist and leader, a teacher for the last quarter century, and a revolutionary all her adult life. For a decade she was a delegate in the United Federation of Teachers.

We publish here a number of Marjorie's speeches and writings, including a 2021 Left Forum presentation (p. 7) and 2008 contribution (p. 53) on the need for class-struggle unionism to defeat the capitalist attack on public education. A speech on Rosa Luxemburg (p. 25) highlights the internationalism of the Polish-German revolutionary contrasted to the counterrevolutionary nationalism of Polish Solidarność, for which the UFT served as a conduit for CIA funds. During her illness, Marjorie devoted much effort to a three-part talk on the 1968 New York teachers strike, a key event whose effects are still felt today. Her presentation emphasized how this was a necessary strike but UFT leader Al Shanker's leadership fostered racist reaction.

Several statements by the CSEW are published here that were issued as leaflets, including on the attempt to force retired educators onto private insurance (p. 14), in opposition to the 2023 UFT contract (p. 12), on the 2024 U.S. elections (p. 17) and on the 2025 UFT elections (p. 21), in which the CSEW opposed the in-bureaucrats, out-bureaucrats and wannabe bureaucrats.

CLASS STRUGGLE EDUCATION WORKERS

Class Struggle Education Workers fights for the transformation of the labor movement into an instrument for the emancipation of the working class and the oppressed. It is fraternally allied with the Internationalist Group, U.S. section of the League for the Fourth International. Read the CSEW program at: <https://edworkersunite.blogspot.com/2008/11/class-struggle-education-workers-formed.html>

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Teachers, Health Care Workers, Teamsters Say... For Workers Action to Stop Deportations

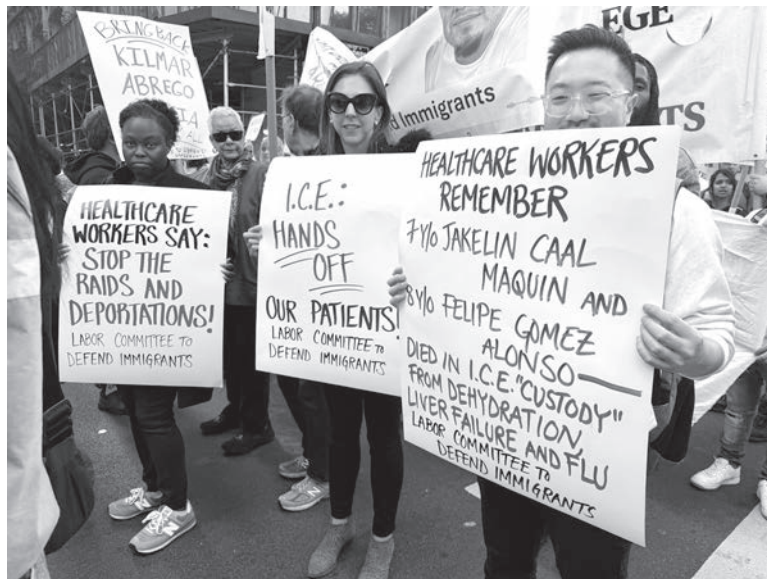
I.C.E. Out Now!

As Donald J. Trump prepared to take office as president of the United States, he made it clear that he would rule by decree. The U.S. Supreme Court had already approved the doctrine of a “unitary executive,” a blueprint for authoritarian rule, in which neither courts nor Congress could stop the “official actions” of the president (like trying to officially overturn an election). So in the first hours and days of his second administration, the would-be strongman unleashed an avalanche of executive orders that set the stage for a wholesale assault on programs and whole departments of the federal government, constitutional guarantees and democratic rights in general. Having been elected on a program for “mass deportations now,” Trump has focused on immigrants in his drive to a Bonapartist “strong state” regime. And we are well on the way.

Among the first actions by the new administration was to rescind the memo instructing agents of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) to generally steer clear of schools, hospitals and religious sites. At the same time, the acting director of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) moved to eliminate undocumented immigrants’ right to due process (under the 14th Amendment to the Constitution) by expanding the use of “expedited removal” throughout the country instead of only in border areas. In addition, Trump decreed an end to birthright citizenship, also secured in the 14th Amendment establishing the citizenship of former slaves. Children of any non-citizen immigrant could now have their citizenship canceled.

Millions of immigrants were thrown into terror. Soon I.C.E. agents were knocking on doors in pre-dawn raids, immigrants were being bundled onto planes to the U.S. base in Guantánamo (stolen from Cuba) and when that didn’t stop courts from challenging this blatantly illegal move, they were transferred to a notorious “anti-terrorist” prison in El Salvador. In late May, seeing deportation numbers falling short of his goal of a million per year, Trump ordered I.C.E. to grab anyone it could. Days later an army of federal agents was dispatched to Los Angeles to carry out militarized workplace raids. Faced with protests, Trump federalized several thousand California National Guardsmen and sent in the Marines. Now masked federal police in unmarked cars are snatching people off the street. In New York, immigrants are being seized as they leave courts.

Soon after Trump’s election, supporters of Class Struggle Education Workers and its fraternal allies of the Internationalist Group in New York City called a Labor Conference to Defend Immigrants for early December on a program for independent workers action to stop deportations. At the same time, a Committee to Defend Immigrants was launched by the Internationalist Club at Hunter College, while CSEW supporters in NYC public schools



Internationalist photo

Health workers in LCDI contingent at NYC May Day 2025.

initiated school-based immigrant defense committees and a resolution was prepared for the United Federation of Teachers Delegate Assembly calling for forming such committees elsewhere. On the West Coast, Class Struggle Workers – Portland put forward a “Resolution to Defend Immigrants Against Mass Deportations and Racist Violence” that was passed by six local unions.

There are now Labor Committees to Defend Immigrants both in New York and Portland, which have held “Know Your Rights” sessions for union members, distributed KYR cards and other information to students, made presentations to parents groups and demonstrated in the streets. The New York LCDI has published a 75-page Immigrant Rights Defense Packet. In NYC, the Committee to Defend Immigrants initiated by the UFT chapter at Franklin Delano Roosevelt High School in South Brooklyn held a demonstration on March 6 to underline that faculty and staff “firmly stand by our students” and are organizing to keep I.C.E. “out of our school and our communities.”¹ On May 1, a contingent of 50 supporters of the LCDI and the Hunter Committee to Defend Immigrants marched in the NYC May Day demonstration.

Then on June 12 the UFT Delegate Assembly finally passed, by an overwhelming 93%, the “Resolution for Union-Led Defense of Immigrant Students, Families and Staff” after attempts to get it on the agenda at monthly meetings since December (see page 6). The resolution notes that “we cannot look to the government, the courts, the police or politicians of either Democratic or Republican parties to protect immigrants

continued on page 80

¹ See “FDR Teachers Say, ‘I.C.E. Won’t Take Our Kids Away’” on page 4.

CLASS STRUGGLE EDUCATION WORKERS

Committee to Defend Immigrants Holds March 6 Rally

FDR Teachers Say, “I.C.E. Won’t Take Our Kids Away”

By Yari Milo Michel
UFT Delegate FDR H.S.

19 MARCH 2025 – On Thursday, March 6, the Committee to Defend Immigrants (CDI) at Franklin Delano Roosevelt High School in Brooklyn organized a rally outside the school to demonstrate, in action, that we firmly stand by our students and are organizing to keep Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) out of our schools and our communities. The Committee, which includes members of the United Federation of Teachers, DC37 members and parents, brought out over 30 teachers and staff along with PTA members. News12 Brooklyn came to the rally and ran a news story and video of the event, headlined “Teachers and parents in Bensonhurst rally amid fears of ICE in schools.”

Brooklyn Paper published an article on the rally highlighting the confusion and disarray caused by the mayor’s contradictory directives to allow I.C.E. into the schools, despite NYCDOE protocols and New York City laws prohibiting cooperation with federal immigration authorities. And the UFT posted to its Facebook and Instagram pages a report on the event, with photos, quoting the flier for the rally: “As teachers and staff, we have a special responsibility to support, defend and protect all our students, and their right to a quality education. Let’s bring out the power of labor to make sure the schools and our communities are ‘no go’ areas for I.C.E.”

At the rally, participants held signs reading, “Teachers, Staff and Parents United Against Deportations,” “Black, Brown, Asian, White, All Unite for Immigrant Rights!” and “Support Immigrant and Transgender Students.” Demonstrators emphatically chanted, “I.C.E. out of our schools! I.C.E. out of New York!” and “*Unión! Fuerza! Solidaridad!*” among other slogans. Several teachers, parents and cafeteria workers spoke at the rally. A CDI member and ENL teacher said that teachers and staff must be ready and equipped so that students “don’t have to be afraid and have to do school remotely or not at all because they don’t know if or when they will get arrested.” An ISS teacher said, “We have a role in our students’ lives. Many of these students see FDR as their safe haven. They see



Courtesy of Ronnie Almonte

Teachers and staff at Franklin Delano Roosevelt High School in Brooklyn, New York demonstrated on March 6 to keep I.C.E. out of the schools.

us as extensions of that support. And we need to continue to stand in those roles.” A Social Studies teacher said, “We fought for these rights. We fought for birthright citizenship and we can’t lose that.”

The News12 story reported, “Teachers like Yari Michel say it’s the fear ... that’s impacting the learning environment. ‘Many [students] have stopped coming to school because they fear deportations, or they fear coming back from school and not finding their parents there. If they feel because of their immigration status, that they’re not allowed to come in to the schools and get that quality education, then that’s highly problematic.’” And from an interview with *Brooklyn Paper*: “‘We want to make sure students are protected because if ICE does enter the schools, this isn’t just going to impact the one student that they could potentially be looking for. This would have a rippling, chilling effect on every student regardless of immigration status. And it would also have the same impact, I believe, on teachers.’”

The following day, teachers and staff showed widespread support and sympathy for the rally. Students came up to say

how happy they were to see their teachers on the news defending immigrants and transgender students.

The Committee to Defend Immigrants was formed as an initiative of our UFT chapter in November, soon after the elections won by Donald Trump, in which he repeatedly threatened to carry out mass deportations. When he took office, on the very first day he issued an executive order for the removal of all undocumented immigrants, and many others such as those in Temporary Protected Status (as is the case with many immigrant students in NYC schools). That night, the acting head of the Department of Homeland Security issued a memorandum removing the restrictions on I.C.E. raids on schools, hospitals, places of worship and other sensitive locations. Every school in the country has had to deal with this threat. Our bottom line is: no I.C.E. in the schools and I.C.E. out of our communities.

The CDI emphasized in organizing this rally that the purpose is not only to defend our students and all New York City students, but to show the way forward in this struggle as union members. Key to this is collaboration with parents, other unions in the schools, like DC37 and 32BJ, and the school community. Starting at the beginning of January, the CDI has had several events. There was a “Red Card”-making session, in which staff gathered to create over 1,000 of these crucial cards in multiple languages for students, as well as the distribution of Know Your Rights packets to FDR students at nearby train stations right before mid-winter break. The packets included information about the recently passed Laken Riley Act, hotline numbers, a flier with things to remember in any situation with non-local law enforcement, and the Red Cards. We also held screenings of the UFT KYR webinars for all staff. Additionally, the CDI has collaborated closely with the PTA to help share crucial information with parents and families.

Our FDR Committee is comprised of various working groups, including: Know Your Rights; Educational Resources; Legal Representation and Resources; Events; Protests and Sign-Making; Community Outreach; and Parent and Teacher Engagement, to name a few. Although some feel that I.C.E. will not enter the schools, our union members have joined together in the Committee to Defend Immigrants to make sure it doesn't, while many other colleagues have contributed to and participated in CDI events.

It is vital to have such Committees to Defend Immigrants, like FDR's, in schools throughout New York City, not only to distribute information and materials to students, families, staff and the school community, but to *underscore that teachers and staff are mobilized to defend our students*. The Committees can be a pillar of support for immigrants and all those under attack by the current administration, including transgender people, and stand fast against the federal government's attempts to regiment curricula. Similar committees have already been set up at several schools in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and the Bronx, but that's only a start. Although no schools have reported I.C.E. entering buildings, they have shown up at train stations, shelters and areas near the schools.

Mayor Eric Adams caused a great deal of anxiety about the instructions and protocols in the schools regarding I.C.E.

The 2017 NYCDOE directive requires that I.C.E. present a warrant signed by a federal judge for a specific named person, but Adams in a January 13 memo stated that I.C.E. should be allowed into the schools, even without a judicial warrant, if employees feel “threatened.” After significant opposition, this was reformulated to say that city employees should not “interfere” with I.C.E., which is essentially no change at all. The schools chancellor Aviles-Ramos then stated that the 2017 protocol is still in effect in the schools. But school “safety agents,” who are the first point of contact for anyone entering the buildings, do not answer to the NYCDOE. As I said at the February 26 meeting of the Panel for Educational Policy: school safety agents “answer to the NYPD because they are a division of the NYPD. And who does the NYPD answer to? Adams. So, my question to the PEP is where do you stand? Are you going to allow I.C.E. to take our kids, even if they come in with a warrant? I would like a response.” There was none.

At a February 9 press conference on the steps of NYCDOE headquarters at Tweed Courthouse, a number of city council members and state assemblymen gathered to denounce and criticize the mayor, but when specifically asked what they'd do about it, they had no answer other than “apply pressure.” This do-nothing response underlines the importance of fighting for political independence from both parties of capitalism: the Republicans, who are pushing a shock-and-awe program of terrorizing immigrants with the threat and reality of mass deportations, and the Democrats, who deported 5.3 million immigrants under Deporter-in-Chief Barack Obama, and 4.6 million more under Biden. They built the deportation machine and oiled its gears by greatly expanding the camps, detaining families, putting kids in cages. In short, Democrats prepared the way for Trump, again.

There will undoubtedly be a reaction against the horrendous mass deportations. But what's needed is an organized response mobilizing the working class, which has the power to stop this bipartisan attack on immigrants. A Labor Committee to Defend Immigrants (LCDI) has been organized in New York City, including members and representatives of a number of unions, from Teamsters and warehouse workers to health care workers and educators in the UFT and PSC. Class Struggle Education Workers is part of this effort. As a leader of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists emphasized at a LCDI conference in January, the attacks on immigrants are a *class issue*. I agree. This is why we need a class struggle workers party and solid labor action to defend our students, their families, our coworkers and community members in this city of over half a million undocumented people and where *half* of the entire city population are immigrant families. The frenzied racist and xenophobic campaign to deport millions is an attack not only against undocumented immigrants but on all working and oppressed people, and labor must spearhead the fight to stop it. ■

Resolution for Union-Led Defense of Immigrant Students, Families and Staff

On June 12 [2025], the Delegate Assembly of the United Federation of Teachers in New York City overwhelmingly approved by a vote of 837 (93%) in favor; 65 against the following resolution presented by Yari Milo Michel, a delegate from Franklin Delano Roosevelt High School in Brooklyn and a supporter of Class Struggle Education Workers.

WHEREAS, on January 20, the Trump administration, building on actions of the previous administration, declared a “national emergency” to carry out its threatened deportations of millions of undocumented immigrants, as well as those in Temporary Protected Status, humanitarian parole, refugees applying for asylum and other statuses, while those in DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) status are at risk; and

WHEREAS, on January 21, the Acting Secretary of Homeland Security (DHS) issued a directive rescinding prior guidelines limiting actions by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) in or near “sensitive” areas, including schools, hospitals and places of worship; and

WHEREAS, on the same date another DHS directive expanded categories for “expedited removal” to any who have been in the U.S. for less than two years, which includes many new immigrant students; and

WHEREAS, this threat of mass deportations has caused widespread fear and anxiety among immigrant families and communities, and harmed our students’ education; and

WHEREAS, students whose parents are immigrants targeted by these plans face the prospect of separation from their families, or being forced to leave the country even if they are citizens; and

WHEREAS, President Trump issued an executive order to nullify the citizenship of children of undocumented parents, blatantly violating the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, so that even children born in the United States of immigrant parents fear they could be deported; and

WHEREAS, New York City local “sanctuary” laws 228 (2017) and 486-A/487-A (2014) restricting NYC employees’ communication with federal immigration authorities are already being undercut

by the mayor, who last week issued a memorandum that would effectively allow I.C.E. to enter city facilities even without a warrant signed by a federal judge or magistrate; and

WHEREAS, many of the 146,000 homeless students in NYC public schools reside in city shelters; and
WHEREAS, 40 percent of the population of New York City and nearly half (45 percent) of its workforce were born in another country, while a majority of the more than half a million undocumented immigrants in NYC have lived here for over a decade and are a vital part of our community; and

WHEREAS, we cannot look to the government, the courts, the police or politicians of either Democratic or Republican parties to protect immigrants from deportation or bigoted attacks; and

WHEREAS, under the NY state constitution, all children here have a right to a public education; and

WHEREAS, it is our duty as educators to stand by and advocate for our students and their families; and

WHEREAS, it is the duty of the unions to defend our fellow workers including school staff; and

WHEREAS, “an injury to one is an injury to all” is a basic principle of the labor movement; therefore
BE IT RESOLVED, that the Delegate Assembly of the United Federation of Teachers encourages local chapters to initiate school-based committees to defend immigrants, which may include and work with other unions, students, parents and community members; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this Assembly rejects the vile attacks on immigrants, and calls on all of labor to initiate such defense committees and mobilize its power in defense of immigrants; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that these are our students, our fellow workers, our neighbors, and we will act to support them in this, their hour of need, and always. We will not let them take our students.

Yari Milo Michel

Delegate, Franklin Delano Roosevelt High School
February 11, 2025

It Will Take a Revolution to Defeat the Attack on Public Education

By Marjorie Stamberg

We print below the text of a talk given by Marjorie at a Class Struggle Education Workers presentation at the Left Forum in New York City on 30 June 2019. It is of continuing urgency today in contrasting the program of class struggle unionism to so-called “social justice unionism,” and for underlining that the only answer to the bipartisan capitalist attack on public education is to fight for socialist revolution.

So we are living in times of a wholesale attack on public education. Because that’s what the whole “movement” for charter schools is about. That’s what the whole “education reform” business is about – and it is a business, a big business. The capitalist system is decaying – we see it right before our eyes, we see it in our classrooms. As teachers, as education workers, we come right up against this in our struggles. Over and over, we see that the attempts to fight the privatization and charterization of the schools are stymied because those leading the struggles accept the capitalist framework. That goes both for the “mainstream” business union bureaucracy like the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, and for the would-be reform caucuses. The stark fact is that to defeat the attacks on public education, as educators committed to the struggle for free, quality, secular, public education for all, we need to broaden our struggle into a revolutionary struggle.

So I want to talk about two counterposed tendencies in teacher organizing, and that is the difference between *class-struggle unionism* and the hollow rhetoric of the so-called “*social justice unionism*.” Now the social-justice “model” says that in contrast to the present leaderships of the AFT and NEA, you have to take on broader issues – racism, mass incarceration, and so on – but they seek to do that within the limits imposed by the capitalist state, and beholden to the capitalist parties. In contrast, class struggle unionism – what Class Struggle Education Workers stands for – means we necessarily take on that framework, understanding that the questions of teachers rights and a radical pedagogy and public education itself are necessarily part of the struggle against racist American capitalism for which the only solution is a socialist revolution.

So that’s why the CSEW participates in struggles in defense of immigrants’ rights, calling for full citizenship rights for all immigrants. We participated in protests against racist lynching, like the murder of Trayvon Martin,¹ where

¹ On 26 February 2012, Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old black youth was walking back to the house where he was staying in a gated community in Florida when he was fatally shot in the chest by a vigilante. The wanton murder set off huge protests nationwide. A year and a half later, the murderer was acquitted of any charges. See “Lynch Law U.S.A.: State Defends Murderer of Trayvon Martin,” *The Internationalist* special issue, May 2012.



Internationalist photo

Marjorie Stamberg at Left Forum, 30 June 2019.

the local reformist union caucus, M.O.R.E. (Movement of Rank-and-File Educators), did not. We in the CSEW have marched in demonstrations against racist police murder, like Eric Garner in Staten Island, where the M.O.R.E. not only did not march, they issued a statement of “solidarity” with ... “our brothers and sisters” of the PBA, the fascistic cop “union” – I’m not kidding, they literally did that. So that is shocking fact, which I want to explain.

So in 2018 there was the “red state teachers revolt,” which we talked about at the Left Forum last year.² The way that phenomenon was explained in the media, and by much of the left, is that it was a wildcat strike, purely spontaneous, organized through social media, and so on. Well, that wasn’t exactly true, as we explained. In West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona, it was organized through the teachers unions. But what was true, is that it wasn’t the union tops who initiated it. The impulse came from the ranks. We said that this was only the first round, and in the next round you’re going to come right up against the union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party. Which is exactly what happened. The recent teacher battles, which started in Chicago in 2012, and broke out this year in Los Angeles and Oakland have been led by the “reform wing” of the labor bureaucracy. What we are talking about here is not the UFT bureaucracy nor the Randi

² See “Lessons of the Teachers Revolt,” in *Marxism & Education* No. 5, Summer 2018.



While liberals and most of the left have effectively turned their backs on school integration, the CSEW continues to fight for high quality, integrated public schools for all. Above: 18 May 2021 protest outside Stuyvesant High School, one of New York's elite schools, where barely 1% of students are black, then and now.

Weingarten leadership of the AFT, it's the would-be reformers.

Now the UFT, the United Federation of Teachers, where I am a union delegate, is the largest teachers union in the country. It's run by the Unity Caucus of Michael Mulgrew – the grandchildren of the Cold Warriors Max Shachtman and Al Shanker – which is deeply entrenched and loyal to the most conservative sectors of the Democratic Party, Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden and Barack Obama. The UFT and AFT have been deeply complicit in the nefarious doings of the “AFL-CIA,”³ the National Endowment for Democracy,⁴ and the like. They were involved in toppling Salvador Allende's left-wing Unidad Popular government

³ While the domestically the AFL-CIO is a labor federation, its international operations have always been an adjunct of, and largely financed by, U.S. intelligence and other government agencies. This was notoriously the case with the AIFLD (American Institute for Free Labor Development) and continues today with the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center, earning it the sobriquet “AFL-CIA” in wide sectors of the labor movement in Latin America.

⁴ For years the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency secretly financed anti-communist opposition movements, cultural associations (like the Congress for Cultural Freedom), student groups and unions as part of its Cold War against the Soviet Union. When this was exposed in the mid-1960s, the U.S. government set up the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to continue, more or less openly, the subversive activity previously sponsored by the CIA.

in Chile in 1973.⁵ The U.S.'s bankrolling of Solidarność counterrevolution in Poland was done directly through the UFT offices.⁶ The UFT was the only major teachers union in the country that did not come out against the Vietnam War.

So that is Unity Caucus, that is the UFT bureaucracy. Right now, the Unity Caucus is palpably gleeful because of the demise of their main internal opponent, the MORE caucus which has pretty much disappeared off the map with the collective political suicide of the International Socialist Organization, the ISO, which was a left-wing social-democratic group that was deeply involved in the reform wing of the bureaucracy that led the strikes in Chicago back in 2012, and L.A. and Oakland this year. The leadership in those strikes was from caucuses which had previously been opposition caucuses who got into power. And once they got

⁵ The AFT and UFT were involved in the 11 September 1973 coup d'état that overthrew the left-wing popular front government in Chile, including through the International Federation of Free Teachers Unions and an operative who was made the AFT's director of international relations shortly after the coup as the AFT applied for its first AIFLD grant.

⁶ The UFT was a main conduit for sending CIA money to the Solidarność “union” in Poland. See “Marjorie Stamberg: Revolutionary Trotskyist, Marxist Educator, A Leader of Struggles for All the Oppressed,” on page 39 of this issue.

into power they behave the same way as the bureaucrats they ousted.

They are the out-bureaucrats fighting to get in. They just wanted a more militant leadership based on the same politics. They are the same animal as the rest of the labor bureaucracy – keep labor in line for the Democrats. Because the Democratic Party does not have its own apparatus, when it comes to an election campaign, who is going door to door, knocking on doors? It is the teachers' unions. Last election for Hillary [2016] – the UFT sent buses to Pennsylvania to canvas. They didn't have to do it in NYC because everybody in New York votes Democratic anyway. The UFT tops are deeply entwined with the Democratic Party.

Randi Weingarten, who is president of the AFT, and was president of the UFT, is part of the so-called “1 percent.” She makes over \$500 K a year. She's a member of the Democratic Party National Committee, and she also receives a housing allowance, literally for her house in D.C., in addition to her house in the Hamptons. So she is a classic representative of the labor bureaucracy, which is a petty-bourgeois layer, a parasitic layer which rests on top of the workers' organization and congenitally seeks to subordinate it to management. They seek “peaceful coexistence.” They are what Daniel De Leon called the “labor lieutenants of capital.”

Since before the turn of the 21st century we have seen the attacks on teachers front and center in the politics of this country. And the attacks are being waged by both Republicans and Democrats. Bush had the NCLB (No Child Left Behind, which many called “No Vendor Left Behind”), and Obama had RTTP (Race to the Top). The content of these were the same, they were the business model of education, and it had grotesque effects on students and teachers. They want to turn children into commodities, to link teacher evaluations to standardized tests, to replace public education with charter schools, which are private schools based on public money.

This came to a head with Bush's Education Secretary, Ron Paige, who actually called teachers unions terrorist organizations; who after Hurricane Katrina seized on the destruction of New Orleans' Ninth Ward and other historic African-American districts to effect the total privatization of New Orleans schools. We saw this in the racist attacks over the so-called “cheating scandal” in the Atlanta schools. We have written extensively on this at our Class Struggle Education Workers Blogspot site and in *Marxism & Education*: see “New Orleans Schools: Test Lab for War on Public Education”⁷ and “How Racism Cheated Atlanta's Black Teachers and Students.”⁸ These pieces were written by Mark Lance and Charlie Brover.

⁷ March 2016 CSEW supplement reprinted in *Marxism & Education* No. 5.

⁸ Available on the CSEW blog, <https://edworkersunite.blogspot.com>.



Class Struggle Education Workers and Internationalists marched with Staten Island protest over police murder of Eric Garner, 23 August 2014.

So, what is the strategy to fight all this in the teachers' unions?

In opposing the entrenched labor bureaucracy, the reformist wing embraced what they call “social justice” unionism. But despite the rhetoric, it *cannot* carry out social justice, as it is wedded to the capitalist system.

In our union the clash with the reformists came before the M.O.R.E. was actually founded, when there was a discussion of what kind of opposition we needed in the UFT. In 2008, we had a big demo in front of Tweed Courthouse, the headquarters of the DOE, to defend the ATRs [those educators placed in the Absent Teacher Reserve]. These were the teachers who had been pushed out of their classrooms with the frenetic closing of the schools. This demo, which we initiated, was during the Obama election campaign, I was a speaker for CSEW, and I said Barack Obama was as bad as his opponent (Mitt Romney) as they were both capitalist politicians.⁹ I said a caucus must be independent of the Democrats and must draw the class line. The reformists went ballistic, saying “you can't talk about that at a union demo.” Basically, these groups are for pressure politics, pressure on the Democrats, that is.

They went on through several incarnations to form the M.O.R.E. in New York which was modeled on Chicago C.O.R.E. (Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators), which struck Chicago schools in 2012. That was a massive strike, and ended with a contract that gained nothing. We wrote “Strike was Hugh, Settlement Sucked.” The House of Delegates voted it down, and the C.O.R.E. bureaucracy shoved it down their throats.¹⁰ Jesse Sharkey of the ISO ran that union as its vice president. Last year he was elected president of the Chicago Teachers Union, and reportedly quietly resigned from the ISO a few months before the group as whole imploded. But under C.O.R.E., the CTU regularly supported Democratic Party candidates, including endorsing Barack Obama.

⁹ See “After November 24...,” on page 53 of this issue.

¹⁰ See *The Internationalist* special issue, November-December 2012.

This is what “social justice unionism” means in practice, and we just saw the same thing in Los Angeles and Oakland. They say they are on the side of the oppressed black and Latin population, yet all of these “reform” caucuses act exactly like the bureaucracies they’ve replaced, and sometimes they’re worse. Before the 2012 strike, Chicago CORE had a fancy brochure, laying out how they would stop the closing schools. I have it here. But when it came down to the wire, they went for a lousy contract that didn’t stop the closing of a single school. Recently in L.A., you had the same scenario. The UTLA published a fancy brochure, which I also have here. And they had a really big strike. But the settlement didn’t stop the charters, they just got the school board to write a hypocritical letter calling for a moratorium on *increasing* charters.¹¹

The reason these reform bureaucrats gave in both cases for not even fighting during the strikes on the issues they used to build community support beforehand was the same. They said that “under the law of collective bargaining” we can’t bring up these issues during the strike. Well, screw their law, as Marxists we know that the law is a reflection of the class forces. Mexican teachers know that, as they have waged militant strikes against the same kind of privatizing education “reforms” we face in this country. And to wage those struggles they have gone directly up against the capitalist state, like in Oaxaca in 2016, where I was present at the time teaching there.¹² But in this country, to return to the topic, the reform “social justice” bureaucrats like the business unionism old-line bureaucrats bow to the bosses’ law. They use these issues like closing schools, and charter schools to dress up their credentials and come back with crumbs.

In New York, it came to a head over the police choke-hold murder of Eric Garner, in 2014 for the “crime” of allegedly selling “loosies” on the street corner in Staten Island. That in itself is a story: why would it be a crime to sell single cigarettes? But, in fact, he was not selling loosies that day. And today, five years later, this is the first time killer cop Daniel Pantaleo has even had to put his face in a court room, and not even a real court, only an “internal review” by the Police Department. No criminal charges were brought against this murderer, only an “internal review” and that only happened because the Garner family did not stop fighting for one minute, even after Eric’s daughter Erica suffered a heart attack and died after her refusal to be silenced. The verdict in this review is still pending.¹³

Well, in August of 2014, when Eric Garner was killed, there was protest march called to go to Staten Island, called by Al Sharpton. The UFT leadership went on the march, and M.O.R.E. not only did not go on the march, thus putting them to the right of the UFT bureaucracy, they issued a statement in solidarity with “the brothers and sisters of the PBA” – the near or crypto fascists PBA or whatever you want to call them. Many of M.O.R.E.’s own members were horrified by this, and

went on the march on their own. So that was pretty much the end of the claim to “social justice unionism.” We went on the march with our signs and wrote to the MORE website and other social media and other outlets to draw the lessons of this.¹⁴

Trotsky said the unions are increasingly integrated into the state. He wrote that they faced a choice: the unions can only end up being the secondary instruments for the suppression of labor, or become instruments of the revolutionary mobilization of the proletariat. That’s what we face today. And in the case of education unions, it is deeply connected to the role of public education in capitalist society.

As Marx wrote in *The German Ideology* in 1847, one year before he wrote the *Manifesto*:

“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 has control at the same time over the means of mental production.”

It’s important to understand the limits of education reform under capitalism. We defend public education against attacks by the privatizers who would like to abolish it. But the system itself is run in the service of capital. To fundamentally change it, you have to get rid of capitalism, of production for profit.

Now there is a long history of education reforms, Montessori, Paolo Freire, John Dewey, others who were not able to carry out reforms under capitalism. Nadezhda Krupskaya wrote extensively on this question. She, of course, was a Bolshevik cadre, a teacher, whose work laid the basis for early Soviet education, as well as being the companion of Lenin. And she studied all of the people doing ground breaking work on this question. She wrote a whole book about this, called *Public Education and Democracy*,¹⁵ I have it here, a photocopy, in Russian. And she looked at all the reformers – Montessori, John Dewey, and so on – because they were organizing to make a revolution, to take power. And then they did, in October 1917. But speaking to educators the next year, Krupskaya made a fundamental point: if you want to have socialist education, you have to first have a socialist revolution, not the other way around:

“Socialist schools are conceivable only in specific social conditions, for they are made socialist not by the fact that they are directed by socialists, but by the fact that their objectives correspond to the needs of a socialist society....

“Since socialist schools could not be viable institutions in a capitalist system, they could at best only be interesting pedagogical experiments.... For the physiognomy of public schools was determined by the ruling class, the class of the bourgeoisie, and the objectives that it set were altogether different. In organizing the school system the bourgeoisie proceeded from its own interests and from the desire to ensure its own class domination rather than from the interests of individuals and of society.”¹⁶

¹¹ See “Powerful L.A. Teachers Strike Was Betrayed in Settlement,” in CSEW Supplement, “Teachers Strikes Shake California” (February 2019).

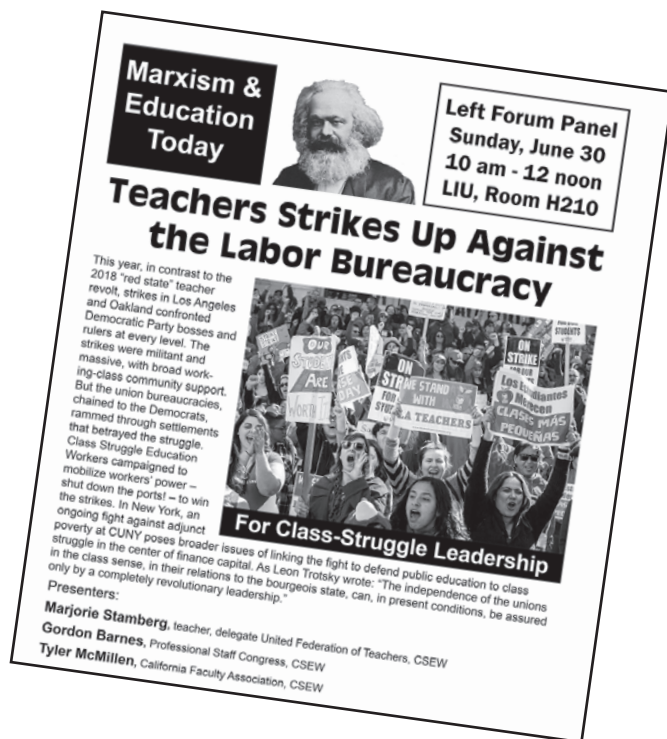
¹² See “Mexican Teachers Strike of 2016: The Struggle Continues,” in *Marxism & Education* No. 5 (Summer 2018).

¹³ Daniel Pantaleo was fired in August 2019.

¹⁴ See “CSEW at Staten Island march in solidarity with family of Eric Garner, murdered by NYPD” and “Open Letter to M.O.R.E. by CSEW Member and UFT Delegate,” on the Class Struggle Education Workers blog, <https://edworkersunite.blogspot.com>.

¹⁵ See excerpt in *The Internationalist Special Supplement, Marxism and the Battle Over Education* 2nd edition, January 2008.

¹⁶ N. Krupskaya, “Concerning the Question of Socialist Schools,” in *Ibid*.



Marxism & Education Today

Left Forum Panel
Sunday, June 30
10 am - 12 noon
LIU, Room H210

Teachers Strikes Up Against the Labor Bureaucracy

This year, in contrast to the 2018 "red state" teacher revolt, strikes in Los Angeles and Oakland confronted Democratic Party bosses and rulers at every level. The strikes were militant and massive, with broad working-class community support. But the union bureaucracies, chained to the Democrats, that betrayed the struggle. Class Struggle Education Workers campaigned to mobilize workers' power — shut down the ports! — to win the strikes. In New York, an ongoing fight against adjunct poverty at CUNY poses broader issues of linking the fight to defend public education to class struggle in the center of finance capital. As Leon Trotsky wrote: "The independence of the unions in the class sense, in their relations to the bourgeois state, can, in present conditions, be assured only by a completely revolutionary leadership."

For Class-Struggle Leadership

Presenters:
Marjorie Stamberg, teacher, delegate United Federation of Teachers, CSEW
Gordon Barnes, Professional Staff Congress, CSEW
Tyler McMillen, California Faculty Association, CSEW

Flier for the 30 June 2019 CSEW event at the Left Forum

I want to make one more important point. And that is, what's important for us as educators, school is where race and class come together.

This year, 7 black students got accepted into Stuyvesant High School for the upcoming school year. Last year, 10 black students got accepted. The year before 13. At Bronx Science, 12 black students got in, down from 25 last year. Brooklyn Tech is not doing much better. This year out of a huge freshman class of 1,825, there will be 95 black students (5.2%) and 117 Latino (6.4 %). In 1989 Black and Latin students were 51 percent of the student body.

When the figure came out of only seven black students getting into Stuyvesant, there was an uproar. So Mayor De Blasio had to do something. Now it's a common place that the mayor, who is in thrall to the real estate industry, has actually done nothing on his so-called "progressive" agenda. He ran for office against the charters and when "Evil Eva" Moskowitz of the Success Academy fought him, he pulled back. He's done absolutely nothing, even in liberal terms, to solve the catastrophe of homelessness in New York City: Out of more than a million kids in the NYC school system, 114,000 kids are homeless in NYC—that is more than one out of every 10. And it gets worse every year.

So in terms of New York's segregated schools, which in 2014 were declared (in the UCLA study¹⁷) the most segregated in the country, De Blasio backed a bill in New York State legislature to get rid of the admissions tests for Stuyvesant. Of course, the bill went down in flames in Albany, because the liberal Democrats who run Albany now oppose the desegregation plans as "too di-

¹⁷ See J. Kucsera and Gary Orfield, "New York State's Extreme School Segregation: Inequality, Inaction and a Damaged Future" (March 2014), from The Civil Rights Project at UCLA.

visive." And, in fact, the segregation has gotten way worse since 1954 when the Supreme Court issued its decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* which codified that "Separate is not equal."

So we have an enormous social struggle ahead of us. Our position, as the CSEW, in terms of the "elite" high schools, is that there shouldn't be any. Abolish the [Regents] test because to ace it, for the most part you need your parents to spend several thousand dollars a year from the age of six, you spend your entire childhood weekends sitting at Kaplan or the other test prep schools preparing for it. Every school in the city should offer a high quality curriculum, rather than having competition at limited places for the "elite" schools. But of course the question of school segregation is far more than that — it is connected to the whole fabric of this racist capitalist society. We need to restore open admission free tuition at CUNY.¹⁸ We need to abolish student debt.

But the question comes down to leadership. Because all the social conditions are in our favor for the struggle. In education, the parents are with the teachers. For 40 years in NYC, the black community was separated and pitted against the teachers union. This is no longer the case. We see this desire for united struggle playing out again and again, in L.A., in Oakland, in West Virginia, in New York. The charters are in trouble. I'd like to refer you to the very important article in the *Washington Post*, May 30 [2019] by Jack Schneider, "School's Out—Charters were supposed to save public education. Why are Americans turning against them?"

But to answer that question, why, I again refer you to *Marxism and Education's* series of articles on this, including, "Free Market Racism: Segregated Schools, Gentrified Neighborhoods" and "'American Apartheid' by Design," which is Charlie Brover's review of Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How our Government Segregated America* (2017).

So in closing, a final quote from Leon Trotsky. Leon Trotsky was writing an essay when he was assassinated by a Stalinist agent in 1940. It was posthumously published under the title "Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay." He wrote there:

"Trade unions in the present epoch cannot simply be the organs of democracy as they were in the epoch of free capitalism. And they can no longer remain politically neutral, or limit themselves to securing the daily needs of the working class. They can no longer be reformist because objective conditions leave no room for any serious and lasting reforms. The trade unions of our time can either serve as secondary instruments of imperialist capitalism for the subordination and disciplining of the workers and for obstructing the revolution, or the trade unions can become the instruments of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat."

A lot of groups that claim to be Trotskyist occasionally make reference to Trotsky's essay, but it is just a ritual mention. We take it seriously, because history has shown that he was right. And we just saw that again in Los Angeles and Oakland. There can be no reformist unionism, because there can't be any serious reforms. To fight against the destruction of public education, the only way to go forward is to fight for a revolution. And to do that you need class-struggle leadership. That is the mission of CSEW, to forge a class-struggle tendency in the education unions to oust the pro-capitalist bureaucracy so that the unions can become the instruments of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat. ■

¹⁸ See "Smash Racist Purge of CUNY – Fight for Open Admissions, Free Tuition!" in *Marxism and the Battle Over Education*.

CLASS STRUGGLE EDUCATION WORKERS

If We Act Together, Teachers, Transit and All NYC Municipal Workers Can Shred the “No Strike” Taylor Law

VOTE NO on UFT-D.O.E. Sellout Deal *It Will Take a Strike to Win*

17 JUNE 2023 – A little before noon on Tuesday, June 13, New York City mayor Eric Adams announced that agreement had been reached with the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) on a *five-year* contract covering 120,000 employees of the city’s Department of Education (D.O.E.). The boldface figures were wage increases of 3% in the first three years, and a fraction more in years four and five. ***Do the math: with inflation in the NYC metropolitan area of 6.3% last year, a 3% “raise” amounts to a PAY CUT.***

UFT president Michael Mulgrew hyped an annual retention bonus of \$1,000 (after May 2026, less before then). And then, in the time-honored manner of the UFT bureaucracy (a/k/a the “Unity Caucus”), having sprung the deal on the day of a union Delegate Assembly, Mulgrew rushed it through the D.A. With no more to go on than a Power Point presentation of some highlights and a truncated Q&A, with no time for substantive debate, by 6:15 p.m. the D.A. voted to send the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA), sight unseen, to the membership for ratification.

This rotten deal is sucker bait. It is a cover for health care cuts, larger class sizes, more segregation, and the money is a swindle, a pay cut disguised as a raise, hitting the lowest-paid education workers the hardest. It should be decisively defeated. But a resounding “no” vote would only be the beginning. The UFT tops hide behind the New York state Taylor Law, which bans strikes by public employees. But to overcome a betrayal like this, the UFT would have to strike. And that requires preparation.

When the MoA was released the next day, what was in there – and what was not – underlined the outstanding reasons why ***this sellout contract should be decisively voted down.*** We can start with the money, although that is by no means the main reason the MoA should be rejected. First there is the “ratification bonus.” \$3,000 sounds good, but don’t expect to see anything like that in your bank account, as income tax on bonuses is withheld at a much higher rate.

Also, teacher aides and paraprofessionals are not just shortchanged in this contract, they are being shafted. An aide will make under \$30,000 a year base pay in 2024 and most paras top out at under \$40,000 even after 15 years on the job. You can’t live on that in NYC, where \$20,000 a year (\$1,650/mo.) is a low rent, if you can find it. Many aides and paras have to have a second job to make ends meet. ***Paraprofessionals and school aides need a huge pay raise, as do school cafeteria***

workers (who are not in the UFT). All UFTers should fight for them to get it, NOW.

Perhaps the biggest reason to vote this sellout contract down is health care. There is no mention of it in the MoA, but a big hunk of the money to pay for the salary increases is coming from the “savings” the D.O.E. plans to wring out of health care. For the past two years, retired UFT and city workers have been fighting against the plan – initiated by Bill de Blasio and taken over by Adams – to ***force retirees off Medicare***, a federal health insurance plan, ***onto a “Medicare Advantage” plan*** which is government-funded but privately managed. Under this, insurance companies make huge profits by denying needed medical procedures and medications.

Across the country, almost half of Medicare recipients have been forced onto these privatized insurance plans as the insurance giants milk multibillion profits from the government till. Moreover, the company that won the NYC Medicare Advantage contract, Aetna (owned by CVS Pharmacy) has one of the highest rates of denying procedures and medications ordered by doctors that a government audit found to be medically justified. Despite many protests and several court suits, Adams seems to be successfully ramming through this attack on retirees’ health care.

Meanwhile, the city is also seeking to slash health care costs by putting out bids to insurers to offer plans costing 10% less than the present GHI EmblemHealth plans for 750,000 in-service city workers and dependents. The D.O.E. has been doing this ever since the 2014 contract, when they “saved” millions by taking the money out of employees’ pockets through “co-pays,” and later by forcing new teachers into the HIP HMO plan, where the insurance company decides. UFTers should demand: ***Stop the “Medicare Advantage” Swindle! Hands Off Our Health Care!*** UFT members should also sign the petition to demand the right to ***vote on any changes to health care.***

Another key thing that is not in the D.O.E.-UFT agreement is ***class size***. At a number of our schools we demonstrated last fall for the City Council bill to sharply lower class sizes, although the UFT tops did little to support this. The bill died in committee, although a majority of the City Council endorsed it. But then a state law was passed that mandated cutting maximum class sizes in high school, for example, from 34 students to 25. This would be a huge gain for public education. Reductions were supposed to start in September 2023, but since

the bill became law (despite resistance from Governor Hochul and Mayor Adams) nothing has been done to implement it.

Until now, class sizes have been stipulated in the contract. But in this MoA, nothing. The D.O.E. and UFT tops are acting as if the heat is off because actual class sizes fell below the limits in the pandemic. But now they are rising again, and this school year over 230,000 students were crammed into classes of more than 30 students. In District 20 (South Brooklyn), high schools are at 130% of capacity, particularly as large numbers of new immigrants have arrived. UFTers should demand that the ***mandated class-size reductions be written into the contract and implemented NOW.***

A third key area unmentioned in the UFT-D.O.E. agreement is ***school integration and providing high-quality programs throughout the system, and in African American and Latino areas in particular.*** Racial exclusion from the elite high schools continues to fester. This year only seven black students were admitted to Stuyvesant High School based on the SHSAT exam scores. Similarly, only 9% of the test-based specialized high schools admissions were black and Hispanic students, who make up two-thirds of NYC public school students overall. New York continues to have the most segregated schools in the country.

Class Struggle Education Workers has long called to ***integrate public schools, including by abolishing specialized and “gifted and talented” programs and providing quality education for all.*** Mayor Adams and his schools chancellor David Banks are hostile to school integration, claiming to promote “diversity” by expanding “G&T” programs. Yet the only mention of high-quality programs in the MoA is of more “virtual learning.” The CSEW has insisted that “*remote education*” is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. *Education is social.* Experience with remote classes in the pandemic showed that expanding these programs will *increase* racial/ economic segregation.

To provide sharply higher income for the lowest-paid D.O.E. employees, to provide quality medical care, lower class size and fight for genuine integration and equality (rather than phony “diversity” and “equity”) will cost money. We demand results, how the bosses pay for it is their problem. But it is particularly obscene that the Adams administration has tried to cut school budgets at a time when city and state governments are swimming in money. New York City has a projected \$4.9 billion *surplus* in the 2023 budget; New York State will have an \$8.7 billion *surplus* in 2023; and as of 2022, over \$4 billion of D.O.E. federal stimulus funds were unspent.

The bottom line is that Adams and Hochul are enemies of public education. Both have received millions of dollars in campaign contributions from billionaire backers of privatized charter schools. Adams raked in \$7.7 million from wealthy donors in 2021, who expect a payback – and they’re getting it, as the ex-cop mayor takes aim at city labor. No surprises there. But the most treacherous role is played by the labor leaders who have fronted for the attacks on union gains by Wall Street and City Hall (sometimes united in a single person, as with billionaire former mayor Michael Bloomberg).

Harry Nespoli of the Sanitation Workers, Henry Garrido of AFSCME District Council 37 and the UFT’s Mike Mulgrew head up the Municipal Labor Committee (MLC) which designed the “Medicare Advantage” rip-off along with de Blasio and Adams. They are literally agents of the bosses in the unions – “labor lieutenants of capital,” in pioneering U.S. socialist Daniel De Leon’s memorable phrase – doing the employers’ dirty work by keeping the workers in check. DC 37’s Garrido set the 3% wage “hike” bandwagon in motion, which the UFT and now other city unions have hopped on in the name of “pattern bargaining.” But the most insidious of this trio is surely Mulgrew.

The UFT chief has ambitions, he wants to “have a seat at the table” with the bosses, to have a hand in designing give-backs that gut union gains. And Mulgrew stands at the head of a well-oiled machine, a steamroller called “Unity.” It is vital to understand that sellouts like this UFT-D.O.E. deal are not due to personal corruption, but the product of a privileged petty-bourgeois bureaucratic layer that sits atop the unions, seeking to mediate between labor and capital. It was in top gear at the June 13 UFT D.A. After one semi-opposition speaker, the question was called, hundreds of “Unity” hands shot up in union and the online vote to close debate was 1,287 to 285.

Teachers by themselves have limited economic leverage, as they don’t produce profit for the bosses. To win, educators must ally with sectors with the social/economic power to shut the city down. In New York City, that means ***joint strike action with Transport Workers Union Local 100***, which runs the subways and buses, ***and all city workers.*** In that way, tens of thousands of education workers of the UFT and Professional Staff Congress (CUNY) – ***with the active participation of students and the working-class and oppressed communities that educators serve*** – can spark an upheaval that can ***shut the city down ... and turn the Taylor Law into a dead letter.***

Above all, a strike must be waged politically, which means taking on the Democratic Party. All of the leading players here – the governor, the mayor, educrats, City Council members and union leaders – are Democrats. And the ploys educators are facing were designed by Democrats: charter schools and Medicare Advantage are prime examples of the “public-private partnerships” pushed by Bill and Hillary Clinton, and kicked off under the Democratic Clinton administration. If things get sticky, as they did in the 2022 Chicago teachers strike, they will call in Democratic president Joe Biden, who last December pushed a law through the majority Democrat Congress imposing a sellout contract that railroad workers had voted against.

The Democratic Party is a party of capital, of Wall Street, of top industrialists and Big Tech, hedge fund operators and the rest of the capitalist parasites who live off the profits squeezed from the working people. The Democrats are strikebreakers and war makers, pushing the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, and preparing for counterrevolutionary war against China, just as they initiated the anti-Soviet Cold War. To defeat them requires forging a leadership based on a program of intransigent class struggle, undertaking to build a revolutionary workers party to fight for a workers government. A “no” vote on the contract is the signal to ***“get ready to rumble!”*** ■

CLASS STRUGGLE EDUCATION WORKERS

Democrats, Pro-Capitalist Labor Bureaucrats Are Attacking the Union Ranks

Use Union Power to Stop Gutting of NYC Retiree / Employee Health Care

The Bosses Have Declared War – Rip Up the No-Strike Taylor Law!

UFT's Mulgrew, DC37's Garrido and Other MLC Tops Sell Out Union Gains

Expropriate the Health Care Corporations – For Socialized Medicine!

NOVEMBER 2022 – For over a year and a half, the New York City government has been waging an unrelenting war on the health care rights of municipal workers and retirees. City rulers are determined to gouge hundreds of millions of dollars annually out of the livelihoods of their current and former employees by curtailing their medical services and raising out-of-pocket costs. The campaign was launched in the spring of 2021 with a plan to push NYC retirees out of the premium-free Medicare + GHI EmblemHealth Senior Care onto a Medicare Advantage plan run by a private insurance company. Then-mayor Bill de Blasio along with United Federation of Teachers (UFT) president Mike Mulgrew, AFSCME District Council 37 head Henry Garrido and other leaders of the Municipal Labor Committee (MLC) insisted that this was a must-do because of skyrocketing health care costs. *It was a lie then, and it is a lie now.*

They then sold this plan with more lies. The city, beginning with de Blasio and now under Mayor Eric Adams, both Democrats, claims that imposing Medicare Advantage (MA) is not privatization. Nonsense. Medicare *Dis*Advantage plans, as retiree advocates have labeled them, are no more public than the charter school scam: these are private outfits milking tax revenues. The city claimed (and union leaders parroted) that there would be no loss in coverage. Another lie. MA plans achieve cost reductions (and thus profit increases) in two main ways: limiting participating doctors and hospitals, and denying medical services. The initial description of the NYC MA plan said that prior approval from the insurance company would only be needed for seven procedures. Yet the contract with Anthem-Empire BlueCross Blue Shield listed 27 procedures requiring prior approval, and an advisory sent to medical providers listed 87!

A year ago, Manhattan Supreme court judge Lyle Frank ruled that the city had to come clean about what was in the Advantage plan. Then, this past March the judge ruled, on a suit by the NYC Organization of Public Service Employees, that the city could not force retirees wishing to stay in Medicare + Senior Care to pay a premium (of nearly \$5,000

a year for a couple), as that would violate Section 12-126 of the New York City Administrative Code. That states: “The city will pay the entire cost of health insurance coverage for city employees, city retirees, and their dependents,” up to a benchmark (H.I.P.-HMO) rate. Retirees breathed a collective sigh of relief. But now the Adams administration is back trying to impose a change to the city code, to allow the city to alter the benchmark plan for “any class” of recipients. This would not only affect retirees but could open the door to “tiered” coverage of in-service employees, as with pensions.

So now the battle is posed over preserving or gutting Section 12-126, which dates back to 1967 when strikes by sanitation workers and teachers roiled NYC, and won union gains. The city and MLC leaders are trying to strong-arm the City Council into approving the change, which would destroy the guarantee of fully paid health insurance for all NYC employees, retirees and dependents. Then on October 28, the NYC Office of Labor Relations sent an ultimatum to the MLC saying that if the city code is not amended by November 23, it will ask the arbitrator to impose a Medicare Advantage plan on all retirees and eliminate all other plans. The arbitrator has said he would do just that, or if the unions object, he would impose premiums of \$1,250 to \$1,750 annually on in-service employees (*The Chief*, 9 November). In an e-mail, UFT president Mulgrew used this threat to insist on gutting the city code. *This is blackmail, pure and simple.*

The reason for the supposed iron-clad requirement of \$600 million in annual “savings” on health care costs for those covered by the NYC health benefits program is that, as part of the wage bargaining in 2018, the city labor leaders negotiated a side agreement with the city providing for \$1.1 billion in “savings” over the period 2019-21, “of which \$600 million will recur annually beyond FY’2021.” That money was the major source for the minimal pay “raises” agreed to that year.¹ So while the 2018

¹ The average pay increase over the 43-month UFT contract was 7.1%. By the time the contract ran out in September 2022, the cumulative inflation in the U.S. (according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Consumer Price Index) was 18.4%. Thus the pay “raises” financed by raiding the health care stabilization fund ended up as a *pay cut*.

contract has ended, the city claims it can contractually enforce \$600 million in health care cuts yearly for the indefinite future! And as former UFT chapter leader Arthur Goldstein noted in the *Gotham Gazette* (15 November), the UFT Executive Committee (of which he was a member), the Delegate Assembly and the membership were not informed of that agreement until *after* the contract was ratified. *It was a swindle, then and now.*

We are faced with a declaration of war on the unions by the capitalist government of New York City, acting on behalf of Wall Street bankers, attacking labor's most fundamental gains. For many younger workers, who have never seen real labor struggle, the unions were synonymous with free health care – and now that is on the chopping block. Yet instead of resisting, the union bureaucracy is acting as agents of the bosses – they truly are “labor lieutenants of capital,” as socialist leader Daniel De Leon (1852-1914) put it in his memorable phrase. And from the plutocrats to the bureaucrats, they are all Democrats. But the sellout misleaders are not same thing as the unions, which are indispensable defensive organizations of the working class. The members are the union. And the 300,000 unionized in-service NYC workers together with 250,000 union retirees are a formidable force. We can bring NYC to a grinding halt, and we should in this fight, which is a crucial one for us all. Power is the only language that anti-labor, pro-cop mayor Adams and his billionaire backers understand.

What should be happening right now is preparing for a battle royale of labor vs. capital, educating the membership on what it will take to ***shred the no-strike Taylor Law*** and to ***wage and win an all-out citywide strike*** against the attack on our health care. Instead, rather than waging a hard fight within the union to take collective action, opposition groups like the Movement of Rank-and-File Educators (M.O.R.E.) and Retiree Advocate-UFT are calling on individuals to call, email or tweet City Council members. Meanwhile, there is a convoluted discussion about the ins and outs of 12-126, the 1992 MLC-NYC MOA (Memorandum of Understanding) requiring bargaining over health care, and other details of the court case. But legal maneuvering only goes so far. The judicial system is there to protect the interests of the capitalist rulers, and what the law is in practice reflects the balance of class forces. It is up to militant trade-unionists to upend the scales of bourgeois “justice” with hard-hitting class struggle.

The stakes here are not just local, and they are eminently political. The drive to privatize Medicare goes back to the administration of Republican Richard Nixon, who pushed to set up “health maintenance organizations” (HMOs) to help employers keep down costs. This was the result of a 1971 conversation between “Tricky Dick” and his friend Edgar Kaiser, founder of Kaiser Permanente, which laid out the essential idea of HMOs, summed up by Nixon aide John Erlichman as: “All the incentives are toward less medical care, because the less care they give them, the more money they make.” Medicare Advantage plans were the brainchild of Democrats Bill and Hillary Clinton, champions of “public-private partnerships,” as a cost-cutting measure after Hillary’s health care reform of pushing all workers into HMOs bombed. Again, the idea was to use private compa-

nies to rein in costs by cutting down on benefits.

The same was true of Democrat Barack Obama’s Affordable Care Act – a/k/a “Obamacare” – based on forcing everyone to buy medical insurance. Since the White House couldn’t get a “robust public option” past Congress, it sold the plan by making it a cash cow for the giant health insurance companies (which then joined in lobbying for it). The Obama administration labeled comprehensive union health care programs (like that of the NYC-MLC) as “Cadillac plans,” claiming that they “overinsured” workers by not requiring them to pay thousands of dollars out of pocket (as most “health insurance” plans do), and imposed a 40% tax on their more expensive benefits. And now we have “Mulgrewcare” (as UFT Exec Board member James Eterno has dubbed it), to force retirees into Medicare “Advantage” plans. All these schemes are based on the view that people have too much health care, and costs should be cut by soaking the workers.

The claim by Mulgrew, Garrido and other MLC leaders that their Advantage plan would not reduce benefits is ludicrous, especially after last April’s study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General of denial of prior authorization and payment by private health care giants. The HHS OIG cited “the potential incentive for Medicare Advantage Organizations (MAOs) to deny beneficiary access to services and deny payments to providers in an attempt to increase profits.”² Sure enough, it found that 13% of medical procedures denied by MAOs actually met Medicare standards, and that 18% of payment requests denied met Medicare coverage rules. Last month the *New York Times*³ published an article detailing how the leading Medicare Advantage companies engaged in fraud and overbilling, including CVS Health, which is slated to provide the NYC “Advantage Plus” plan after Anthem/Blue Cross pulled out.

And it isn’t just retired city workers whose health coverage is under attack. In June, the NYC Office of Labor Relations (OLR) announced it was putting out proffers to insurance companies to replace the premium-free GHI Emblem Health plan by cutting costs “by at least 10%.”⁴ Mulgrew’s absurd claim that health care savings under previous contracts with the city have not reduced benefits is belied by the fact that in 2018 alone, almost \$100 million in “savings” came from imposing higher co-pays on in-service workers. The city OLR boasts that it “saved” \$3.5 billion over the life of the 2014 contract, which went into the Stabilization Fund that was then raided to pay for “raises” under the 2018 contracts. The UFT leader claims he doesn’t want to set current employees against retirees, but that is exactly what he is doing by accepting the city’s ultimatum to gut administrative code 12-126 or lose premium-free health plans.

² U.S. HHS OIG Report in Brief, “Some Medicare Advantage Organization Denials of Prior Authorization Requests Raise Concerns About Beneficiary Access to Medically Necessary Care” (April 2022).

³ “How Insurers Exploited Medicare for Billions,” *New York Times*, 9 October.

⁴ “City Employee Health Plan Could Switch to Lower-Cost Company Under New Proposal,” *The City*, 15 June.



Retired members of the UFT and other city employees have put up a tremendous fight against the municipal union leaders' attempt to force them into a privatized "Medicare Advantage" plan. The labor misleaders want to save money for city rulers by making health care dependent on insurance companies' approval. Above: Internationalists, including CUNY students, join retirees in a 10 March 2023 protest at NYC City Hall.

This attack is a classic example of the bosses' divide-and-conquer techniques. It aims to set in-service employees against retirees. And it starkly shows how pro-capitalist union leaders help the employers wring concessions out of the workers, supposedly to stop things getting "even worse" – which opens the door to even more concessions, which make things worse and worse.

Over and over, we are seeing how the labor bureaucrats play ball with the Democrats to undercut union gains. Some of those opposing the Medicare Advantage attack on retiree health care are buying into the search-for-health-care-cost-savings ploy. Thus, while the Professional Staff Congress (representing City University of New York faculty and staff) has opposed the Medicare Advantage plan, PSC president James Davis has suggested various steps such as consolidating the 100 or so municipal union welfare funds for prescription drug purchasing. But the issue is not that the city doesn't have the money to pay for top-notch health insurance, or that it faces future hypothetical budget deficits – Mayor Adams is currently sitting on a \$7.7 billion surplus, much of it stashed away in NYC's Rainy Day Fund. In any case, it is not the job of unions to fix the rulers' money problems, but rather to defend the working people against capitalist attacks, which the sellout union tops are going along with and even spearheading.

Another demand that has been raised in the current fight is to support the New York Health Act, which would abolish the state's existing health insurance system and set up a "single payer" government health insurance program. (UFT and other MLC union leaders oppose this call – no surprise there!) But even state-run health insurance, such as most advanced capitalist countries already have, would be facing a capitalist medical care system based on maximizing profits. It is that system, gutted by decades of hospital closures, that nearly collapsed in the COVID-19 pandemic, producing the deaths of over 65,000 New Yorkers. Rather, class-conscious workers should fight for a *fully socialized medical system*, from top to bottom, which can only come about through a socialist revolution.

Class Struggle Education Workers and the Internationalist Group call for the union ranks, including retired and current workers, to unite and to join with all supporters of labor rights to stop the assault on New York City workers' health care. There should be protests of tens of thousands ringing City Hall and shutting it down, day after day. To lead such a struggle it is necessary to build a class-struggle leadership of labor defending all the oppressed. The urgent need is for a fight to *oust the pro-capitalist labor bureaucrats, break with the Democrats and begin building a class-struggle workers party fighting for a workers government.* ■

CLASS STRUGGLE EDUCATION WORKERS

Democrats, Republicans vs. Public Education

We Need a Class-Struggle Workers Party

By Class Struggle Education Workers/UFT

16 OCTOBER 2024 – For the past year, schools and colleges across the country have been in turmoil as protests mounted against the genocidal U.S./Israel war on Gaza. While ultra-rightist Republicans in Congress summoned administrators to Washington for witch-hunting hearings, Democrats also slandered the protests as supposedly “antisemitic” and brought in police to shut them down. Gaza became a hot issue in K-12 schools as well. In New York City, the Department of Education (D.O.E.) issued a directive threatening disciplinary action against expressions of support for the embattled Palestinian people by students and educators, even on employees’ own time and outside of school.¹ This gag order soon became a dead letter as outrage over the slaughter grew.

Now the final spurt to the November elections is in full swing, and teachers unions are going all out to elect the Democratic Party slate. After President Biden (now widely derided by student protesters as “Genocide Joe”) dropped out, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) quickly jumped to endorse the Democratic ticket headed by Biden’s vice-president Kamala Harris. (The NEA had to curtail its July annual assembly and Biden’s address in Philadelphia due to picketing by striking staff members, to which it responded with a lockout!) So as the slaughter in Gaza continues and spreads to Lebanon, teachers unions are promoting Harris’s campaign theme of “joy” and “freedom.”

Adding to the enthusiasm was her vice-presidential pick, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, a former high school football coach and teacher. Walz’s wife, Gwen Walz, also was a teacher and school administrator for over two decades. NEA president Becky Pringle gushed that educators were “excited to see one of their own on the debate stage.” Within the first 24 hours of Walz’s selection as running mate, the Harris campaign brought in \$36 million from 450,000 donors, with teachers as the top profession. Now NEA and AFT members are phone-banking, door-to-door canvassing and busing to battleground states on weekends to elect Democrats, perhaps with more urgency than usual but basically following the same old playbook.

As the Democrats posture as supposed friends of labor, women and educators to bring home the money and the vote, the Republican candidate Donald Trump, a certified sociopath, is demonizing and threatening to deport “nearly 20 million” immigrants. Now he is regurgitating fascistic verbiage, vowing to “root out the communists” and “Marxists” he calls “vermin.” At the same time, Republican governors and state legislators

have embarked on a racist crusade to erase black history from public school libraries and classrooms, along with Latino and Native American history, references to Palestine in history books, or anything about transgender rights (or even sexuality). Plus, of course, union-busting.² This ominous campaign is just a step away from book burning.

Yet over the years, the historic alignment of the teachers unions with the Democratic Party has not put an end to, or even diminished Republican attacks on public schools and teacher-bashing. Far from it, as on issue after issue, Democrats have chimed in on the agenda of charterizing, corporatizing and privatizing public education. The reason is straightforward: the Democratic Party, no less than the Republicans, is a capitalist party, and as the capitalist system decays at an increasing rate, it is seeking to slash expenditures on public schools, hospitals, welfare and social programs. This reached its nadir in the COVID-19 pandemic when millions died as the U.S. public health system all but collapsed.

Teachers unions are in the crosshairs of racist reactionaries and Wall Street money men, Democrats and Republicans alike, because they are an obstacle to the drive to gut public education. Class Struggle Education Workers (CSEW) says that *you can’t defeat Trump with Democrats*. This is doubly true in the public schools, where the bosses (local governments and school administrators) and union leaders are almost universally supporters of the same capitalist party – the Democratic Party. Being in bed with the bosses is *class collaboration*. You won’t defend teachers and students with pillow talk. What we need is a *fighting workers party* prepared to lead hard *class struggle* to defeat the *bipartisan capitalist war on public education*.

L.A., Oakland, Chicago: Education Bosses Are All Democrats

Just take a look at the history of teacher strikes in recent years. The 2018 walkouts, from West Virginia to Oklahoma and Arizona, were in Republican-governed states where teachers unions are weak. But the next year saw major strikes by teachers in Los Angeles and Oakland, California and a continuing standoff in Chicago. In L.A., where 35,000 teachers struck in January 2019 for smaller class sizes and against charter schools, United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) union president, Alex Caputo-Pearl steamrolled strikers into voting for a contract that sold out those goals. UTLA had endorsed Democrat Gavin Newsom for governor and Democrat Eric Garcetti for mayor. As the CSEW wrote then:

¹ Class Struggle Education Workers called a protest, “Down with Gag Order Against NYC Teachers!” on the steps of the D.O.E. headquarters on 16 November 2023.

² Florida’s 2023 law, SB256, has already led to decertification of 54 local teachers unions, and now they are going after the largest, United Teachers of Dade (County) in Miami.

“The governor, state superintendent of education [Austin Beutner], Los Angeles mayor and almost all members of the L.A. school board are Democrats, who also hold huge supermajorities (over 70%) in both houses of the state legislature, which they have controlled almost continually since 1970. They are the ones directly responsible for the perilous state of public education in California today. Yet both the UTLA and the LAUSD are looking to the Democrats to resolve the issue in the strike.”

—CSEW, “To Win the Teachers Strike We Must Shut Down L.A.” (21 January 2019)

The following month, 3,000 educators of the Oakland Education Association (OEA) went on strike against the school district for pay raises, smaller class sizes and more school funding. Again, the prime enemies of the teachers were Democrats, including top-level capitalists pushing education “reform”: Michael Bloomberg, Bill Gates and Eli Broad. Bloomberg, the billionaire NYC ex-mayor who switched from Democrat to Republican and then back to the Democrats, “dropped more than \$5 million on California elections to elect charter school supporters,” including \$300,000 to a slate in Oakland seeking to turn half of local schools into charters (CSEW, “Mobilize Bay Area Workers to Win Oakland Teachers Strike,” 21 February 2019).

Both the UTLA and OEA’s rotten deals in cities governed by Democrats amounted to pay cuts (when adjusted for inflation), achieved essentially nothing on class size, and did not stop the charter school invasion and the resulting cut in funding to the public schools. Still, “California teachers unions [had] spent more than \$1.3 million supporting Newsom” in the elections, who only called to make charter schools “more transparent” (“Here’s who invested in Gavin Newsom – and what they want him to do,” *The Bee*, 11 February 2019).

In the Windy City, Democratic mayor Rahm Emmanuel declared war on the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) even before taking office in 2011, essentially forcing a strike the next year.³ He was replaced in 2019 by Democrat Lori Lightfoot, who continued trying to strongarm the teachers through mayoral dictatorship over the schools. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when the CTU put forward specific demands for safely reopening the schools, she locked 150 teachers out of Google Classroom in a blatant union-busting move. As we noted then, “one of the main forces behind Mayor Lightfoot’s diktat ordering teachers back to school no matter what, was the sinister outfit Democrats for Education Reform (DFER), which has long attacked the CTU, and teachers unions in general.”⁴ The DFER was bankrolled by Bloomberg.

So while Republicans demonize teachers unions and want to destroy them, it is most often Democrats who deliver the blows, and the union tops trail along behind like good boys and girls. Union misleaders like AFT president Randi Weingarten, a longtime member of the Democratic Party National Committee, argue that aligning with the Democrats gives teachers

more clout and leverage in backroom negotiations. The UFT has poured millions into its lobbying operations in Albany and Washington. But none of this has protected teachers, students and schools from charters, standardized common core curricula, high stakes national testing and the like. And in many cases such schemes were originated by the Democrats and pushed by Democratic party elected officials.

Clinton, Obama and Eva Moskowitz

Take the case of Hillary Clinton. Back in the 1980s, when husband Bill was governor of Arkansas, she chaired a state Education Standards Commission, denouncing the head of the NEA affiliate as the “leading villain” for opposing Clinton’s introduction of “teacher competency” tests. She was put on the board of directors of virulently anti-union Arkansas-based Walmart. Hillary also raked in \$100,000 for leading a Commission on Workforce Skills of the National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE). And when in November 1992 Bill was elected president, NCEE CEO Marc Tucker wrote her outlining a plan to separate off college-track students at age 16, while others would be channeled into programs focused on “work-related skills.”

The Clintons enacted much of this plan in the 1994 “Goals 2000: Educate America Act” and “School-to-Work Opportunities Act.” Later, a 2006 NCEE report, *Tough Choices or Tough Times*, financed by the Gates Foundation, called to end secondary education for many poor and minority students after the 10th grade; to “change the shape of teacher compensation,” raising wages by gutting pension plans; to end seniority for teachers and introduce “merit pay” based on student performance; and to sideline local school boards so “schools would be operated by independent contractors, many of them limited-liability corporations” (from the November 2008 *Internationalist* supplement, “No to Teacher-Basher McCain and Education-for-War Obama”).

In Hillary Clinton’s 2000 Senate bid, she remarked in a campaign debate, “I think we ought to streamline the due-process standards so that teachers that don’t measure up would no longer be in the classroom.”⁵ With her trademark calls for “public-private partnerships,” for decades she has backed charter schools, many of them financed by her friends in the Walton Family, who’ve “given grants to one in every four charter startups in the country, for a total of \$335 million.”⁶ In her 2016 presidential campaign she added some mild criticisms of charters, causing a few jitters in the corporate “education reform” crowd that considered her a political ally. But her overall support for these privately managed schools, which siphon off money and space from public schools while receiving millions from Wall Street, did not change.

So what has been the response of the teacher union leaderships to these Democrats backing anti-teacher policies? In 2008, they were all for Barack Obama’s “hope” and “change,” which brought the “Race to the Top” program (a knock-off of Republican George W. Bush’s infamous “No Child Left Behind”)

³ “Chicago Teachers: Strike Was Huge, Settlement Sucks,” *The Internationalist* (September 2012). The CTU leaders forced union delegates to revote after they turned down the contract.

⁴ CSEW, “Chicago Teachers in the Eye of the Storm” (9 March 2021).

⁵ “Where Does Hillary Clinton Stand on Education Reform?” *The New Yorker*, 7 March 2016.

⁶ “A Walmart Fortune, Spreading Charter Schools,” *The New York Times*, 25 April 2014.

that “sent money to states that reformed their public-education systems by, among other things, weakening teacher tenure, introducing data-driven accountability measures and adding more nonunionized charter schools.”⁷ In 2016, AFT president Randi Weingarten rammed through an early endorsement of her pal Hillary over Bernie Sanders without a vote by the membership, while the NEA likewise went all in for Clinton.

In 2024, on the same day Biden exited, within hours the American Federation of Teachers leadership endorsed Kamala Harris, the first union to do so. Yet all that Harris had to say about education policies when she spoke to the AFT convention a few days later was, “God knows, we don’t pay you enough.” Of course, almost every union-busting education “reformer” has called to raise teachers’ salaries, combined with weakening or abolishing teacher tenure, in order to be able to fire them more readily. So come November, teachers will be asked to go to the polls and vote for Kamala Harris, being told that, even if you oppose Biden/Harris genocide in Gaza and railroad strikebreaking “at home,” Democrats are a “lesser evil” – “vote blue, beat back Trump.” But *lesser-evilism is a ticket for defeat*.

Dump the Democrats, Oust the Bureaucrats, For a Workers Party to Fight for a Workers Government

Considering the Republican vituperation against teachers unions and their ties to the Democratic Party, it is striking that Democrats have been at the forefront of many of these schemes to regiment teachers and corporatize or privatize public schools. Even “evil Eva” Moskowitz, the NYC “charter school queen” who cofounded Success Academy Charter Schools together with Joel Greenblatt of Gotham Capital, got her start as a Democratic City Council member. In particular, hedge fund operators and private equity funds, many led by Democrats (as opposed to the mostly Republican Wall Street establishment), which took off after Bill Clinton’s 1999 repeal of the 1933 Glass-Steagall Act separating banks from speculative investments, piled into the charter business in order to milk the cash cow of state funding.

The fact is that the Democrats, like the Republicans, defend the interests of capital. And the fundamental loyalty of the bureaucratic layer that sits atop the unions is to American capitalism rather than to their own members. This has been seen with crystal clarity in the recent (and on-going) fight in the United Federation of Teachers over the attempt by mayors Bill de Blasio and Eric Adams working together with UFT president Mike Mulgrew, to force a private “Medicare Advantage” plan onto retirees. The 2-to-1 victory of the Retiree Advocate slate in last June’s union chapter elections forced Mulgrew to back off, although the threat of forcing retired city workers off government Medicare health insurance is still there.

The fundamental point is why Mulgrew and the rest of the union tops in the Municipal Labor Committee (MLC) were so committed to this plan to gut health care for their members. De

Blasio, Adams, Mulgrew and the other MLC bureaucrats are all Democrats, and as such they accept the “responsibility” of looking out for the finances of the (capitalist) city government rather than militantly fighting to defend union gains *against* the onslaught by the capitalist state. The attacks on teachers are also motivated by a drive to cut the “overhead costs” of capital, cutting back on school funding, etc. The labor bureaucracy represents a (well-paid) intermediate layer between capital and the working class, whose task for the bosses is to keep a lid on worker discontent.

In a nutshell, the capitalist Democratic Party is a class *enemy* of working people, while the labor bureaucracy is an *obstacle* to workers’ struggles. That’s true not only of an establishment figure like the AFT’s Weingarten but also of union reform groups like the Caucus of Rank and File Educators (C.O.R.E.) in Chicago, who when they get into office are barely distinguishable from the sellouts they replaced. Now, labor officialdom is trying to corral votes for the Dems, except a few like the Teamster and ILA docks union tops who are playing footsie with Trump’s Republicans. As the bureaucrats engage in *class collaboration* with the bosses’ parties, working people and the oppressed need a workers party to lead sharp *class struggle* against the bosses.

Union misleaders argue for their alliance with the Democrats saying they get a “seat at the table.” But while the Wall Street fat cats feast, working people only get crumbs from the capitalist table. In several unions in different parts of the country (L.A. transit workers, City University of New York faculty, the Painters union national convention) where they are present, supporters of the Internationalist Group, with which Class Struggle Education Workers is fraternally allied, have put forward motions based on a model resolution by Class Struggle Workers – Portland declaring:

“WHEREAS, the Democratic and Republican parties, which have shared and alternated in power for over a century and a half, have led U.S. society into a deep social and political crisis that poses existential threats to workers and oppressed people here and around the world; and ...

“WHEREAS, it’s high time for the labor movement to ditch the endless parade of billionaire-backed capitalist politicians who keep promising “change” while things keep getting worse for the working class; and

“WHEREAS, “Genocide Joe” Biden’s VP Kamala Harris fully shares responsibility for his administration’s war-mongering from the Middle East and Far East to Ukraine; the strikebreaking legislation against rail workers that they and the Democratic Congress rammed through in 2022 while claiming to be “pro-union;” and competing with the Republicans in targeting immigrants; ...

“RESOLVED, that since labor’s continued subordination to the bosses’ parties will only deepen the threats facing the working people here and around the world, [our union] will not endorse or support the Democrats, Republicans, or any capitalist party in the elections....”

In conclusion, the CSEW together with the CSWP and other Internationalist supporters “*call on the labor movement to break from the bosses’ parties and politicians and build a class-struggle workers party to lead the struggles of the working people and all those ground down by capitalism.*” ■

⁷ *New York Times Magazine*, 30 April 2023. See also (“Obama, Democrats Spearhead Teacher-Bashing, Union Busting Corporate Education ‘Reform,’” Class Struggle Education Workers, 16 June 2010

CLASS STRUGGLE EDUCATION WORKERS

The Fruits of Mayoral Control

16 OCTOBER 2024 – Ever since school opened this September, the New York City government has been in turmoil leading up to the federal indictment on a host of corruption charges of Democratic ex-cop mayor Eric Adams, accompanied by a string of resignations, subpoenas and investigations into his inner circle. Centrally involved are the three Banks brothers: David, as NYC schools chancellor; Philip III, as deputy mayor of public safety; and Terrence, a lobbyist and consultant.

Most significant to educators is the scandal around David Banks, and what his case tells us about the school system under mayoral control (which was just renewed for two years last spring, amid much controversy). When Adams took office as mayor on January 1, 2022, the first person he appointed at the commissioner level was Mr. Banks, a longtime friend. Banks had worked as a teacher, as a lawyer in the office of the state attorney general, and later founded the boys-only Eagle Academy, a school franchise emphasizing strict rules and regimentation. Lauded by then New York senator Hillary Clinton, on her recommendation he got the approval from then NYC mayor Michael Bloomberg (at the time a Republican, now once again a Democrat). The Academy was founded, and continues to be, in partnership with Cr dit Suisse, a top Swiss bank, with a number of Wall Street execs on its board.

On September 4, the first day of school, federal agents seized **David Banks'** phone (and that of his partner and now wife, first deputy mayor **Sheena Wright**) and searched his home in an investigation on corruption charges. Note that the chancellor has not been charged. A few days later, David Banks announced his plan to retire on December 31. That date was then moved up to October 16 by Adams, after New York governor Kathy Hochul told the mayor to clean house, or else. Wright resigned a couple of weeks later.

Among those who have since exited are Police Commissioner **Edward Caban**; the city's chief legal counsel, **Lisa Zornberg**; Adams' main advisor **Ingrid Lewis-Martin**; his longtime confidant **Timothy Pearson**; the mayor's liaison with the Chinese American community, **Winnie Greco**; and deputy mayor for public safety **Phillip Banks III**, who had been the highest-ranking uniformed officer of the New York Police Department, and was earlier an unindicted subject of another corruption investigation.

The charges of corruption reach into the Department of Education, as Phil Banks' former chief of staff, **Justin Meyers**, is under scrutiny for using his connections in city government to win a contract for the BusPatrol company he now works for just a few months after leaving city employ. **Terence Banks**, the third brother and lobbyist, was hired by the company Saferwatch to bring their products into schools. Terence also won a \$154 million contract for a company his brother Phil formerly owned to distribute fire-watch services

to the New York City Housing Authority. (Wright reportedly pushed through the contract for her now brother-in-law's former business.) In turn, **Tracey Collins**, Mayor Adams' partner, was hired by then chancellor Banks as a senior advisor in the Division of School Leadership. Colleagues reported that she hadn't shown up for work since Thanksgiving.

Cronyism and corruption in New York City politics? No-show jobs, no-bid contracts and free travel upgrades from officials seeking to buy favor with the mayor? Shocking! Of course, back in the day there was Bloomberg's appointment of a no-experience, know-nothing schools chancellor Cathleen Black, who frequented the same elite Upper East Side social circles as the billionaire mayor and sat on the board of a charter school headed by corporate media mogul Rupert Murdoch. A perfect fit! Black was run out after her racist comments, that an answer to school overcrowding was more birth control, sparked a storm of protest. And, of course, the D.O.E. headquarters are in the famous Tweed Courthouse, named after the wheeler-dealer late 19th-century boss of the Democratic Party machine.

Our point is, when you impose mayoral control of the schools, or more to the point, mayoral dictatorship of public education, this is what you get . . . along with racist school closings, shutting down most of the large high schools with diverse programs, imposition of high-stakes testing, ever-changing rubrics for teacher evaluation, and so on and so forth. Not to mention school and library budget cuts over non-existent deficits, only to be restored a few months later when, lo and behold, they city has a budget surplus (though deficits are still "looming"). It is reported that the new chancellor-to-be Melissa Aviles-Ramos is the protegee of deputy chancellor Dan Weisberg, a top D.O.E. official in charge of labor relations under would-be union-buster Bloomberg. (He failed.) So the beat goes on.

But let's not forget that the United Federation of Teachers leadership under Randi Weingarten pushed for mayoral control under Bloomberg. Even today, UFT president Mulgrew only wanted to tweak it a little with more "community" representation. Others have called for an elected school board, which is no guarantee of independence from politicians: in capitalist elections money talks, witness how the ubiquitous Bloomberg bought the Oakland, California school board (see "Democrats, Republicans vs. Public Education" on page 1).

We in Class Struggle Education Workers have a very different answer: the CSEW calls for *educator-led, teacher-student-parent-worker control of the schools*, in order to support students facing poverty and racism, put an end to overcrowded classrooms, and fight to break dictatorship of the capitalist ruling class over public education with a workers government. ■

CLASS STRUGGLE EDUCATION WORKERS

Needed: A Class-Struggle Opposition of Education Workers to Fight Trump's Wrecking Ball Attack on Public Education

UFT Elections: In-Bureaucrats vs. Out-Bureaucrats and Wannabe Bureaucrats

By Class Struggle Education Workers/UFT

MAY 2025 – This Spring the United Federation of Teachers is holding elections for president and other union-wide officers, executive board members and convention delegates. The contending slates are: first, the Unity caucus, which is the bureaucracy that has run the UFT uninterruptedly since it was formed in 1960, running Mike Mulgrew for reelection as president. It is facing two challengers with nearly indistinguishable programs: ABC (A Better Contract), running Amy Arundel for president, and ARISE (Alliance of Retired and In-Service Educators), whose candidate for president is Olivia Swisher. The opposition slates are for a more democratic union, more “transparency,” no more back room deals, etc. But at bottom, they and the Unity leadership all work within the framework of business unionism, or simple trade-unionism in the confines of capitalism, they are all beholden to the capitalist Democratic Party, and all that is a program for defeat.

Unity, of course, is responsible for the string of sellout contracts in recent decades. In 2005, it gave up seniority transfers in exchange for a piddling 15% raise, creating the Absent Teacher Reserve of educators without assigned positions. In 2014, it undercut health care by introducing copays and siphoning over \$1 billion from the Health Insurance Stabilization Fund to pay for raises and bonuses. In 2018 it promised \$600 million yearly in perpetuity in “savings” from health care to pay for “raises” below the rate of inflation, and in 2022 it tried to impose a switch from Medicare to private “Medicare Advantage” on retirees, who tenaciously resisted. The starting wage of teachers has fallen sharply due to 23% inflation since 2020. Today ABC wants a “better contract,” but its leader is a former Unity bureaucrat co-responsible for those rotten deals.

The components of ARISE – Retiree Advocate, the Movement of Rank-and-File Educators and the New Action caucus – opposed the last contract, but their platform, like those of all the slates, is a long list of positions (“combat racism,” etc.) and general pledges (“restore and improve healthcare benefits”) that few would object to, without spe-

cific demands or indicating how these would be won. Saying “We need more, not less!” is not a program for struggle. ARISE makes a nod to being “strike-ready for the next contract negotiations,” but doesn’t say we will actually have to strike, or what the obstacles are. Yet we are under attack not just by Trump Republicans in the White House and Congress but also by Democrats in City Hall and the Statehouse, and ***none of the slates are prepared to fight the capitalist attack on public education.***

Just look at where the slates stand on the issues facing educators today. Begin with the shameful ***poverty pay*** for the 24,000 ***paraprofessionals***, whose starting salary is still under \$32,000 a year. In the 2022 UFT-NYCDOE contract, which sold out the entire membership with “raises” that were actually a pay cut, the Unity leadership threw paras under bus. Now it is pushing a bill in the City Council for a \$10,000 annual payment to paras, which would be a step forward, but would not count toward pensions. ABC and ARISE both call vaguely for a “living wage” for paraprofessionals. But what does that mean concretely? We say the UFT should demand that the “bonus” be included in their base salary, and if the bill isn’t passed by the first day of school in September, ***the union should walk out until paras get their pay.***

Another immediate issue is ***pension reform***. Teachers covered by Tier IV of the New York City Teachers Retirement System are eligible to retire at age 55 with 30 years’ service. But for those hired from 2012 on, Tier VI was instituted by Democratic governor Andrew Cuomo to require that teachers work until age 63 before they can retire with full pension, with drastic reductions for early retirement and as much as doubling teachers’ contributions. ABC, ARISE and Unity all call to “fix Tier Six.” But how exactly? All look to lobbying state legislators, i.e., pressuring the Democrats in Albany. Lack of decent retirement pay is a problem for working people throughout the U.S. Class Struggle Education Workers/UFT calls to use union power to fight for ***Tier IV and more for all – and full pensions for everyone nationwide.***

A burning issue in NYC schools is *class size*. All the slates are for the New York state class-size law. But until this year, the NYC Department of Education and the mayor, Eric Adams, who opposed the law, have continuously tried to undercut it, putting off actual reductions. Now the D.O.E. says it will hire an additional 3,700 teachers for the next school year, when its own plan says 20,000 more are needed. It highlights nine school buildings that are opening, but says nothing about schools at max capacity because of “collocated” charter schools. UFT president Mike Mulgrew even OKed waivers for schools that don’t have space! ARISE and ABC talk of changing contract language ... in 2027. We say the UFT should mobilize to *enforce the class size limits in every school from the first day of school!* And to free up space, *kick out charter schools – end co-locations!*

To achieve any of these goals, the union will have to confront head-on the *New York State Taylor Law*, which outlaws strikes by public sector workers in exchange for state-regulated “collective bargaining.” In fact, all three slates accept this anti-union law. Mulgrew and the Unity bureaucracy hide behind the Taylor Law, using it to ban any move for a strike. Both ABC and ARISE call to amend it. ABC calls for “lobbying for a pro-union amendment to the Taylor Law that allows us to be fully action-ready – including the option to legally strike, if necessary.” ARISE calls to “support current legislative efforts to amend the Taylor Law to be more union friendly.” Yet the purpose of the law is to ban strikes and chain public sector unions to the state, it can’t be amended to make it “more union-friendly.”

Class Struggle Education Workers says unions must not be bound by anti-labor laws, or beg the bosses for permission to engage in strikes, occupations or other effective labor tactics. *The Taylor Law must be shredded by militant strike action*, just as its predecessor, the 1947 Condon-Wadlin Act, was ripped up by the powerful 1966 NYC transit strike. And to do so, it’s necessary to bring the power of the heavy hitters of New York labor to bear. The UFT alongside the TWU (Transport Workers Union) Local 100 and other city workers unions must be prepared to truly shut New York City down. Otherwise, calls for better working conditions, higher wages, lower class sizes, etc. will come to naught.

Another key issue is *mayoral control*. Mayoral dictatorship through the NYC Department of Education (D.O.E.) was instituted by billionaire Michael Bloomberg in 2002, with the support of the UFT under Randi Weingarten. Unity’s Mulgrew says he wants to make changes in the composition of the mayor-controlled Panel for Education Policy to make it “more representative.” ABC wants to “end



Class Struggle Education Workers at International Longshoremen’s Strike in Newark, October 2024.

unilateral mayoral control.” To replace it with what? Elected school boards? All around the country big money has poured in to buy school board elections. ARISE calls to “replace mayoral control and ensure decision-making is more inclusive of all stakeholders.” Like Wall Street hedge funds that have a huge stake in charter schools? Less “unilateral,” “more representative,” “more inclusive” – these sound bites all duck the issue, namely *capitalist* control of education.

Charter schools are the spearhead of the attack on public education by the forces of capital. Both Republicans and Democrats have supported these union-busting outfits that siphon off money and space from public schools for privately managed “academies.” None of the three slates even mention charters. It appears they have dropped this issue which was the focus of huge battles in the past. ABC and ARISE have some vague rhetoric against privatization, but no specifics. Class Struggle Education Workers calls for *expropriation of all private schools as well as semi-privatized charter schools and their inclusion in the public school system*. The CSEW is for the *abolition of mayoral control* and for democratic *control of the schools by educator-led assemblies of teachers, students, parents and workers*.

This issue came to a head during the **COVID-19 pandemic** when teachers unions around the U.S. pushed to keep the schools closed. The M.O.R.E. caucus demanded that schools remain closed until there was a 0% infection rate, even after vaccines became available, demonstrating with child-size coffins and signs saying “I won’t die for the D.O.E.” This disastrous policy was deeply harmful to kids confined to home and used by right-wingers to bash teach-

Mike Mulgrew's Red-Baiting Motion Against "Outside Organizations"

In the run-up to the Spring UFT elections, at the January Delegate Assembly the perpetually ruling Unity caucus launched a red-baiting smear of the opposition M.O.R.E. (Movement of Rank-and-file Educators) caucus and the ARISE slate, putting forward a "Resolution on Union Interference: Interference in the UFT's election from non-members (individuals and outside organizations)." At the May D.A. where it was voted on, the Unity presenter asked delegates to stand and be counted to show loyalty to the bureaucratic machine. The motions passed by a 2-1 margin, showing that Unity still has a lock on the D.A. *This despicable motion was a threat to the democratic rights of all UFT members*, and a throwback to the late-1940s "red purges" that gutted militant unions and destroyed the Teachers Union in NYC at the start of the Cold War.

This crude display of McCarthyism is hardly surprising coming from the UFT bureaucracy, which was founded by social democrat Albert Shanker and other followers of Max Shachtman, a renegade from Trotskyism and arch red-baiter. It also shows that Unity is still smarting (and panicking) after losing to the Retiree Advocate slate (now part of ARISE) in last year's elections in the Retired Teacher Chapter. Suddenly there were 300 opposition delegates in the D.A. Mulgrew was forced to backpedal on his attempt to force retirees off traditional Medicare onto a "Medicare Advantage" scheme, which would save the city \$600 million a year by cutting back on retiree health benefits. (The issue is still before a court, and although Mulgrew says he no longer supports it, he hasn't withdrawn the UFT "friend of the court" brief backing it.)

Mulgrew sought to whip up the bureaucracy's conservative base against the ARISE election slate, whose supporters are generally aligned with more liberal and "progressive" Democrats, while Unity prefers more "moderate" Democrats. At the January D.A., while the motion against "interference" in the union by non-members was being introduced inside, outside Unity was distributing a scurrilous leaflet headlined "'? DSA = MORE = ARISE ?'" equating the opposition groups with the Democratic (Party) Socialists of America. Unity cited a five-month-old article on the *Politico* news site, "Democratic

Socialists Look to Take Over New York's Powerful Trade Unions" (14 August 2024), which cited an internal DSA memo on getting hired into union jobs in NYC and joining M.O.R.E. This is a crime? Only to die-hard red-hunters.

The Unity leaflet accuses the DSA of "infiltrating" unions to "advance their own agendas," saying that it is "imperative that our union elections remain free from external interference." Hello? Mike Mulgrew himself is a conduit for the influence of an "external entity," namely the Democratic Party which governs New York and whose agenda he carried out in pushing the Medicare Advantage scheme which first originated with Democratic mayor Bill de Blasio. *Revealed!* Mulgrew ran for delegate at the last three Democratic National Conventions in support of Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden, imperialist ruling class politicians who upheld Barack Obama's agenda of corporate education "reform," charter schools and "merit pay." AFT president Randi Weingarten is a longtime influential member of the Democratic National Committee.

The DSA memo was incredibly dumb and speaks volumes about the actual outlook of many of their members: "DSA members interested in working in education should think hard about how they will relate to and work with student populations that are predominantly non-White, and should also consider how they will work with teachers of color," but nothing more. The pale pink DSA, which is part of the Democratic Party of Gaza genocide, racist repression and imperialist war, hardly "undermines our democratic principles" or "suppresses the authentic voice of the members" in the interests of a "broader political agenda." Mulgrew somehow knows that the "authentic voice" of teachers is to support Unity's "narrower" agenda of collaborating with the NYC Department of Education (and their bosses in the city and state governments) to suppress the struggle of teachers to defend and improve public schools and their own conditions.

Class Struggle Education Workers says: *No to the Unity witch-hunting motion! Break with the Democrats, Republicans and all the bosses' parties! For a class-struggle workers party!* ■

ers unions. The CSEW fought, uniquely, from July 2020 on, to *use union power to reopen schools safely*. We declared: "Where Pandemic Is Raging, Keep Schools Closed – For Teacher-Student-Parent-Worker Control" but "Where Infection Rate Is Low, Schools Should Reopen Safely with Billions for Sanitation & Ventilation, Triple Classrooms Now, No Hiring Freeze, Hire Thousands."¹

¹ See "Class-Struggle Program to Reopen New York City Schools Safely" and "The Fight Over Reopening Schools Is a Class Battle" (September 2020). Also "Chaotic Reopening of NYC Schools: This Is What Mayoral Control Looks Like" (February 2021) and "Use Union Power to Keep Schools Open Safely" (January 2022) both in *Marxism & Education* No. 6, January 2022. All available at the CSEW web site: edworkersunite.blogspot.com/.

We also called for *union-led committees of teachers, students, parents and workers* to bring in independent ventilation experts to *inspect school buildings to make sure they are safe*.² This was a program for direct union action, and where we were in a position to do so (e.g., at the City University of New York), CSEW supporters initiated and participated in such committees. That is what a real class-struggle union leadership would fight for, *and do*.

² In this emergency situation, the CSEW made detailed demands for frequent testing by union safety committees, for MERV 13 air filters in all schools and portable HEPA air cleaners, rebuilding bathrooms, enforcing class sizes of no more than 10-15 students, and massive hiring to make that possible.

Today, the Trump government is enacting policies threatening our **undocumented and immigrant students, families and staff members with mass deportations**, including targeting birthright citizenship, a gain won by the Civil War. Supporters of the CSEW in New York City public schools have called *for local UFT chapters to initiate school-based committees to defend immigrants*, which may include and work with other unions, students, parents and community members. And *we have carried this out*, with functioning committees in several schools in Brooklyn, the Bronx and Manhattan. We have also called on the UFT and other unions to *independently mobilize labor's power* to defend immigrants and to declare, *"We will not let them take our students."*

ARISE talks about expanding "bottom-up restorative justice and conflict resolution programs," but neither it nor ABC or Unity call for *police out of the schools*. School safety agents, who are part of the NYPD, are certainly not going to stop ICE agents from snatching our students, especially after ex-cop Mayor Adams sent out a memorandum in January stating that city employees should let federal immigration authorities enter a school building, even if they don't have a judicial warrant, if the I.C.E. cops insist. Moreover, having cops in schools only further perpetuates the school-to-prison pipeline. The UFT should also *defend cafeteria workers and other staff*, as well as *school bus drivers and attendants* who may be at risk from I.C.E., and support their fight for greatly improved pay and working conditions.

Although the UFT election campaign is at bottom a fight between in-bureaucrats, out-bureaucrats and wannabe bureaucrats, with few fundamental differences, they are all playing dirty in a political knife fight. Unity has engaged in vile red-baiting and "outsider"-baiting, putting out a leaflet at the January Delegate Assembly equating ARISE and M.O.R.E. with the Democratic Socialists of America. At the same D.A. it introduced a resolution declaring "individuals, groups, or organizations that do not have membership in the UFT, should not be allowed to interfere in the UFT's elections" (see box). At the May D.A., the person motivating the motion called on delegates to "stand with me if you believe UFT is for UFT members" and vote "yes." This was a threat to dissidents and a loyalty oath for Unity supporters.

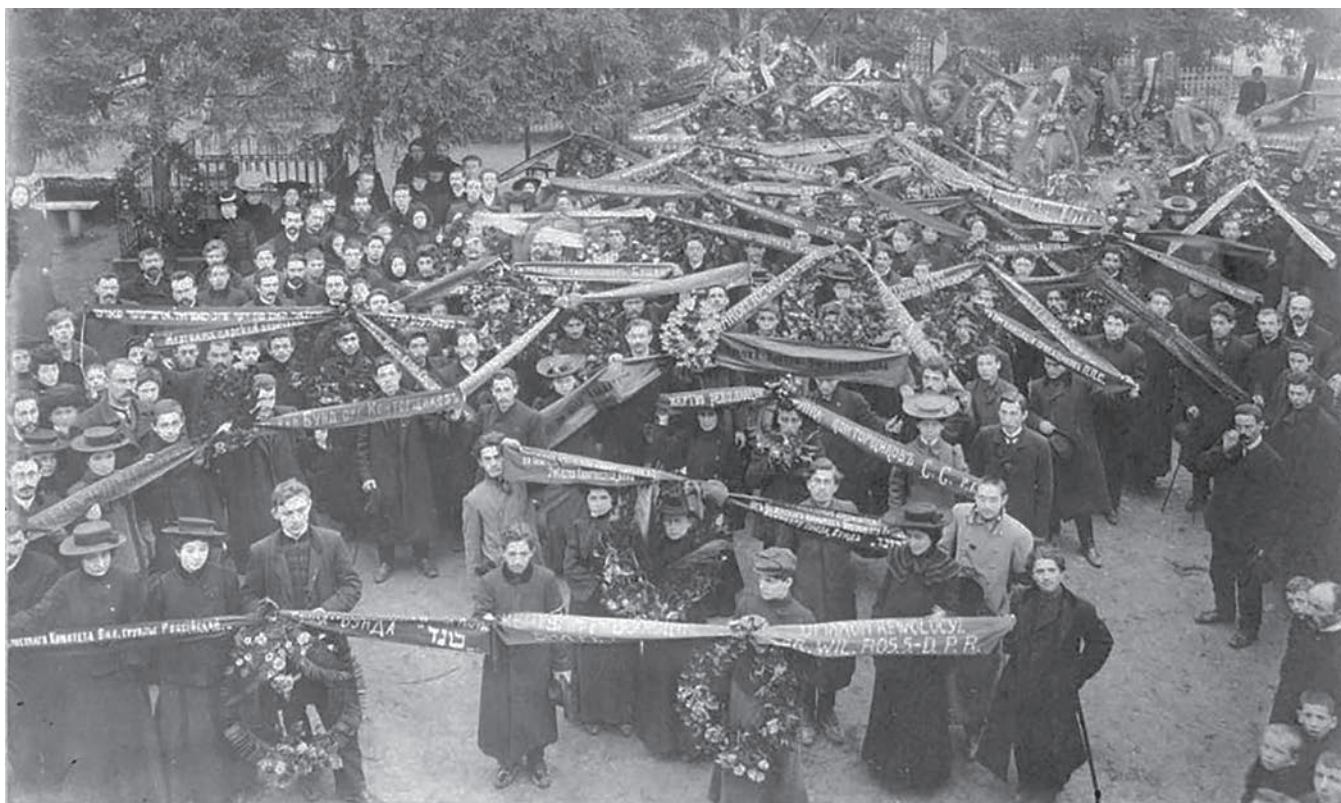


While many teachers unions and union opposition groups called to keep schools closed during the COVID 19 pandemic, Class Struggle Education Workers called to use union power to keep schools open where infection rates were low, and spelled out how to do that. Above: at demonstration called by M.O.R.E. outside UFT headquarters, January 2022.

ABC, for its part, *sued the UFT* over election procedures! This is a bald-faced betrayal, crossing the class line: it is a matter of principle to *never go to the bosses' courts against a union*. Labor must clean its own house! ARISE, meanwhile, decided to put forward a "Hands Off Our Schools" resolution, which it negotiated with Unity, that lifted the call in our supporter's motion for school-based committees, but gave it an opposite political content. Where our supporter's motion said such committees should be to "defend immigrants" and called for labor to "mobilize its power," the ARISE resolution called for committees to defend public education generally, in a campaign to "culminate in a series of actions with congressional electeds." Instead of a call for *class struggle*, it was a call for *class collaboration with the Democratic Party*.

After the election, the Unity bureaucracy will continue back-room deals with the Democrats to save the city money. Next up: in-service health care. If a court rules in favor of imposing Medicare Disadvantage on retirees, the UFT and other city unions should strike to stop it. If by some fluke an opposition slate should win, Delegate Assembly meetings might be a tad more democratic – wouldn't be hard – but they would do the same kind of deals, perhaps with a show of member participation. Why? Because (a) that's the way it's done under capitalism, and they all play by the rules; and (b) they all accept responsibility for the finances of the capitalist rulers. The CSEW says instead that we should break with the Democrats and Republicans, and all capitalist parties, and *build a class-struggle workers party to fight for a workers government*. ■

Poland's Marxist Tradition



Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

Polish, Russian and Jewish workers and socialists commemorate victims of Vileyka pogrom, October 1905.

Hail Rosa Luxemburg!

By Marjorie Stamberg

The following edited transcript of a presentation by Spartacist League Central Committee member Marjorie Stamberg at a SL educational conference in Chicago in April 1982 was printed in two parts in Young Spartacus No. 100 (May 1982) and No. 101 (Summer 1982). At the time, almost the entire left along with the imperialist bourgeoisie had embraced the Polish nationalist Solidarność movement. (By that point the anti-communist movement was financed by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, using the United Federation of Teachers as a conduit.) Comrade Stamberg's talk counterposed to this the legacy of Poland's greatest revolutionary Marxist who was belittled by the Stalinists and reviled by pro-imperialist Solidarność.

Part I

A part of the glorification of Solidarność as the standard-bearer of the "free world," the Western commentators, Susan Sontag,¹ the whole "god that failed"² crowd once again pro-

¹ At a pro-Solidarność rally in February 1982, the liberal writer Sontag equated communism with fascism.

² In 1949 a collection of anti-communist essays titled *The God That Failed* was published with the secret support, financing and distribution by the CIA and Britain's MI6, as part of the anti-Soviet Cold War.

claimed the "death of communism" in Poland. What they do, you see, is present the bankruptcy of the Stalinist bureaucracy as the bankruptcy of communism. Now, the regime is bankrupt, and not just politically. This band of venal, corrupt bureaucrats, who have made a holy mess out of the country and not incidentally brought it to the brink of counterrevolution, are justly hated. But to the bankruptcy of Stalinism they project Solidarność as the only alternative – that company union for the CIA and bankers, steeped in the traditions of Catholic nationalism and all of it presented as a great "democratic" movement.

As we have stressed over and over again, that is the tradition of bourgeois Polish nationalism crystallized in the figure of Marshal Pilsudski,³ the fascistic dictator of interwar Poland, whom Solidarność honors. Indeed, last year for the first time since World War II, the date of the "independence" of the Polish bourgeois republic was celebrated in Poland – a commemoration of Pilsudski, who was commander in chief of the army and who in 1920 led the attack on Soviet Russia. You know, a lot of leftists denied this was possible when we first said it, but here is a poster put out by Solidarność – a bust of Pilsudski with one of his most famous quotes.

³ After seizing power in a coup d'état in 1926, Marshall Józef Pilsudski ruled as a Bonapartist strong man until his death in 1935.



Rosa Luxemburg, ca. 1911

But there *is* a socialist tradition in Poland which has not been bankrupted politically. They tried to exterminate it physically – through the joint efforts of the Nazis and Pilsudski, and also of the Stalinists. This is the tradition of the early Communist Party of Poland. Above all, this is the tradition of Rosa Luxemburg, who was the founder of the Socialist Party in Poland, which became the core of the early Communist Party. And the whole tradition of Rosa Luxemburg and her comrades in the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL) was the tradition of the most militant internationalism. It was a party steeled in the struggle against Pilsudskiite petty-bourgeois nationalism. That is the reason why the heritage of Rosa Luxemburg – a communist, a woman and a Jew – is suppressed by both the Stalinists and Solidarność.

You see, what's happening today in Poland is, in the course of creating the myth of Solidarność, they're going back and reinterpreting all of Polish history – as if it was one long uninterrupted struggle for national destiny against Russian communism. The well-known Polish literary figure, Jan Kott, who returned to Poland in 1979 after 13 years in exile, describes how pervasive is this world view. In the 1960s he wrote, when one member of his "dissident" circle died, he had an agnostic burial and they sang the "Internationale" over his grave. Now, he was shocked to find, such occasions were celebrated with a funeral mass and the anthem "Still Poland Hasn't Perished." And then he was appalled as he sat down to discuss with his old friends from the student struggles of '68:

"Three names were passionately emphasized: Dmowski, Pilsudski and Daszynski. [Dmowski was a National Demo-

crat who preferred the Tsar to the Kaiser's Germany and Daszynski was another right-wing member of the 1918 government.] For a time I simply couldn't grasp what was going on. I rubbed my eyes. What did this recall? In which emigration in London, in which anachronistic Warsaw did I find myself? Before the war ... but before which war, the second? No, before the first! I had the impression that time had stood still. History was running backwards. In the space of those thirteen years while I had been away, quite different chapters of Polish history had returned. This furious dispute, in which names were brandished like evocative signs, was about the choices and alternatives of 1979."

—quoted in Neal Ascherson, *The Polish August* (1981)

Today the Polish workers are at a crossroads. This is a period of reflection following the imposition of martial law. Various journalists have reported on such conversations as the workers who were overheard asking each other, "How did it go so wrong so fast?" The answer is, you were *against* all the right things, but what were you for? While the counterrevolutionaries are rewriting history to push their catechism of Polish nationalism, we Trotskyists seek the creation of educational and propaganda cells based on the tradition of socialist internationalism. In searching for this tradition, the Polish workers will reencounter their own past.

It's curious, you know. In the 1960s, Rosa Luxemburg was very popular in the American "left" – particularly among what we call the "third camp" social democrats, who refused to defend the Soviet Union against the imperialists. They wanted to give themselves something of a left cover. (Today of course, now that they're tailing Solidarność, you don't hear much about Rosa Luxemburg.) So they picked up various writings by Rosa Luxemburg that were critical of Lenin,

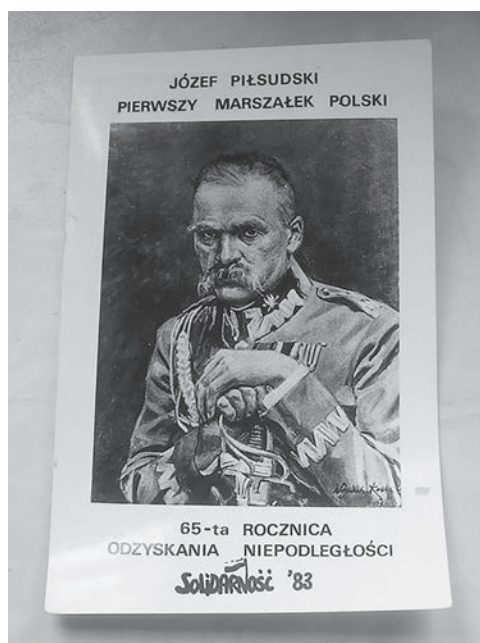


During her 1982 talk, Marjorie Stamberg holds up a copy of *Spartacus*, published by the Spartakusbund led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in World War I.

and based on them, called themselves Luxemburgists. And this is something I'm going to stress in this talk – there is no Luxemburgism in opposition to Leninism. This was invented after her death by her enemies – first by the social democrats, who wanted to separate themselves from Leninism and still look kind of left-wing. And also a creation by the Stalinists, who also wanted to separate Luxemburg out from Lenin – in order to smash her heritage of internationalism as the “Polish form of Trotskyism.”

So if you listen to these people, you would think that Rosa Luxemburg spent all of her life fighting with Lenin on one thing or another. Which, as we shall see, is a completely distorted view. Most of Rosa Luxemburg's life was spent fighting together with Lenin against the right wing of social democracy – in Germany, Poland and Russia – which eventually went over to open counterrevolution at the time of World War I.

Throughout her life, Rosa Luxemburg's struggle was for internationalism. She understood that the key to the success of the revolution in Poland was the unity of the Polish and Russian workers, and also the German workers. Today, Solidarność and the West try to present the picture of “poor little Poland” caught between the two giants of Russia and Germany, and therefore destined always to suffer a tragic fate. Well, from a bourgeois nationalist perspective, they've got a point. But from the point of view of revolutionary internationalism, Poland is a vital connection between the two great revolutions that will determine European history – the Russian and the German.



Solidarność poster hailing the fascistic anti-communist dictator of interwar Poland, Jozef Pilsudski.

And you can see this very concretely in the life of Rosa Luxemburg, a woman who played an important role in the 1905 Russian Revolution – as a major leader of the left wing of German Social Democracy and as a founder of the party which formed the core of the Polish CP. You can see it also in the “Three Ws.” You know, some people find it comical that we raise the “Three Ws.” We had a sign at our March 27 El Salvador demonstration, “Long Live the Party of Warski, Walecki, and Wera Kostrezewa.” Alexander Cockburn in the *Village Voice* thought this sign was evidence of our Marxism-Leninism-Bonkerism – reflecting on his part more than a touch of Anglophile chauvinism. You know, how could anybody with so many “Ws” in their names be relevant to us? (Of course, they've got their own “Three Ws” – Wojtyła, [Archbishop Stefan] Wyszyński, and [Solidarność leader Lech] Wałęsa – the pope, the primate and the puppet.)

Well, the “Three Ws” are plenty relevant. There was a saying in the Comintern: the German party is the biggest, the Polish party is the best. In fact, this was one of the few parties that protested over the campaign of the troika against Trotsky in 1923. The letter they sent at the time stated:

“For our party, nay for the whole Comintern, for the whole revolutionary world proletariat, the name of Comrade Trotsky is insolubly connected with the victory of the Soviet revolution, with the Red Army, with Communism We refuse to admit any possibility of Comrade Trotsky being put outside the ranks of the leaders of the Russian Communist Party and those of the Communist International.”

This was the party of the “Three Ws.” It was the party built on the traditions of Rosa Luxemburg. And it was so solidly internationalist that Stalin did something to it unique in the history of Stalinism – for the Polish CP, purges weren't enough. In addition to murdering hundreds of its central cadre, Stalin had to literally dissolve the entire party in 1938 as a nest of “Trotskyite saboteurs” shot through with the influence of Rosa Luxemburg.

Rosa Luxemburg

So let's see why the reformists and counterrevolutionaries have so much trouble with Rosa Luxemburg. She was born in 1871 in the province of Lublin, which was then under Russian rule. She came from a middle-class Jewish family – her father was a timber merchant. Her family was very assimilationist and they took little part in Jewish politics. When Rosa was two years old, the family moved to Warsaw. There she went to a girls' high school where she was one of the very few Jewish students, in fact one of the very few Polish students,



Priest blesses workers at Lenin shipyards in Gdansk, Poland, August 1980. The Polish Solidarność movement had a strong Catholic clerical nationalist influence.

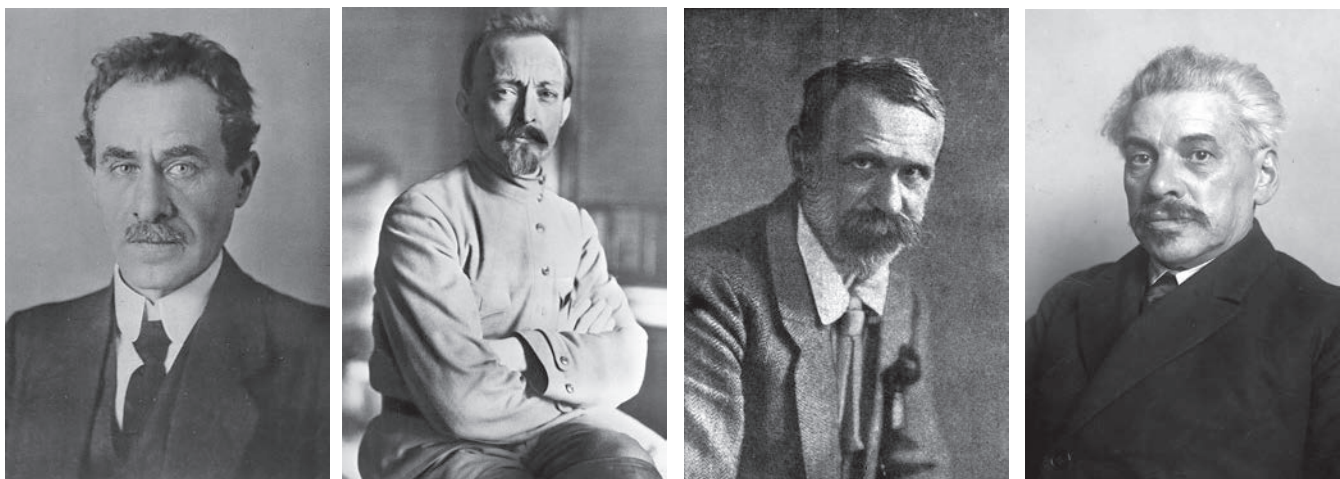


Photo credits (from left): Lebendiges Museum Online; RIA Novosti Archivve; Polona; National Digital Archives of Poland

Members of the SDKPiL (Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania) of which Rosa Luxemburg became a main leader. From left: Leo Jogiches, Felix Dzerzhinsky, Julian Marchlewsky and Adolf Warszawski.

since most of the places were reserved for children of Russian officials in Warsaw. In high school she graduated first in her class, but did not receive the gold medal because of her “rebellious attitude toward the authorities.” She always had a little trouble with that.

Now, it’s important to understand that there was no Polish state in those days. Poland was carved up between Russia, Prussia and Austria. For the tsarist empire, Russian Poland was a key industrial region with the textile factories in Lodz and the center of Warsaw and so forth. This was also a period of big economic boom for the Russian Empire – industrial production was soaring. This is one of the main reasons that at the time almost nobody but the nobility was for creating a Polish state.

Rosa’s first known political activities were in high school, where she joined one of the last remaining cells of the party Proletariat, just before it was smashed. Proletariat was the first socialist organization in Poland and its founder, Ludwik Waryński, rejected the program of a national uprising as “harmful” and called for proletarian social struggle against

the bourgeoisie, not just tsarism. Proletariat was closely aligned with the Russian Narodniks. During the years Rosa was in high school, many members of party Proletariat were rounded up by the tsar and sentenced to many years’ hard labor or execution. Waryński was arrested at this time and died in prison. In 1889 Rosa, learning her own arrest was imminent, went to Zurich, Switzerland.

But by the late 1880s, the strike movement was actively beginning to pick up. Much of this was under the influence of another group with whom Rosa Luxemburg would soon be closely linked: the Union of Polish Workers. In 1893 this group joined together with the remnants of Proletariat to form the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland. They saw themselves following in the traditions of Proletariat in rejecting the call for the restoration of the Polish state. They wanted an all-Russian party even before there was a Russian party – the RSDRP [Russian Social Democratic Workers Party] of Lenin was not formed until 1898. In 1899, Felix Dzerzhinsky put the ‘L’ in SDKPiL, when the Lithuanians attached themselves, and it became the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania.

Around this time also, another group was formed – the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) – also out of some remnants of Proletariat. They were for restoring the Polish state. And soon to emerge as their historic leader would be Jozef Pilsudski. For the next 25 years PPS and SDKPiL would be locked in combat against each other to win the allegiance of the Polish masses and to decide what the future course of Polish history would be.

Now you don’t hear much about SDKPiL, for reasons that were stated earlier. But it was a very real party which produced a number of leaders who played major roles in the Russian and German communist movements as well as in Poland. Besides Rosa Luxemburg there were: Leo Jogiches, the man who was to be associated with her most of her life. Jogiches was a Jewish Russian emigre who fled to Switzerland after escaping military service in the tsar’s army. Jogiches had organized Jewish workers in Vilna. He went on to become one of the principal



On 24 September 1981, the Spartacist League demonstrated outside the offices of the United Federation of Teachers in New York protesting the union acting as a conduit for CIA funds to Solidarność.



In response to the Bloody Sunday massacre in St. Petersburg on 9 January 1905, strikes broke out in Warsaw and the textile center of Lodz, uniting Russian and Polish workers against the autocracy.

first figures to go over to Trotsky's Left Opposition. It is not unimportant that many of these original founders and leaders of SDKPiL were Jewish. At the time, Poland had a huge Jewish population – about 10 percent of the population until World War II.

The 1905 Revolution

By the beginnings of 1900, SDKPiL had a few hundred, maybe 600 members and nuclei in most of the major industrial areas. But it was the 1905 Russian Revolution which was the major event in the development of SDKPiL and also the major event in the consciousness of the revolutionaries and socialists. By 1904 all over Russian Poland, revolutionary ferment was mounting; strikes and demonstrations were spreading throughout the country, sparked by Russia's losing war against Japan. And then in St. Petersburg on 9 January 1905, a demonstration led by Father Gapon ended with the massacre of hundreds. This, of course, was Bloody Sunday, signaling the outbreak of the revolution. Almost immediately after Bloody Sunday the Poles came out in a spontaneous response to the events in Russia and with equal fervor. A general strike started in Warsaw and soon spread to all major industrial centers. The civil administration almost collapsed; a state of siege was proclaimed; there were huge clashes between demonstrators and police, street battles, armed skirmishes.

Now this was of tremendous significance for Rosa Luxemburg and for SDKPiL, for they had always insisted on the need for the Russian and Polish workers to join forces, while the PPS had opposed an all-Russian movement. So in 1905, when the

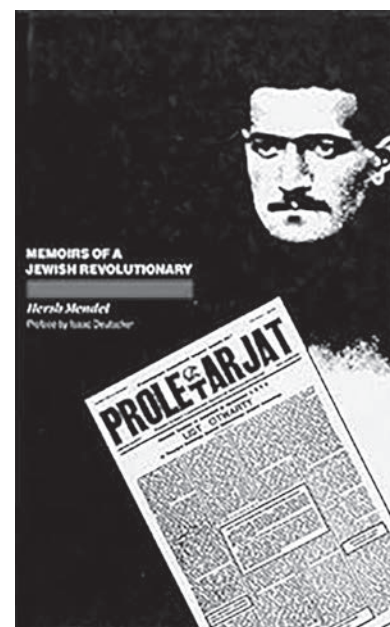
organizers of SDKPiL and he was also the main organizer for the Spartakusbund when Rosa and Karl Liebknecht were in jail. There was Felix Dzerzhinsky, who went on to become head of the Cheka – the Bolsheviks' state security apparatus. There was Julian Marchlewski, who also became a prominent Comintern leader. And Adolf Warszawski – who was Warski of the "Three W's." Also Karl Radek, who, although he much later capitulated to Stalin, was during World War I Lenin's closest collaborator in the German left, and who was also one of the

Russian Revolution surged forward, it was the vindication of all that SDKPiL had envisioned. The connection between Russia and Poland was there for all to see – instead of acting like separate entities, the workers of both countries behaved as if no ethnic barrier separated them.

No wonder SDKPiL was the main beneficiary of these events. The resulting upheavals turned SDKPiL into a small mass party as the layers of radicalized youth and workers swept up in the revolutionary process streamed into the party. As Rosa Luxemburg's biographer, J.P. Nettl said, "By February 1906, the party had some 30,000 members, artisans and proletarians, in spite of the fact that its activities had been plunged once more into illegality after a brief fortnight of open agitation." So the party went from 600 to 30,000 in little more than a year! Meanwhile, PPS was splitting down the middle as its members had to decide whether to support the Russian Revolution or abstain from struggle.

Pilsudski, who *did not* want to support the Russian workers, instead started organizing armed cadres for a nationalist uprising – these were the Fracy detachments. The PPS-left supported the revolution and the mass action of the workers. It was in opposition to Pilsudski's putschist nationalist bands that Rosa Luxemburg fought for the mass strike of the Polish workers.

Now the question of nationalism or internationalism was posed not only in the common fight of the Polish and Russian workers, but also within Poland itself over the anti-Jewish pogroms. In late 1905 the tsar was employing one of his standard tactics to split the workers movement – tsarist agents were instigating the Black Hundreds fanatics into attacking Jewish ghetto communities throughout Eastern Russia. These were eventually brought into Poland by Dmowski's National Democrats – but they were stopped, crushed by the revolutionary action of the workers. Joint Polish-Jewish workers defense guards sprang up and stopped the pogromist terrorists in their tracks. Rosa Luxemburg commented on this development, writing from Warsaw in 1906 that "the instigation of pogroms was impossible where enlightened workers groups existed – the persecution of Jews was impossible in Poland, Petersburg, Moscow, Riga and all important centers of the revolution." And there is a powerful description of



Hersh Mendel, who lived through the 1905 Revolution in Warsaw, recounted how Polish and Jewish workers formed defense squads against the pogroms instigated by the tsarist regime.



Workers meeting outside textile plant in Lodz in response to lockout by the bosses in 1906.

these workers defense guards by Horst Mendel, who wrote “Memoirs of a Jewish Revolutionary.” Horst was a young boy at the time and later became a member of the Polish Trotskyists in the mid-1930s.

“I concluded that there couldn’t be any indigenous Poles [among the pogromists] from the fact that in the self-defense organizations there were also Polish workers involved. In Pawia Street, in fact, there were more Polish than Jewish workers in the self-defense organization. The Polish workers assured us constantly that Poland was not Russia and there would be no pogroms here. “Every apartment house had its committee. There was also such a committee in our area. At night the door was locked and the self-defense groups would gather at certain points, while spotters would go through the streets. I remember that from time to time when the alarm was spread, the self-defense groups would rush into droskys [sort of horse-drawn cabs] which were standing ready especially for this purpose-and tear off to the threatened places.

“In addition to the active self-defense groups, there were also auxiliary groups including all the residents of the apartment complex, especially the Jews. People were armed with whatever they had-with axes, hatchets, knives. Every trade came armed with their work tools.

“My father-was also in such an auxiliary group. When the door to the courtyard was shut, they stood in the door entrance and waited. It was their task in case of an attack to defend the door. I stood for whole nights next to my father and looked at him.”

This heroic action by the workers during the Russian Revolution was a far cry from the hideous experience in 1943 of the Warsaw ghetto uprising when the *Polish nationalists* at best turned their backs and others betrayed the Jews.

Now, when the Russian Revolution broke out, Rosa was in Germany. And by the time she was able to get to Warsaw on a lengthy circuitous route in the dead of winter, things had slackened off. The third general strike in a year had finally gone down to defeat and the Bolshevik-led Moscow insurrection was also over. For Rosa Luxemburg the Russian Revolution and the mass strikes were a powerful confirmation of the revolutionary

possibility of the workers movement, and when she returned to Germany, she fought for them against the ossified trade-union bureaucrats and party center apparatus of Kautsky. I’ll take that up more later.

So by March of 1906 it was clear the revolution was ebbing. A wave of arrests fell over the cities; police spies were everywhere. Now there were lockouts rather than strikes. SDKPiL lost most of its leadership in the police dragnet. Marchlewski was arrested. Jogiches was arrested. (Here’s an irony of history – Jogiches was arrested and sentenced to eight years’ hard labor in Siberia for advocating the independence of Poland! Boy, he must have been pissed, but the tsar didn’t recognize these subtle differences.) Luckily, Jogiches managed to escape before his transport actually left for Siberia. Rosa was arrested on March 4, 1906. She and Jogiches were both held in the notorious Pavillion X of the Warsaw Citadel, the fortress for dangerous criminals where years earlier the members of party Proletariat had been held.

Rosa Luxemburg and the Bolsheviks

When Rosa was released from prison she went off to Finland to talk with Lenin and the Bolsheviks on evaluating the Russian Revolution. During the time she was in jail, the SDKPiL had joined the RSDLP at the Fourth (“Unity”) Congress. And while in 1903, Rosa’s bias had been toward the Mensheviks, the revolution changed all that, and she came out of 1905 much closer to the Bolsheviks. She was strenuously opposed to the Mensheviks’ orientation to “make the bourgeoisie fight” and their policy of tailing the constitutional monarchists, the Kadets. Both Luxemburg and Lenin were convinced that the working class would be the main force in the revolution.

Now the social democrats and Stalinists have tried hard to conceal this. But the fact is that for the next seven years SDKPiL and the Bolsheviks worked pretty much in tandem. Lenin and Luxemburg collaborated on a whole host of things – together the Bolsheviks and Rosa struggled against militarism within the Second International – for instance at the 1907 Stuttgart Conference where they put up a joint resolution and where Lenin even gave her the Bolshevik mandate to cast in that discussion. Luxemburg and Lenin fought together in the fight in the Russian party against the Mensheviks; and Lenin and Luxemburg fought together against the PPS and Pilsudski in Russian Poland.

Back in 1904 Rosa had written a sharp polemic against Lenin on his position for a communist vanguard party. It was quite sharp, it was quite wrong, and for this reason of course social democrats and Stalinists have seized upon it. Now this question of Luxemburg and Lenin on the party question has been incisively analyzed in comrade Seymour’s pamphlet, *Lenin and the Vanguard Party*, which was included in the readings for this talk. But I want to go over some of the ground, briefly.

We first have to understand that until the outbreak of World War I, all the parties – Lenin, Luxemburg, everybody – had Kautsky’s position on the doctrine of the “party of the whole class” or “one class – one party,” by which was meant that

all tendencies of socialism belonged in one party. In practice, however, Lenin strove to create a disciplined, programmatically homogeneous vanguard party. This was a case in which his revolutionary thrust ran ahead of his theoretical generalization. And as our pamphlet says, the resolution of that dialectical contradiction is one of the elements creating Leninism as a world-historic doctrine in our epoch.

You see, Lenin as early as 1903, saw the need for a hardened homogeneous party and that was crystallized in the fight over the membership rules. But *at the time* he saw the split with the Mensheviks as a split that was Russian-specific. And he did not see the Mensheviks as a current within the working class, but as the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia. It was not until the outbreak of World War I that Lenin had fully worked out his concept of the party and understood that the opportunist current in the Second International as a whole was counterrevolutionary, that it was a reflection of the labor aristocracy created by imperialism, and therefore a split within the workers movement and a cohering of a separate communist vanguard was needed to successfully carry out a socialist revolution.

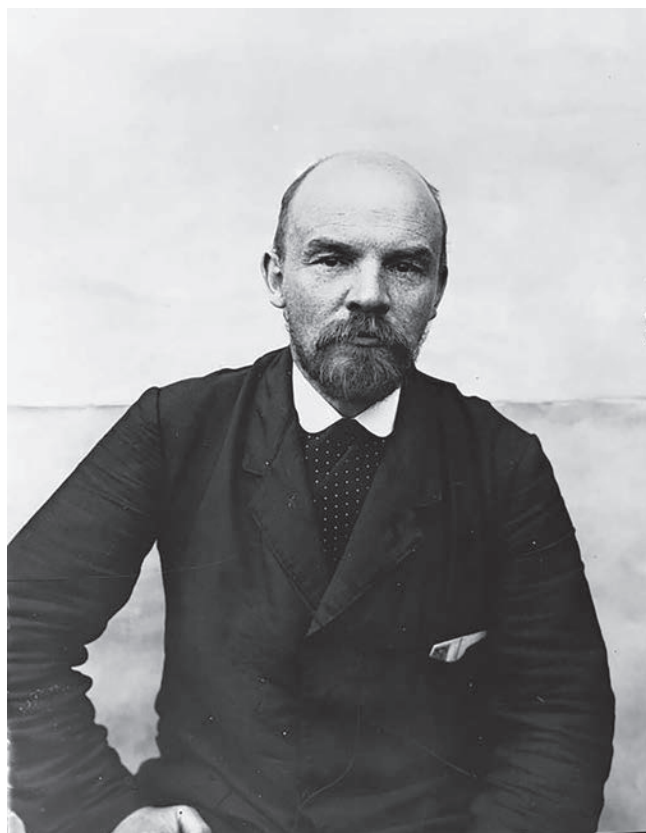
So, in 1904 when Rosa wrote “Organizational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy” she attacked Lenin’s conception of professional revolutionaries as “Jacobinism” characteristic of a bourgeois party. And she was quite acerbic, writing that “Nothing will more enslave a young labor movement than this bureaucratic straightjacket.” Now, in this period you could also cite Trotsky’s Menshevik polemic here, “Our Political Tasks.” But the point is they transcended these views. Trotsky did so explicitly, Rosa in practice – as early as a year later when she saw the role of the Bolsheviks in the 1905 Revolution and by the very nature of the SDKPiL which was always a highly centralized and hard party. And of course, Rosa went on to become one of the founders of the KPD – the Communist Party of Germany in 1918.

Part II

There’s been a long history of trying to justify support to national movements by citing Lenin against Luxemburg on the grounds that Lenin supported Polish independence, which, in fact, he didn’t. This is coming up a lot lately. For instance, this winter at a Solidarność forum in Boston all the speakers, from a counter-revolutionary Pilsudskiite emigré to the SWP [Socialist Workers Party] spokesman, had the line that Solidarność and the Polish nationalists justly hate Rosa Luxemburg because she was wrong on the national question! And in his book, *The Polish August*, Neal Ascherson simply repeats the common misconception that Lenin was for the independence of Poland as against Luxemburg:

“In her opposition to the restoration of a Polish state, which she considered a surrender to reactionary bourgeois nationalism, Rosa Luxemburg was in conflict not only with the much larger Polish Socialist Party (PPS), but with Lenin himself.”

Not so. Lenin was not for Polish independence; and furthermore he energetically supported Rosa Luxemburg and the SDKPiL [Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania] against the nationalist PPS. What Lenin did insist upon was that this question was something that had to be decided by the Polish people, not something that was to be imposed by the tsar’s army. And he insisted that the Russian party had to fight its



B.D. Vigniev / Russian State Archive for Social and Political History

V.I. Lenin in 1914.

“own” country’s national chauvinism. Here is the key passage in Lenin’s 1914 work, “The Right of Nations to Self-Determination”:

“The question of the right to self-determination is of course not so important to the Polish Social Democrats as it is to the Russians. It is quite understandable that in their zeal (sometimes a little excessive, perhaps) to combat the nationalistically blinded petty bourgeoisie of Poland, the Polish Social Democrats should overdo things. No Russian Marxist has ever thought of blaming the Polish Social Democrats for being opposed to the secession of Poland. These social democrats err only when, like Rosa Luxemburg, they try to deny the necessity of including the recognition of the right to self-determination in the program of the Russian Marxists.”

– Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 20

By the way, there were real reasons why Luxemburg and the SDKPiL opposed Polish independence. Rosa argued that after the tsar’s emancipation of Polish serfs in 1864, the peasantry had lost interest in the struggle for independence. The bourgeoisie, which needed the Russian market, was never interested in independence. And if the proletariat proceeded to set up a bourgeois state after seizing state power, it would be a crime. So in her eyes, it could only be the outmoded, archaic program of an archaic class, namely the down-at-the-heels Polish nobility and its offspring. In fact, Polish independence did not come about as the result of a broad national movement, but was the result of the outcome of World War I – particularly the Russian and German revolutions.

Nonetheless, Rosa Luxemburg did have an incorrect position, rejecting the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party’s support to the *right* of self-determination in Poland. Ultimately, it did amount to putting the right of self-determination of oppressed



Rosa Luxemburg on her way to court in 1914 with her lawyer Paul Levi. She was sentenced to a year in jail on charges of encouraging public disobedience for her antiwar speeches. After a few months of freedom she was rearrested in July 1916 and imprisoned and was only released in November 1918 with the fall of the monarchy. In January 1919 she was murdered on orders of the Social Democratic government.

nationalities in question. At one point she said rhetorically, well, if you accept Polish independence, then that raises the question of Ireland, Alsace-Lorraine, and a whole series of places where Bolsheviks did consider the right of self-determination relevant. This position did weaken the struggle of the Polish Social Democrats against Pilsudski. In particular, after 1905 there was a split in the PPS over the question of supporting the Russian Revolution, producing the PPS-Left. One would want to have an orientation to such a leftward moving split, but Rosa insisted that PPS-Left were just nationalists masquerading as socialists. Yet the Polish Communist Party resulted from the fusion between the SDKPiL and PPS-Left in 1918, and it's quite possible that had she not had this position, there might have been unity much earlier.

The Party Question

The point is that the differences between Luxemburg and Lenin are much narrower on the national question than what is generally understood and that is not the question over which

they split. They collaborated closely with each other from 1906 until 1912 and, in general, the SDKPiL and the Bolsheviks fought together against the Mensheviks in the united party. They parted ways when that unity was put into question – namely when Lenin, passing over from being a revolutionary social democrat to a communist, determined to put an end to the “unity” with the conciliators and liquidators once and for all. This struggle came to a head in 1912, and [SDKPiL leader Leo] Jogiches in particular earned Lenin’s ire because he had become a leading “conciliator.”

Later the Stalinists tried to slander Rosa Luxemburg by saying that because she broke late from the SPD [German Social Democratic Party], she was just another garden-variety social democrat. But it was Rosa who, at the turn of the century, fought the rightwing opportunists in the SPD Bernstein & Co. By 1910, even though she may not have taken it to its logical outcome, she launched a fight against the party center of Kautsky and [August] Bebel – the towering lights of “orthodox Marxism” – much earlier than Lenin, and without his support. An upsurge in the class struggle had broken out and Rosa fought for the mass strike, which conjured up fears in the bureaucrats’ minds of the “ghost of 1905.” Rosa was at the head of the insurgent workers movement, fighting for mass action against the ossified trade-union bureaucrats and the Kautsky center who were constantly trying to channel things back into the parliamentary road, talking about the “slow accumulation of forces.” She was the first to realize that the fight in the SPD would not be just with rightwing revisionists like Bernstein, but with the

central party leadership.

Rosa tended to see the mass strike as the pressure that would overcome the passivity of the SPD center, as opposed to the need for internal factional struggle in the party. You can see that in her letter to the Dutch left socialist Henriette Roland-Holst:

“Opportunism is in any case a swamp plant, which develops rapidly and luxuriously in the stagnant waters of the movement; in a swiftly running stream it will die of itself. Here in Germany a forward motion is an urgent, burning need! And only the fewest realize it. Some fritter away their energy in petty disputes with the opportunists, others believe that the automatic, mechanical increase in numbers (at elections and in the organizations) is progress in itself!”

—quoted in Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905-1917* (1955)

But to people who later tried to make this into a crude counterposition between Rosa’s “spontaneism” and Lenin’s “centralism,” Trotsky wrote that “the most that can be said is that

... preparatory selection of the vanguard in comparison with the mass action fell too short with Rosa.” He labeled as “thoroughly revolutionary and progressive” her fight for the mass strike against Kautsky. And Lenin was the first to admit this, saying:

“Rosa Luxemburg was right when she wrote, long ago, that Kautsky has the ‘subsistence of a “theoretician” – servility, in plainer language, servility to the majority of the Party, to opportunism.”

—Lenin, letter to A. G. Shlapnikov, October 1914, *Collected Works*, vol. 35.

The Main Enemy Is at Home

It was the imperialist World War I which spelled the bankruptcy of the Second International. August 4, 1914 has gone down in history as a day of infamy: the date that the German Social Democrats – the SPD parliamentary fraction, the biggest fraction in the Reichstag – voted for German war credits. The historic leader of the SPD, August Bebel, had coined the famous slogan, “Not a man, not a penny for this system.” Now this was replaced by the slogan, “We shall not desert the fatherland.” Rosa Luxemburg suffered a nervous collapse. And it is well known that Lenin at first refused to believe it – he thought that the issue of the SPD paper, *Vorwärts*, containing the news, was a forgery put out by the Kaiser’s agents.

August 4, 1914 posed the issue with crystal clarity. Lenin developed his basic policy toward the war in a few weeks; socialists stand for the defeat of “their” bourgeoisie. Turn the imperialist war into civil war! The Second International has been destroyed by chauvinism – long live the Third International!

In Germany, Rosa Luxemburg picked up the task of opposing the infamous Reichstag vote. But in contrast to Lenin’s Bolsheviks, there were only four leaders in the SPD who would do so. In September 1914, the first declaration against the war was signed by Luxemburg, Liebknecht, Franz Mehring and Clara Zetkin.

They were horribly isolated – a letter Rosa wrote to Clara

Zetkin’s son Konstantin captures the quality of how they tried to draw together their tiny opposition forces against the betrayal of the whole of the SPD:

“I want to take the sharpest possible action against the activities of the [Reichstag] delegates. Unfortunately, I get little cooperation from my [collection of] incoherent personalities ... Karl [Liebknecht] can’t ever be got hold of, since he dashes about like a cloud in the sky; Franz [Mehring] has little sympathy for any but literary campaigns; [Clara Zetkin’s] reaction is hysteria and the blackest despair. But in spite of all of this, I intend to try to see what can be achieved.”

—J.P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg* (1966)

Throughout Luxemburg’s writings in this period, this sense of isolation and horror at the holocaust to come was to ring through. But as her biographer, J.P. Nettl points out, there was a difference here between Luxemburg and Lenin, who saw the situation not as a tragedy but as a crucial opportunity. For Lenin, the collapse of the Second International represented a new historical epoch – he saw the need for, and was ready for, the complete split with the opportunists and chauvinists. In this, Lenin was making a leap, and a crucial one. Luxemburg and Liebknecht were only to come around to this position much later – throughout the war they were to cling to their oppositional stance within the social democracy.

For the German revolutionists, these were the dog days

of 1914 and early 1915, when Germany seemed to be winning the war, and when the whole of the working masses were taken up in chauvinist fever. The SPD leadership under the social imperialists like [Friedrich] Ebert, [Gustav] Noske and [Philipp] Scheidemann gave open support to the Kaiser with the argument that Germany was the most advanced country, and therefore had to be defended against tsarist reaction. There was also a center group, headed by Kautsky, but also including the old right-wing revisionist [Eduard] Bernstein. They eventually mildly opposed the war on the grounds that it was for imperial expansion, while still insisting they were for the “right of the German nation to defend itself.” The only ones



The first issue of *Spartacus* (September 1916).

Ullstein Bild



Above: Karl Liebknecht speaking at antiwar demonstration in 1911. After the outbreak of imperialist World War I, he issued a leaflet (left) with his famous slogan, “The Main Enemy Is at Home!”

with a clear class opposition were Luxemburg and Liebknecht, whose slogan was “The Main Enemy Is at Home.”

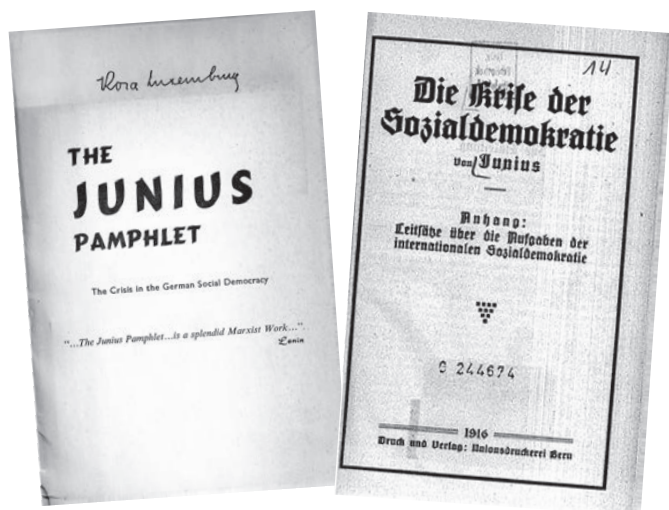
Very quickly repression began to fall on the heads of the antiwar social democrats. On February 18, 1915, Rosa Luxemburg was arrested. Karl Liebknecht enjoyed a few more months of immunity because he was a Reichstag deputy. In November 1914 he became the first SPD deputy to vote against war credits. The Luxemburg-Liebknecht group became known as “Spartacus,” after the name of the underground letters they circulated opposing the war and their “own” bourgeoisie.

On May Day 1916, the Spartakists held a rally in the center of Berlin which drew 10,000 people. When Liebknecht got up to cry, “Down with the Government, Down with the War!” he was immediately arrested. This arrest sparked the first political strike against the war.

From August 4, 1914 to May Day 1916 the mood of the workers had changed dramatically: from four signatures against the Kaiser’s war to 10,000-strong demonstrations. Now there were labor strikes against the war and a mass hatred of German militarism which would a year and a half later bring Germany to the point of revolution. A reflection of this sentiment in the working class was the development of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards movement. I want to make the point to young comrades that the consciousness of the working class can shift quickly under the impetus of such mammoth events. The key is leadership – a revolutionary vanguard that can “swim against the stream.”

While she was in Breslau prison in the early months of 1915, Rosa Luxemburg wrote *The Junius Pamphlet*, exposing the imperialist war in all its gore. She ended the pamphlet decrying the chauvinism which had seized the imperialist countries:

“‘Deutschland, Deutschland über alles,’ ‘long live democracy,’ ‘long live the tsar and slavery,’ ‘ten thousand tent cloths, guaranteed according to specifications,’ ‘hundred thousand pounds of bacon,’ ‘coffee substitute, immediate delivery’ . . . dividends are rising – proletarians falling; and with each one, there falls a fighter of the future, a soldier of the revolution, a savior of humanity from the yoke of capitalism into the grave.”



Rosa Luxemburg’s Junius Pamphlet, “The Crisis of Social Democracy,” was written from jail in 1915.

Lenin called *The Junius Pamphlet* on the whole, a splendid Marxist work.” But he criticized the author sharply for not mentioning the opportunism of the Kautskyite center. This was crucial. Because the Kautskyites were trying to dismiss August 4 as “an error” whereas revolutionaries had to get to the bottom of the opportunism which had destroyed the Second International. *For Lenin, the key question was a split:*

“But, first, Junius has not completely rid himself of the ‘environment’ of the German Social Democrats, even the Leftists, who are afraid of a split, who are afraid to follow revolutionary slogans to their logical conclusions. This is a false fear, and the Left Social Democrats of Germany must and *will* rid themselves of it. They *are sure to do so* in the course of their struggle against the social chauvinists.”

–Lenin, “The Junius Pamphlet,” *Collected Works*, vol. 22.

That is, in fact, what happened. But the split with the treacherous Kautskyite center came very, very late and only under the pressure of events which were to overwhelm the Spartakusbund.

Lenin commented on the sense of isolation in Junius: “One senses an outsider who like a lone wolf has no comrades linked to him in an illegal organization.” He was careful to point out that it was not a weakness in the author, but a statement about the German left. Here he captured a crucial difference between Lenin and the Luxemburg group. The Bolsheviks went into the war and the revolutionary situation which grew out of it with a party hardened and tested in struggle; the German lefts only reluctantly and gradually moved toward a break with the official Social Democrats. The Kautsky center group was expelled from the SPD in 1916 and formed the Independent Social Democrats (USPD): the Spartacus group was attached to the USPD until quite late, after the abdication of the Kaiser in November 1918.

Thus, one of the great achievements of the Bolsheviks was to recognize a political split in the working class as a precondition for proletarian revolution. The Bolsheviks had achieved this by August 4, 1914, although they had not generalized it. The German revolutionary left paid with the loss of its leaders, Luxemburg and Liebknecht, and a lost revolution, for the failure to have assimilated this lesson.

“Order Reigns in Berlin”

From the SPD’s great betrayal in August 1914, there was a straight line to taking over the reins of the Kaiser’s Imperial Chancellery [in November 1918] in order to save the bourgeoisie from the threat of revolution, and from there, to ordering the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht. The Majority Social Democrats drowned the German revolution in blood in the “Spartacus Week” of January 1919 and stabilized the governments of the Weimar Republic that led, through their impotence, to Hitler’s seizure of power in 1933.

The ultimate weapon of the reformists always is calling upon the capitalist state to do the dirty work for which they can’t mobilize mass support. Today, the various reformists and pacifistic doves who want to organize El Salvador protest movements on behalf of the liberal wing of their own bourgeoisie mount physical attacks on the Spartacist League, attempting to



During the El Salvador civil war, the Spartacist League called for military victory to the leftist insurgents. Different reformist groups formed lines (“daisy chains”) and called on police to attempt to seal off the revolutionaries. Above: Washington, D.C., 27 March 1982.

seal us off, bringing in the cops.⁴ Behind their lies, slanders and pathetic daisy chains lie the threat of murderous force. Those who don’t believe that the social democrats are capable of this need only look to the tragic events of Germany of 1918–1919 to see whereof we speak.

The treachery of the social democratic leaders was bottomless. The historian Carl Schorske commented on how SPD leader Scheidemann loved the parliamentary junkets to the front where social democrats were wine and dined by high officers. Early in the war, the Majority Socialists actually went and had a meeting with the government, which said, if you guys don’t make trouble, we won’t make trouble for you. You’ll be able to keep your unions (which can be useful in mobilizing the workers for the war), you can keep your press – if you help us out, you’ll get your share. So the labor leaders called off pending strikes, even suspended strike support payments in the name of *Burgfrieden* (class peace) at home. But it didn’t work out the way they thought it would because Germany was losing the war. The ravages of the war, and the resulting social crisis in Germany, was turning the masses violently against the Kaiser, against militarism and on to revolution.

By 1917, early 1918, the mortality rate for children was up to 50 percent. The average adult calorie intake was 1,000 calories a day – starvation was everywhere. There were strikes and food riots on the part of the Berlin munitions workers. The army was crumbling – Spartacus letters were reaching the trenches hidden in sandbags. After February 1917 and the overthrow of the Russian tsar, the Independents and the Spartakists got a big boost. Then came the October Revolution and the Bolsheviks,

⁴ Only weeks before this talk, on 20 February 1982, at a New York City protest over the U.S. war on El Salvador, the reformists of the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) and the SWP, tried to exclude the Spartacist contingent, even getting the police to put up barricades to keep the SL out. The reformists were appealing to liberal Democrats, and were mortally afraid of being “contaminated” by the revolutionaries calling for military victory to the leftist insurgents. See *Workers Vanguard* No. 300, 5 March 1982. The same happened in Washington, D.C. on March 27 when reformists again called on the cops to keep out the Spartacists.

as genuine internationalists, did everything they could to further the German revolution.

In his “Farewell Letter to the Swiss Workers” written in January 1917, Lenin had stated flatly, “The revolution will not stop at Russia – the German proletariat is the most faithful and reliable ally of the Russian and worldwide revolution.” Upon arriving at the Finland Station he went out of his way to say, “The hour is not far off when, at the summons of our comrade, Karl Liebknecht, the people will turn their weapons against the capitalist exploiters.” Lenin was prepared to undergo any sacrifice. He told Trotsky, “If it were necessary for us to go under to assure the success of the German revolution, we should have to do it.” And in March 1918, Lenin spoke at the Russian party conference declaring, “It is an

absolute truth that we shall go under without the German revolution ... [but] Liebknecht will rescue us from this.”

The possibility and necessity of a German revolution was key to Lenin’s acceptance of the Brest-Litovsk accord.⁵ It gave the Soviet revolution a breathing space – and an embassy in Berlin. From April 1918, the Soviet Embassy became a headquarters for the promotion of the German revolution. Lenin sent in Adolf Yoffe with an enormous staff: more than 300 persons. Over the embassy, Yoffe hoisted an enormous red banner on which was written, “Workers of All Countries Unite.” From this building he sent out streams of agitators – money was distributed liberally, tons of diplomatically immune revolutionary literature were imported from Russia for distribution in war-torn Germany. Almost every night Yoffe conferred with German revolutionaries on the most detailed tactical questions. (Tell that to the Stalinists who unfortunately aren’t lying when they forswear arms to El Salvador!)

By the autumn of 1918, time had run out for the German Empire. The military government of [German commander General Eric von] Ludendorff wanted to resign so somebody else would take the rap for Germany’s defeat. But they couldn’t find anybody willing to take over the government – except the Social Democrats who rushed in to save the sinking ship of the imperial Kaiser’s government. Germany was about to explode. In what might be called the first day of the German revolution, the sailors in the Baltic seaport of Kiel mutinied on November 3, 1918. They had refused to ship out in what was whispered to be a final “death ride” against the British navy, and filled the streets instead. Workers and sailors councils were formed. The *Internationale* was sung. Red flags flew from every vessel in Kiel. The Berlin government dispatched Majority Socialist Gustav Noske, who would soon be known as “the bloodhound,” to try to cool things

⁵ In March 1918, the young Soviet republic (which had taken power less than four months before) signed an armistice with the German Imperial Army. Trotsky had opposed a ceasefire, calling for “no war – no peace” and as Commissar for Foreign Affairs went to Brest-Litovsk, where the negotiations were being held, in order to stall for time. But as the military situation of the Soviets worsened, Lenin insisted that a “robbers peace” had to be signed “in order to save the world revolution.”



The Social Democratic government of Germany after November 1918: Philipp Scheidemann (left), Gustav Noske (center) and Friedrich Ebert (to his right). This government of executioners ordered the murders of Liebknecht and Luxemburg.

down. But within a week general strikes were spreading across Germany. The prison gates were flung open – Rosa Luxemburg was released from prison in Breslau to cheering crowds.

About two weeks earlier, Karl Liebknecht had been released from jail and went straight to the Soviet Embassy for consultations. There was full agreement – the call would be “All Power to the Soviets.” When news of Liebknecht’s release reached Russia, the factories closed down for a holiday. Lenin’s government sent a telegram, “The release from prison of the representatives of the revolutionary workers of Germany is a visible sign of the new epoch – the epoch of triumph of socialism now being revealed for Germany and the whole world.”

On November 9, the Kaiser finally abdicated. Friedrich Ebert, the head of the Majority Socialists, told the Chancellor that their only chance to save capitalism was to get rid of the Kaiser: “If the Kaiser does not abdicate, the social revolution is inevitable. I do not want it – in fact I hate it like sin.” The Kaiser finally bailed out – after they appealed to his higher sense of duty to his class. The Majority Socialists also acted in the higher interests of these same class masters. Friedrich Ebert became president of an Empire that no longer existed.

But Where Was the Party?

The form of the German revolution had come pretty much as Rosa Luxemburg had predicted – mass actions and mass strikes, largely spontaneous in character. But there was a central difference between what happened in Russia and in Germany. There was no party. Lacking was the central leadership which could coordinate and concentrate the revolutionary forces to focus on one single aim: the seizure of power.

The revolutionary leaders, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, the other Spartakists were there, and they had tremendous prestige. But at this point they were still part of the Independent Social Democrats. And when they put forward a motion in USPD for “All Power to the Soviets” and for boycotting the constituent assembly, they were voted down. Only afterwards was the decision made to set up an independent organization, to form a Communist party in Germany. As a result of this excruciating

delay, for example, in the elections to the all-German Congress of Workers Councils, not a single Spartakist candidate was presented. And the Spartakists had never independently penetrated the trade unions. The mass of the workers were concentrated in SPD and USPD.

Finally, on December 30, 1918, the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) was founded. Rosa Luxemburg wrote the draft program. But by this time, she and Karl Liebknecht had only two weeks to live. Already the rabid calls of the bourgeoisie and their trained dogs, the Majority Socialists, were escalating. Every tactic was used to crush the revolutionary rising – provocation, set-ups, assassinations. Every crime was put down to Spartakist. Paul Frölich, Rosa Luxemburg’s comrade, and later biographer, told how the “Anti-Bolshevik League” of the time – well supplied with government money – kept inventing new monstrosities which screamed out from posters on the walls, from leaflets.

“Bolshevism Nationalizes Women” was one typical cry. Spies and provocateurs were everywhere. The Majority Socialists made a secret agreement with General [Wilhelm] Groener – the army would not make a coup against the Social Democratic cabinet, if the Social Democrats would agree to fight the Spartakists.

They brought Noske back from Kiel and made him Minister of Defense. He had a single task – round up, sniff out and destroy Spartakist. Noske accepted, saying, “Someone has to be the bloodhound.” More attacks: the head of the Berlin police force – a popular left Independent – was sacked. The printing offices of the KPD’s *Rote Fahne* (Red Flag) were attacked. Anonymous social-democratic leaflets circulated reading, “Strike the Spartakist leaders dead – Kill Liebknecht.”

And that was what they did. The army was unreliable, so they brought in the Freikorps.⁶ On January 13, the SPD paper *Vorwärts* printed a poem – an open call for the deaths of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. And two days later they were rounded up by Noske’s soldiers. Rosa was shot in the head and her body thrown in the Landwehr Canal; Karl Liebknecht was pushed out of a car and then shot in the head – “shot while trying to escape,” they said.

We recently reprinted the *Vorwärts* poem in *Workers Vanguard*, in the article “The Main Enemy Was the Spartacist League” [*WV* No. 303, 16 April 1982] reporting on the massive police presence combined with social-democratic goon squads arrayed against us at the March 27 (1982) El Salvador demonstration in Washington. You’ll recognize the tone – “the Spartacists are a violence-prone minority,” etc.:

“Many hundred corpses in a row, proletarians!

“Powder, iron and lead don’t ask if to the right or left it’s a Spartakist, proletarians ...

“Who sent force into the streets, proletarians?

“Who first took weapons to hand and burned for a show-

⁶ After the overthrow of the imperial monarchy in November 1918 and Germany’s capitulation in World War I, volunteer corps were set up that enrolled thousands of the army veterans who blamed their defeat on a “stab in the back” by Communists and Jews. The Freikorps, the largest of these paramilitary groups, quickly became the shock troops to put down a potential workers revolutionary uprising.



On 4 January 1919, over 100,000 Berlin workers protested the government's repressive crackdown including occupying the printing plant of the Social Democrats' newspaper *Vorwärts* (above).

down? Spartakus!

"Many hundred corpses in a row, proletarians

"Karl, Rosa, Radek & Co.,

"Not one of them is there, not one of them is there, proletarians."

Well, pretty soon there were Spartakist cadavers in the street. Anybody who thinks that all of these slanders presently going around about the Spartacist League today are only something written on paper or said over the radio should look at what happened in Germany – it set them up for the kill.

The German reformists did everything in their power to crush the revolution. Our reformists today are only the water-boys and advisers of Teddy Kennedy. But one should not expect that they are the only ones. As we said, forces far greater than these reformists had to have been in play for the kind of police mobilization brought out against us on March 27.

After the Spartakist "rising" had been defeated – and two days before her death – Rosa Luxemburg wrote her last article in *Rote Fahne*, attacking the murderous social democrats who would crush the insurrection to preserve "order" for the capitalist class. Their call for "law and order" always reminds me of the [Socialist Workers Party's] call to keep things "peaceful, legal." Rosa's article, called "Order Reigns in Berlin," ended this way: "You stupid lackeys. Your 'order' is built on sand. The revolution will raise itself up again clashing and to your horror, it will proclaim to the sound of trumpets, 'I was, I am, I shall be'."

It wasn't long after the defeat of the first German revolution that the revisionists of all stripes started to exploit Rosa Luxemburg's writings and started inventing "Luxemburgism," either as a dogma to give themselves a left cover and still be anti-Leninist; or as the Stalinists did, to create a "Luxemburgism" in order to destroy her internationalist legacy.

As we have seen, this is a complete falsification. There was no Luxemburgism separated from Leninism. Luxemburg and Lenin, although in different countries and different situations, were generally political allies. On a number of issues, they had disagreements. But they were together two of the leaders of the revo-

lutionary wing of pre-World War I social democracy.

Now, through the bullets unleashed by the social democrats, Rosa Luxemburg was ripped away at a crucial point in history, and we cannot say what would have become of her. The program of Lenin, you see, was able to bring together the best elements of the left wings of the socialist parties, and others – for example the revolutionary syndicalists – under the banner of the Third International. Certainly, at every key point in her life, Rosa took the revolutionary side; she founded the KPD just before her death.

Nonetheless, one of the first to try to exploit her differences with Lenin was Paul Levi. Levi had been Rosa's lawyer and comrade and took over the leadership of the KPD after Jogiches, Luxemburg, Liebknecht, [Eugen] Leviné and most of the central Spartakist leaders had been killed. But Levi didn't last much longer in the communist movement. On his way back to the Second International Levi published Rosa's 1917 writings, written in Breslau prison, wherein she was sharply critical of the Bolshevik Revolution. (By the way, Rosa never published these writings in her lifetime – indeed, Levi, after discussions with Leviné, had gone to Breslau at the time to tell her she was disoriented and should wait until she got out of jail and understood more of what was going on in Russia before going into print with her differences. She did later retract much of what she had written in jail at that time.) But now Levi, obscenely trying to reclaim Luxemburg for the social democrats who had murdered her, published these writings.

Lenin replied with his defense of Luxemburg:

"Paul Levi wants to get into the good graces of the bourgeoisie – and, consequently, of its agents, the Second and the Two-and-a-Half Internationals – by republishing precisely those writings of Rosa Luxemburg in which she was wrong. We shall reply to this by quoting two lines from a good old Russian fable: 'Eagles may at times fly lower than hens, but hens can never rise to the height of eagles.' ...



Government forces, including former Guards Corps troops, restore "order" in Berlin on 10 January 1919 by assaulting revolutionary workers and drowning their uprising in blood.. Their leaders, Rosa and Karl, were murdered five days later.

“But in spite of her mistakes she was – and remains for us – an eagle ‘Since August 4, 1914, German social democracy has been a stinking corpse’ – this statement will make Rosa Luxemburg’s name famous in the history of the international working-class movement. And, of course, in the backyard of the working-class movement, among the dung heaps, hens like Paul Levi, Scheidemann, Kautsky, and all that fraternity will cackle over the mistakes committed by the great Communist. To every man his own.”
–Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 33.

And Trotsky, on numerous occasions took up the cudgels for Rosa against Stalin’s slanders and those of the social democrats. I’d like to end by just quoting from one, from “Luxemburg and the Fourth International” (24 June 1935):

“Put aside the incidentals which developments have overcome, and we can, with full justification, place our work for the Fourth International under the sign of the ‘Three L’s,’ that is, under the sign not only of Lenin, but also of Luxemburg and Liebknecht.” ■



FRTIC Blog

A marker where Rosa’s body was pulled out of Berlin’s Landwehr canal a month after she was dumped there by her murderers.

A Sign of the Times

We received the following communication from Jan Norden, editor of The Internationalist, who was Marjorie Stamberg’s companion for 50 years.

At the time Marjorie gave her presentation on Rosa Luxemburg, in 1982, various opportunist leftists had seized on the figure of Luxemburg in an attempt to counterpose her to the “sectarians” Lenin and Trotsky, which Marjorie refuted. Today, the political climate has evolved so far to the right, including on the left, that some garden-variety opportunists consider Luxemburg beyond the pale. On multiple occasions, members of the Democratic (Party) Socialists of America (DSA) have even marched past Internationalist literature tables grotesquely chanting “We killed Rosa!”¹

An example of how the rightward shift is reflected at a more intellectual/“theoretical” level was provided by an essay by Eric Blanc, a leading writer for *Jacobin*, magazine, which has a sizable readership on the left and is associated with the DSA. Titled “Rosa Luxemburg, national liberation, and the defeated Polish revolution,” it was published on the web site of John Riddell (22 February 2018). Claiming to debunk “The Rosa Luxemburg Myth,” the author writes regarding Luxemburg and the party she led, the Social Democracy of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL), that “their commitment to proletarian emancipation was undermined by sectarian and doctrinaire tendencies that contributed to the defeat of the Polish Revolution of 1918–19.”

Rather than the “sectarian and doctrinaire” Luxemburg – according to Blanc, who has made a reputation as

a professional anti-Leninist – “the Polish Socialist Party [PPS], Luxemburg’s main political rival, posed a viable Marxist alternative.” The PPS was a Polish nationalist party, whose central plank was independence for Poland, which had been carved up between the Russian, German and Austrian empires. Its founder, Józef Pilsudski, became the “founding father” of the bourgeois Polish state in 1918–19, and although Pilsudski split in 1906 from what became the PPS-Left, the PPS continued to exist and supported his regime in 1918 and even his May 1926 coup d’état.

Blanc argues that the PPS-Left was in a good position to lead a revolution in 1918–19, but alas, it decided to fuse with the SDKPiL and found the Polish Communist Party in alliance with the Bolsheviks. As Marjorie’s 1982 presentation made clear, Leninists rejected Luxemburg’s opposition to the right of self-determination, but they did not oppose Polish independence when it did occur, which, as Isaac Deutscher pointed out, came as a result of the Russian and German Revolutions.

The social-democratic nationalist opposition to Luxemburg and the SDKPiL (as well as Lenin and Trotsky’s Bolsheviks) promoted by Blanc’s essay is a reflection of the opportunist left’s embrace of Polish nationalist, clericalist Solidarność. Both in the 1918–20 period and during the rise to power of Solidarność in the 1980s, that position led straight to support for counterrevolution. In the 1980s, the then-revolutionary Spartacist League, which still upheld genuine Trotskyism, stood solidly against virtually the entire Western left in proclaiming “Stop Solidarność Counterrevolution!” The victory of Solidarność, which I made the anticommunist antisemite Pilsudski its hero, brought bitter defeat to women, minorities and basic rights of all the workers and oppressed in Poland. ■

¹ See “DSA Called the Cops on Trotskyists,” in the Internationalist Group pamphlet *DSA: Fronting for the Democrats* (February 2018).

Marjorie Stamberg

(1944-2024)

**Revolutionary Trotskyist, Marxist Educator,
A Leader of Struggles for All the Oppressed**



Internationalist photo

Marjorie speaking at 24 November 2008 rally to defend educators in the Absent Teacher Reserve (ATR), demanding “Let teachers teach!”

Our comrade Marjorie Stamberg died on May 29 after a three-year battle with ovarian cancer. She was 79 and had been active in the New Left, was a pioneer of the fight for women’s liberation, a Trotskyist activist and leader since her ’20s, a teacher for the last quarter century, and a revolutionary all her adult life. Throughout, she fought tirelessly for the working class, for black people, women, immigrants and all the oppressed. In different arenas, she defended all those exploited and downtrodden by capitalism. Up to her last days, as a central leader of the Internationalist Group (IG), the U.S. section of the League for the Fourth International, Marjorie continued the struggle for equality, for public education and for international socialist revolution, which was her life. She never stepped back from that

goal, continuing through her illness until her life was cut short by a disease that is seldom detected in time. Firm in her communist convictions, she was also a warm collaborator, mentor and friend of so many who worked with her. Her comrades and colleagues cherish her great contributions, which will continue to inspire us and hopefully many others in years to come.

Marjorie Stamberg grew up in Philadelphia in a family of East European Jewish heritage. Her grandfather fled from the Ukraine at the time of the 1904 Russo-Japanese war and antisemitic pogroms. She first became active in protesting the Vietnam War at the University of Michigan, participating in the first antiwar teach-in (1964). Marjorie moved to Washington, D.C. to become a full-time activist with the Student Non-



Attending the University of Michigan, Marjorie (front, center) protested against the Vietnam War and participated in the first antiwar “teach-in” (above) on 24-25 March 1965.

Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the radical wing of the civil rights movement, and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the main organization of the New Left.

Marjorie marched in the 26 March 1966 New York City peace parade on Fifth Avenue as part of the contingent of the Committee to Aid the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. Click on image to see photo of the whole contingent.

Already by that time Marjorie was part of the most radical wing of antiwar protesters, considering herself a revolutionary. She not only opposed U.S. foreign policy in Indochina but took a stand with the Vietnamese Communist forces (derisively referred to by the media as “Viet Cong”) fighting against U.S. imperialism and its puppet regime in Saigon. Marjorie marched in the March 1966 Fifth Avenue Peace Parade in the dissident contingent calling for victory to the Vietnam National Liberation Front (NLF) with its leader, Walter Teague, and with NLF flags flying, along with over two dozen supporters of Spartacist, which had been expelled by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). In November 1969 she marched in the Revolutionary Contingent in the Vietnam Moratorium march in Washington calling for “Victory to the Vietcong,” which with its NLF flags was excluded by the reformist organizers (notably the ex-Trotskyist SWP) of what many radicals called “peace crawls.” When in 1970 the Spartacist League carried the banner “All Indochina Must Go Communist,” Marjorie strongly supported that call.

Living in an SDS-SNCC commune in D.C., she was part of the collective that produced the *Washington Free Press*, the first of the underground papers that spread across the U.S. Marjorie’s article on the October 1967 March on the Pentagon against the Vietnam War was quoted in Norman Mailer’s *Armies of the Night*. That march of tens of thousands who ringed the headquarters of the imperialist war machine had a large pacifist majority and a smaller Revolutionary Contingent of SDS and the Committee to Aid the NLF, which Marjorie supported. After the pacifist leaders declared victory on the first day, her article, “Wedge!” described “the agony of those who sat and watched for hours” – held at bay by paratroopers from the U.S. Army’s 82nd



Marjorie marched in the 26 March 1966 New York City peace parade on Fifth Avenue as part of the contingent of the Committee to Aid the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam.

Airborne Division – “who could not leave yet could not resist” as hundreds were arrested. Marjorie also covered the upheaval of black Washington following the 4 April 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King, when the police fled the city, and there was a brief period of 48 hours with “no state power, and no scarcity,” as she put it, until the 101st Airborne Division and the National Guard were brought in to restore bourgeois “order.”

Coming to New York, Marjorie became a staff writer for the *Guardian*,¹ and when the staff revolted, she wrote for the *Liberated Guardian*² and other movement papers. Rejecting the

¹ The *National Guardian* was founded as the paper of the Progressive Party (PP), the Communist Party-led electoral vehicle for the 1948 presidential campaign of former U.S. vice president Henry Wallace. Under the blows of McCarthyite repression the PP disbanded in the mid-1950s, but the newspaper continued as the largest left paper in the U.S. As the New Left grew, in early 1968 the Stalinist popular-front editors stepped down and were replaced by a New Left team of writers who changed the name to the *Guardian* and invited Marjorie to join the staff.

² As the New Left *Guardian* settled into a reformist Mao-Stalinist line, and the editor Jack Smith acted in a high-handed way toward the collective that supposedly ran the paper, members of the staff staged a strike and then started up the *Liberated Guardian*, with a somewhat more radical (but still Stalinist-influenced) political line.



At the *Washington Free Press*, the first of the underground papers that swept across the U.S. in the late 1960s, Marjorie was one of the main writers, covering the October 1967 antiwar march on the Pentagon.

male chauvinism rampant in the New Left, she became a pioneer of the modern women's liberation movement and of its left wing that sought a program fit to the radical tasks posed by the fight for emancipation. She was an early member of Redstockings,³ a leading organization of what is now called "second wave feminism" in 1968-69. A three-part series on "The New Feminism" that she wrote in the *Guardian* in March/April 1969 was considered influential in breaking through resistance in the New Left to the women's liberation movement. Although posed in a feminist framework, Marjorie underlined issues of class and capitalism and referred to the Marxist analysis of Friedrich Engels. As she said later in a 2015 class on women's liberation that she gave to the New York Marxist study group of the IG:

‘I was a member of Redstockings in New York for a few months while I was writing for the *Guardian*. Others have told me that I was always pushing from the left. In particular, I was concerned about the fact that the group was overwhelmingly petty-bourgeois and entirely white.... The group included

³ A takeoff on “Bluestockings,” a name used to disparage female intellectuals in past centuries.

Guardian

The new feminism

By Maggie Stambor

In New York, as

across the country, a new feminism is exploding, ignited by a pattern of continuous oppression whose origin dates back to prehistory. There are scores of feminist groups here, ranging from rather apolitical discussion groups to single-issue organizations to militantly separatist

The groups are learning that if a woman is obsessed with consumption, if she displays herself as a sexual object, if she behaves deviously, she is acting as she should, for possession of these skills is necessary to her survival. She is exploited

by a capitalist system and a patriarchal family system whose mythology has institutionalized male supremacy. She is oppressed not only by these two interlocking systems, but by men as a whole, who benefit from her condition. Women organizing for change are suspicious of a world history created and written by men, and are unwilling to have the new movement's energy channelled or defined by a man-made movement for social change.

Defining oppression

"All of leftist thinking must be rethought in terms of the oppression of women," says Ellen Willis, a member of Redstockings, a new action group. Although the feminist movement is healthy with ideological struggle, there are few in women's liberation who would

"In order to be liberated, a man must be aware that he is oppressed," said Herbert Marcuse in "One Dimensional Man." Consciousness-raising groups which document and define patterns of oppression long hidden behind psychiatric jargon, sexual fears and

questions and to share target demonstrations and projects. Newcomers are so many and theological development so rapid that most groups have found themselves unable and unwilling to absorb new members. Groups are now experimenting with ways of bringing in new members.

In the intensely clinical consciousness-raising groups, "personal experience" reveals its political base. Any woman who has taken part in such a group will testify to the exhilaration that comes from understanding she is not sick, but oppressed. This is the first giant step; ramifications are so vast that it leaps even the most committed women.

"The influence of Freud has held the movement back for many years," says Kate Millett, a member of many of the groups. "His description of women as narcissistic and masochistic, his diagnosis of aggressiveness being penis-envy, is simply a description of the way women are in a patriarchy. The penis-envy analysis confuses society and anatomy. White supremacy has the same effect."

"To be really militant for a movement means to threaten," says Shulamith Firestone, of Redstockings. "Consciousness-raising is therapeutic and alleviates oppression somewhat. But if the movement becomes really serious, to the point where people throw tomatoes at you, call you lesbians, where

you turn off the artists, where you won't be cute or popular any more, where you may be in for many years of loneliness... the problem with our movement now seems less to me a question of ideology but more a terror of carrying it to its logical conclusions. I think this explains why leadership is continuous.

in 1967 the wage scale for women was lower than that of black men. In 1967, white males earned an average \$6704; nonwhite males, \$4277; white females, \$3991; nonwhite females, \$2861.

'Control' over money

Some people argue that women have control over money because they spend it. They may choose between Babo and Ajax, but their access to money is delegated.

"To assume that women have financial power because they consume is like saying a messenger boy has power because he carries the money to the

"The identification with class vicariously," according to Kate Millett. A woman takes on the class of her father or husband and may take on its cultural values. She can and does get kicked out, abandoned, divorced, and she will then enter the working class. In the U.S., only 2% of people who earn over \$10,000 a year are women.

"But the real issue is patriarchy. All historical cultures have this in common. We are vicarious members of society and we are governed at home. This is why the vote was such an issue, and as far as I'm concerned, 70 years were wasted on the idiot ballot."

In "The Origins of the Family, Private

"The establishment of the exclusive supremacy of the man shows its effects first in the patriarchal family. Its essential characteristic is the organization of a number of persons . . . into a family, under paternal power, for the purpose of holding lands. . . .

Marjorie's article series on "The New Feminism" in the *Guardian* was influential in breaking through New Left resistance to the women's liberation movement.

many who become well-known writers, critics and professors and a number of Greenwich Village intellectuals. So while it may loom large in histories of feminism, it wasn't that influential among radical women activists who basically came from the New Left."

–Marjorie Stamberg, “Women’s Liberation and the Class Line” (29 October 2015)

Meanwhile, she added, “Redstockings and most of the women’s groups consolidated around various gradations of anti-Marxist theory in order to justify a thoroughly pro-capitalist program.”

Marjorie was at the SDS 1969 convention, where the main organization of the New Left split between competing Maoist wings, that of the Third-Worldist Revolutionary Youth Movement I and II, on one side, and the Worker-Student Alliance led by the Progressive Labor Party, on the other. She had been in close touch with what would become the Weathermen faction of RYM since her days in Washington, although not entirely sharing their politics.

Moving to the West Coast, Marjorie was a founder of *Tooth and Nail*, a feminist journal that became the organ of Oakland Women's Liberation (O.W.L.). In her 2015 talk, Marjorie noted:

“We were not feminists first who were won to revolutionary communism. For a lot of us, we were revolutionaries first, who saw the need to fight for women’s liberation and because of that were won to feminism – and then, for some of us, as we saw what it meant in practice, we went from feminism to genuine Marxism.”

With the group's working-class orientation, Marjorie organized operators in the phone company (AT&T, which until the 1980s was a monopoly), many of them Black Panther women. But she saw through the defeatist sectoralism of feminism, notably when some operators scabbed on a strike by (white male) IBEW switchmen. As she recounted, that experience won her to the program of women's liberation through socialist revolution. The most conscious women in O.W.L. undertook what Marjorie called a "voyage of discovery" that led them to Friedrich Engels' 1885 work *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, and his "discovery that oppression of

No. 18 SPRING 1979

Women and Revolution

Journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League

Stamberg: "Consistent Feminism Leads to... Strikebreaking"

[Reprinted from *Workers Vanguard* No. 218, 3 November 1978.]

On Tuesday, October 24, Marjorie Stamberg, the Spartacist Party candidate for New York state assemblyman in the 64th A.D., was interviewed and talked with listeners for approximately two hours on the "Round Midnight" radio show broadcast by WBAI. In response to a question on the Spartacist attitude toward feminism, from a listener who identified himself as a supporter of the Socialist Workers Party, Stamberg answered:

We believe that the sex line is not the fundamental division in society—the class line is. We have forged our work in the women's movement by fighting against the strategy of feminism and to link the fight against the oppression of women to the workers movement. Let me give you some examples of this. You see I spent many years in the women's movement myself and I considered myself a feminist for many years, and part of my being won to a Trotskyist program had to do with my experiences trying to organize working-class women to a feminist strategy....

My experiences are similar to those of a number of people of my generation who went through various kinds of struggles in the New Left and the women's movement. I joined SDS in 1965 and was active in the New Left until approximately 1969. At that point I



New York City, 4:00 a.m.: 10 phone lines of radio station WBAI are jammed.

these political questions out with the Militant Action Caucus and we really came to no decision for quite a while until the class struggle heated up in 1971. Then there were a series of strikes against the phone company and we were able to test our strategy out in action against the revolutionary strategy of the

Interview with Marjorie in *Women and Revolution*, the journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League, No. 18 (Spring 1979), recounting her experience organizing women phone workers in Oakland, and the conclusions she drew from that.

women and the patriarchy evolved out of the development of private property and its locus was the family, integral to the capitalist social and economic system." Actually, as Marjorie put it in her 2015 talk, it was a "rediscovery":

"This political work had been done before by an earlier generation of revolutionary women leading up to and after the Russian Revolution – Clara Zetkin, Alexandra Kollontai and others. But that work had been systematically buried by the Stalinists after the political counterrevolution in the Soviet Union and destruction of the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky. We had to find it again."

Professional Revolutionary

In the Bay Area, Marjorie joined the Spartacist League (SL), which for three decades championed revolutionary Trotskyism against the betrayal of internationalist communism by Stalinism, the politics of the conservative nationalist bureaucracy that usurped political power in the Soviet workers state. She also helped build the Militant Action Caucus in phone, which was politically supported by the SL. A key question for her was the 1968 New York City teachers strike, which she had covered for the *Guardian*, opposing the walkout by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). She traveled to New York to speak with Spartacist leader Jim Robertson, who convinced her of the SL's position that the strike was a necessary action against the anti-labor drive of the liberal Republican mayor and the Ford Foundation, who were pushing "community control" in order to set black people against the union and to undercut the potential for ghetto rebellion by putting black militants on the payroll. But while defending the strike, the SL

also denounced the UFT leadership under Albert Shanker for waging it in a way that stoked white racist attitudes instead of on a program to defend the impoverished black community. Robertson's crucial role in the fight to uphold the Trotskyist program over many years is an important part of our history and what we stand on today.

Transferring to New York in 1973 to help launch the SL's *Workers Vanguard* as a biweekly paper, Marjorie continued to work at the phone company, where she launched the New York branch of MAC and became the first female switchman in NYC. She was a staff writer and then member of the editorial board of *WV*, edited by Jan Norden, who was to be her companion through thick and thin for 50 years. Together they were at the core of a vibrant collective, often under fire internally, that put out *WV* as the premier publication of the Spartacist tendency for 23 years and what many judged to be the finest left paper in the U.S. at the time. In 1985, the Pacifica Radio group's NYC station, WBAI, launched a "first annual 'Emma' Awards for the American left press," declaring *Workers Vanguard* the hands-down winner, describing it as "the craziest, most lively, most humorous, most nasty, most intelligent and most pig-headed of the left-sectarian organs." We, of course, took every word of that as a compliment.

Marjorie was also a main public spokesperson for the SL, a member of its central committee and its candidate for state assembly in 1978, running in the 64th A.D. encompassing downtown Manhattan's Greenwich Village, East and West. In opposition to social-democratic electoralism, where elected officials simply ignore their party's political positions, following Leninist practice Marjorie signed an undated resignation statement from her position, to be tendered should she fail to carry out the Spartacist program. Bolsheviks run in bourgeois elections primarily as a platform for their revolutionary program. Marjorie's campaign called for "A Socialist Fight to Save New York." At the time, large parts of the city looked

WORKERS VANGUARD 25¢

No. 29 28 September 1973

Workers, Leftists Face Massacre in Chile

The lives of thousands of labor leaders and rank-and-file militants, as well as revolutionaries from all over Latin America, are at stake in Chile today. We call on all workers organizations to mount militant protests against the reactionary junta, demanding the immediate release of the arrested militants and workers who are being held and murdered. It is an elementary duty of class solidarity to offer international proletarian aid to these victims of a military coup aimed at crushing the Chilean workers movement.

The international working class has addressed a major defeat in this counter-revolutionary coup. For the Chilean workers the September 11 military takeover represents a decisive setback; recovery will take a matter of years. Internationally, the spectacle of the last organized, mass conscious proletarian of Latin America suffering a bloody and systematic defeat, lacking the capacity to launch a civil war in self-defense, can only demoralize large numbers of militants. Either the lessons of this tragic defeat will be learned by the labor movement or we shall pay the price of our blindness in blood as is happening in Santiago today.

The Bloody End to "Popular Unity"

Allende's overthrow by the military was no accident. It had been prepared by everything the Popular Unity (UP) ever did. But now the UP has supposedly "Marxist" government attempt to touch the "secret" about

better preparation for a bloody massacre!

Moreover, the Popular Unity coalition constantly greeted blind faith in the supposed "neutrality" of the "democratic" military. In its "Message to Congress" in December 1970 Allende proclaimed:

Chile is one more proof. The reformists actually approved legislation to permit the military to seize any arms in the hands of civilians. (The law was, of course, applied rigorously against the unions and workers parties, while the fascists built up a tremendous arsenal.) The bill was in-

in search of illegal arms." As a result of the UP policy the Chilean working class is now facing the full force of the army, navy, air force and carabineros with nothing more than a few light machine guns.

In the final days of Allende's Popular Unity government, sections of the proletariat were beginning to reject this pacifist-defeatist policy by forming the "Comunidades Industriales" (workers committees in the industrial belts around Santiago) and the "Comunidades Vecinales" (local self-defense groups in the proletarian and petty-bourgeois districts). However, for the most part these were armed with nothing more than spears. The day before the coup, troops of the air force attempted to raid the Santa Lucía factory in Santiago and fire the first time were repulsed by the resistance of the armed workers. As a consequence for this "limit" to the "dignity of the armed forces" the factory has been bombed three times since the coup, with at least 500 workers killed, according to reports in the bourgeois press (*Newsweek*, 24 September).

Allende, however, remained committed to the last. His first radio message after the beginning of the coup stated that "a sector of the army" had rebelled and "I am awaiting now a decision from the army to defend the government" (*New York Times*, 12 September).

Popular Front

More than just hammering in a com-



Soldiers searching for snipers in Santiago after coup.

One of the first issues of *Workers Vanguard* that Marjorie worked on.



Marjorie Stamberg as Spartacist candidate for state assembly in 1978.

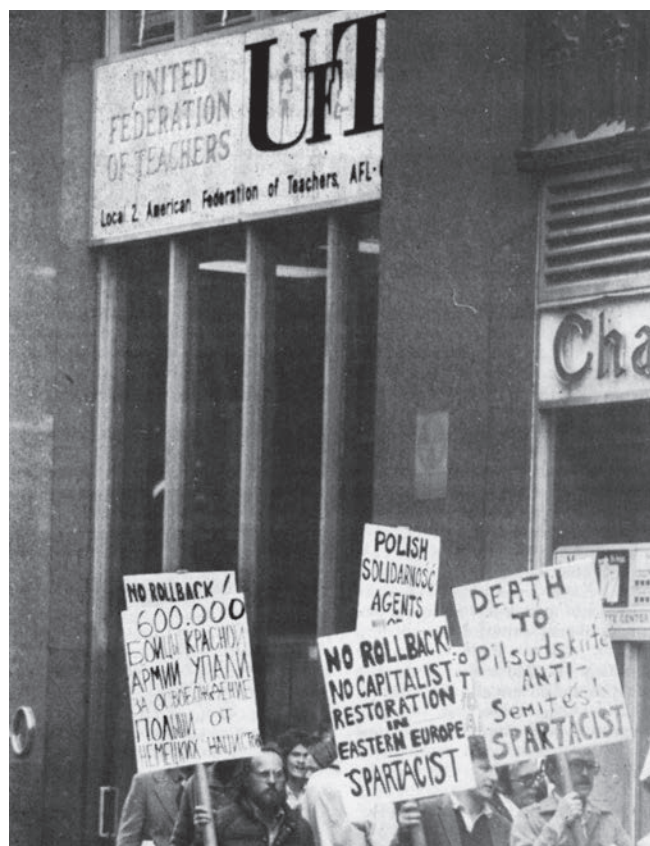
like bombed-out war zones as landlords burned down their own buildings in order to collect insurance money. Marjorie got 3.2% of the vote, a good showing for a leftist candidate, and a lot of local press coverage highlighting her program.

Marjorie ran for office again in 1985, this time for New York City mayor against the racist Democrat Ed Koch. The central campaign slogan was, "From Soweto to Harlem: Smash Racist Terror!" This connected with the uprising in the impoverished townships of South Africa against the apartheid regime of white supremacy which denied black people any rights while superexploiting their labor. Meanwhile, in NYC the NYPD was on a murderous rampage against black people, enforcing "Koch's Killer Kuts," as a sign protesting the closing of a hospital in Harlem put it. In 1983, "Koch's cossacks" killed 25-year-old Michael Stewart for writing graffiti on a subway wall. In 1984 they killed a Bronx grandmother, Eleanor Bumpurs, in her apartment as she resisted eviction. Coming amid Ronald Reagan's anti-Soviet Cold War crusade, Marjorie's campaign proclaimed "We Are the Party of the Russian Revolution." Speaking on WLIB, the leading black radio station in New York, she declared "the KKK doesn't ride in Moscow."

Marjorie always emphasized the centrality of the fight against the racist oppression of black people. After the Ku Klux Klan and Nazis massacred leftists in Greensboro, NC, in 1979, she played a main role in sparking SL-led labor/black mass actions that kept the KKK out of the North for years. In 1980, when the KKK threatened to go to Detroit, she went there to help organize a mobilization of black workers under the watchword, "The Klan Won't Ride in Motor City." In 1982,

after the hooded fascists announced they were coming to the nation's capital, she fought for the party to initiate actions to stop them. When that was initially turned down, as the SL didn't have a local there, her tenacity overcame the initial objections. On 27 November 1982 the SL's "Labor/Black Mobilization to Stop the KKK in Washington, D.C." brought out 6,000 determined demonstrators, including a Nat Turner Brigade of black shipyard and naval workers from the Norfolk, Virginia area, who took over the streets while the nightriders slunk off.

Marjorie fought against counterrevolution everywhere. In 1981, she demonstrated with the SL outside the offices of the UFT denouncing its role as a conduit for CIA funding of the nationalist, anti-Communist Solidarność movement in Poland. As the overwhelming majority of the left proclaimed "solidarity with Solidarity," Marjorie gave a seminal talk titled "Hail Rosa Luxemburg," in which she analyzed "Poland's Communist Tradition." This was published in *Young Spartacus* (May and Summer 1982), the newspaper of the Spartacus Youth League. We will be republishing this important article. In 1985 Marjorie went to Nicaragua as part of our



SL protest against United Federation of Teachers funneling CIA dollars to anti-Communist, Polish nationalist Solidarność movement, September 1981.



In 1993, Marjorie traveled to Cuba as the island was reeling from the cutoff of Soviet aid following counterrevolution in the USSR. Upon returning from that trip, she was asked as she walked in the door of the SL's offices if Cuba would resist counterrevolution. She responded that, from what she had seen, it would – which led to a campaign of accusations inside the SL of being “soft on Stalinism.” A little later, party leader Robertson wanted *WW* to say that the Cuban deformed workers state would “sink under the warm waves of the Caribbean.” Marjorie and Jan refused. Thirty years on, Cuba is still afloat, and the *gusano* counterrevolutionaries are still held at bay. But as Marjorie said in a forum she gave at Howard University in Washington on “Blacks and the Cuban Revolution,” “Latin American anti-Yankee nationalism, or black nationalism, were not able to give a revolutionary answer to black struggle.”

The imperialist-led destruction of the Soviet Union, the first workers state in history – founded by the Bolsheviks led by Lenin and Trotsky, and betrayed by Stalin and his heirs – devastated much of the Western left. Many who had called themselves communists rebranded as socialists, erstwhile socialists became “progressive” union bureaucrats, and many organizations closed up shop. The Spartacist tendency, which fought against counterrevolution in the DDR and the USSR, was not immune to this defeatism, but it expressed itself differently, by a retreat from the class struggle. In 1995-96, there was a

Marxist Educator

After the bureaucratic expulsions, Marjorie didn't hesitate. She proposed the name "internationalist" for our new organization and publication, as it summed up our aims in a clear, simple, understandable way. Starting over from scratch at age 51 with a tiny group of four comrades (Marjorie, Jan, Socorro and Negrete) is not easy, but this was her life's work. She went to work at the New York University Medical Center to pay the tuition at the NYU Steinhardt school of education, and by 1999 she embarked on a second career as a teacher in New York City schools.



Excerpts from September 1993 forum by Marjorie on the history and situation of black people in Cuba.

Jan Norden



Becoming a teacher in the New York City schools, Marjorie taught young adults, ages 17-21, almost all new immigrants.

Now there were new challenges. Marjorie compared teaching to being on-stage in a Broadway play five days a week, with a run that goes on for nine months, and continues year after year, with a different script every day, and an audience that talks back. Plus, she and her colleagues had to deal with mind-numbing rubrics supposedly measuring teachers' effectiveness, which changed almost yearly, a stultifying bureaucracy in the NYC Department of Education (D.O.E.) and the exhausting work of teaching young people as they are going through the difficult time of becoming adults. Marjorie taught English as a second language, or ESL, now called ENL (English as a new language) initially in high school and from 2008 on in a program for young adults ages 17 to 21. She also taught university-level English language courses at Hunter College and summers at NYU for a decade, and then later in adult ed in the D.O.E.

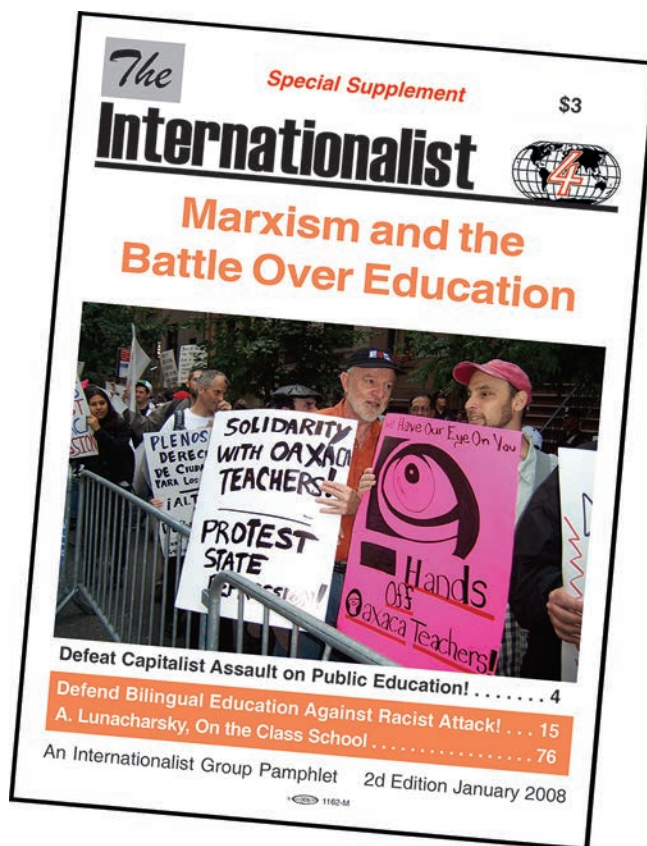
Soon after Marjorie started teaching, the IG began publishing articles on education. A 2001 article, "Defeat the Capitalist Onslaught Against Public Education!" spelled out how the Democratic Party, with Hillary Clinton in the forefront, embraced privatizing and corporatizing the public schools, pushing education "reform" to please Wall Street. It also explained the origins of the UFT leadership in the anti-communist social democracy of Max Shachtman, a renegade from Trotskyism who went over to imperialism. (UFT founder/leader Albert Shanker was a devotee of Shachtman, whose wife, Yetta Barsh, was Shanker's long-time assistant.)

A special supplement on *Marxism and the Battle Over Education* also included materials from the early Soviet republic when the Bolsheviks introduced a revolution in education, including replacing the dictatorship of school administrators and their capitalist bosses with teacher-stu-

dent-worker-parent control of the schools. In addition to "On the Class School" by Anatoli Lunacharsky, the commissar of education from 1917 to 1929, two essays by Nadezhda Krupskaya on public education and socialist schools (explaining that it will take a socialist revolution to realize thorough-going educational reform), it included a report by John Dewey on a trip to the USSR in 1927 where he saw his program of "labor schools" connecting education with social life turned into reality, before they were squelched by Stalin.

In December 2001, Marjorie went to Hunter College to join in a united-front rally, initiated by the IG, to stop the "war purge" of undocumented immigrant students by raising their tuition that the City University of New York tried to push through in the atmosphere of repressive hysteria following the 11 September 2001 attacks. In 2002, she leafleted the UFT Delegate Assembly with a resolution calling

for teachers to show solidarity with a looming NYC transit strike by, among other things, encouraging teachers to "take their classes to TWU picket lines to provide students with education in the class struggle."



An Internationalist Group pamphlet contained many of Marjorie's writings on education.



In June 2006, the government of Oaxaca, Mexico murdered ten people in an encampment of striking teachers. Alerted by our Mexican comrades, in a matter of hours, the Internationalist Group organized a protest outside the Mexican consulate in New York City.

In 2003, as the U.S. invasion and occupation laid waste to Iraq, Marjorie wrote a paper on “Teaching English as a Second Language in a Climate of War,” skewering the lying war propaganda (invented Iraqi weapons of mass destruction) being spewed out by the government and media, and denouncing the fear instilled by repressive laws like the U.S.A. PATRIOT Act. She presented the paper at the national TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) convention in Long Beach, California and later at the New York state TESOL convention. In 2005, she slammed the UFT contract with the D.O.E. that gave up the right of transfer by seniority when schools close in exchange for a salary hike, and wrote a leaflet denouncing the arrest of Muslim students by immigration cops.

On 14 June 2006, there was an explosion of sharp class struggle in the Mexican state of Oaxaca as teachers rose up in the face of a deadly cop attack on their *plantón* (encampment), in the state capital. The teachers sparked a semi-insurrectionary struggle backed by indigenous peoples and workers that drove the police, courts and all government authorities out of Oaxaca city, surrounded and shut down the state legislature, blockaded highways and the airport and cut off the state for five months. That same day, Marjorie and the Internationalist Group called a solidarity protest outside the Mexican consulate in New York. A few weeks later, she and comrades of the Grupo Internacionalista de México traveled to Oaxaca, where strikers effusively thanked the teacher from New York who had played a key role in helping to spread the word of their struggle.

Defending the ATRs

Back in the U.S., Marjorie had enjoyed teaching her immigrant students, most of them newly arrived, inspired by their excitement at seeing their first snowfall and amazed that they respected their teacher. (“They hadn’t got the memo,” she remarked.) It was challenging, with students ranging from some who had almost no formal education (and sometimes no written first language) to others with baccalaureate decrees in their home countries that are not recognized in the U.S. D.O.E. administrators soon saw that she was a superb teacher and asked her to become a mentor. So for a couple years she traveled to schools around Queens helping new teachers. Many stayed in touch over the years, saying how much they appreciated her support. But she felt it was a semi-management position – she even had to wear a suit – and she decided to return to teaching. “Who needs the suits?” – the D.O.E. bureaucrats – she would say. “We’re the ones who do the educating. We should decide.”

Marjorie returned to the classroom in spring 2007. She was hired at ASHS – Auxiliary Services for High School – just as the D.O.E. decided to dissolve this model program that prepared students for the high school equivalency exam. The chaotic reorganization of the alternative schools district, D79, “excessed” hundreds of teachers. Because of

a clause in the 2005 contract, they couldn’t be fired – so instead, more than 250 who couldn’t find a principal to hire them were thrown into the “Absent Teacher Reserve” (ATR). Marjorie and the UFT ASHS chapter leader Roz Panepento launched a petition and media campaign to get them back in the classroom. When ASHS was replaced by “GED Plus,” Marjorie ran for chapter leader, narrowly losing as the UFT Unity Caucus bureaucracy refused to give her a list of chapter members, or even of the 80 locations where they taught, until a day or so before the election.

By 2008, the excruciating situation of the “excessed” D79 educators worsened. By now there were 1,400 in the pool. Once more, Marjorie didn’t give up. She put out a call for a citywide meeting of ATRs and again launched a petition drive calling on the union to demand they be placed, garnering hundreds of signatures from over 103 schools across the city. Together with other activists she initiated an Ad Hoc Committee to Support the ATRs and wrote a motion, which was actually passed by the Delegate Assembly, for a UFT “citywide rally ... calling on the NYC Department of Education to reduce class sizes and assign positions to all teachers in the Absent Teacher Reserve who want assignments before any new teachers are hired.” This spooked the UFT and D.O.E. tops, so much that they hurriedly signed a side agreement the day before the November 24 rally. But instead of placing ATR teachers in permanent positions, it only created some financial incentives for principals to hire them.

The union then announced a wine and cheese party at the UFT offices at the same time as the rally to celebrate this empty agreement, and dispatched staffers to divert people from the

protest. It didn't work. Some 300 teachers and supporters turned out to a united-front demonstration organized by the Ad Hoc Committee, the largest opposition showing in years. The crowd was electrified. Marjorie was a main speaker, as a UFT member and the main public spokesperson of the recently formed Class Struggle Education Workers (CSEW). She insisted that the struggle for the ATRs continue, the UFT-D.O.E. agreement couldn't be trusted. But she didn't stop there.

Marjorie went on to denounce mayoral control, calling for teacher-student-parent-worker control of the schools. She excoriated the union bureaucrats as labor lieutenants of capital, in socialist Daniel De Leon's famous phrase, who act as a transmission belt for the bosses, particularly through the Democratic Party. She said that as the government was bailing out the banks (this was at the height of the 2007-08 Wall Street crisis), educators had big battles ahead and needed to ally with all of NYC labor and prepare to take on New York state's no-strike Taylor Law. She warned against illusions in newly elected president Barack Obama, who as a Democrat was going to continue the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq when what was needed was to defeat those wars. And she ended, "We need a workers party, we need a workers government."

Given the size and energy of the rally, as it was winding down Randi Weingarten showed up with a retinue to peddle their backroom deal. When Marjorie sought to answer her, the AFT/UFT chief refused to hand over the megaphone until people calling out "let Marjorie talk" forced her to relent. In fact, in the next several years as few as 16 ATR teachers were assigned positions as a result of the incentives in the side agreement. Instead, the ATR pool ballooned to close to 1,700 teachers by 2014. As the bosses' press (not only the teacher-bashing *Post* but also the *New York Times*) harped about ATRs as mooches sitting around "doing nothing," Marjorie kept agitating for union action to demand that they be placed. The ATR only ended with the pandemic-induced teacher shortage in 2021 when the D.O.E. finally let these qualified, experienced educators teach.

What Kind of Opposition to the Bureaucracy?

Marjorie's criticism of Obama and the Democrats at the November 2008 ATR rally upset a number of reformists and liberals in the crowd. In the aftermath, there was a sharp struggle over what kind of opposition was needed. Speaking for the CSEW, Marjorie called for more united-front actions like on November 24, but insisted that to defeat the pro-capitalist Unity caucus "we need *leadership based on a class-struggle*



Despite the attempt by the union tops to divert people from the rally approved by the UFT Delegate Assembly, some 300 educators and supporters turned out on 24 November 2008 to demand that teachers be placed in permanent positions. Marjorie (barely visible, bottom center) was a lead organizer and speaker.

program, and that is what we need to build now." Others wanted an all-inclusive opposition caucus bringing together all the different groupings despite their very real differences in program and strategy. Marjorie replied that a mega-caucus would only result in mega-confusion, and that it would have a lowest-common-denominator program that could only be simple trade-unionism:

"But simple trade unionism in this period where working people are under attack across the board, where every union gain is being taken away, is impossible. In this period of capitalist decay, reformism is a dead-end: if you are not prepared to fight the system as a whole, you are destined to fail...."

"There has to be a serious discussion about the history and future of this union, from the 'AFL-CIA' 'State Department socialist' Albert Shanker, to his wannabe imitators of the fourth reincarnation.... As we fight on every issue of social justice, we need to understand their roots in and to struggle against the capitalist system as a whole. That's why we call for a class-struggle workers party."

—"After November 24..." (2 December 2008)

The one-big-caucus crowd went on to form the Grassroots Education Movement, which a few years later engendered the Movement of Rank-and-File Educators (M.O.R.E.).

The ATRs were only one of the issues Marjorie fought over. In the spring of 2009, as Obama was pushing "performance pay" for teachers, Weingarten tried to soft-soap it by proposing that if student test scores in a school rose, each teacher would get a \$3,000 bonus. Marjorie denounced this as a soft-core version of the union-busting agenda of "merit pay," and she led the teachers of GED-Plus to vote it down. It's no mean feat to get a majority of union members to reject a \$3,000 bribe, but she did.



Marjorie emphasized that to fight the pro-capitalist union bureaucracy, what is needed is a class-struggle opposition that fights the capitalist system that is destroying public education. Shown here at April 2014 protest against invasion of charter schools, financed by Wall Street hedge funds.

Ultimately that ploy went nowhere. When Marjorie ran for UFT delegate from GED-Plus that spring, she was elected with more votes than the Unity chapter leader, Michael Friedman. They clashed on different issues over the next decade, but they also collaborated, and he always spoke of her with respect.

“Public Schools Are Where Race and Class Come Together”

2010 saw a full-scale teacher-bashing, anti-union offensive nationwide. Right-wingers produced a pseudo-“documentary,” *Waiting for Superman*, denouncing tenure for public school teachers. The next year, Columbia Pictures followed suit with *Bad Teacher*, starring Cameron Diaz. In New York, billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg launched a campaign to close scores of “failing” schools and promote privately managed anti-union charter schools that siphoned off dollars (in addition to big bucks from Wall Street) and stole classroom space from public schools with disruptive “co-locations.” Marjorie and the CSEW fought this tooth and nail, calling to *occupy closing schools*. She put out leaflets detailing how charters were used by real estate operators and served as cash cows for hedge funds, their steady flow of state funds to be milked if their speculative “investments” went south (as they did in 2007-08).

Marjorie testified at hearings of Bloomberg’s PEP (known as the “Puppet Education Panel”) against the closing of Paul Robeson High School in Crown Heights and at Bronx Regional

High School. She along with hundreds of educators, parents, students and supporters spoke at animated PEP hearings of several thousand people that went on for hours, after which the panel members dutifully rubber-stamped the closing of the latest batch of schools slated for destruction by Bloomberg and his schools chancellors Joel Klein and Cathy Black, imports from the corporate world who knew nothing of education. Black (who never attended a public school) set off a firestorm with her racist quip that the solution to classroom overcrowding was birth control! At a PEP meeting, Marjorie distributed a hilarious “Pop Quiz for Cathy Black” written by her colleague and comrade Charlie Brover, whom she had worked with since the 1970s.

The UFT, the several dissident currents in the union, just about the entire left, community activists and many liberals came to the stormy PEP meetings, but what Marjorie had to say was distinctive in one

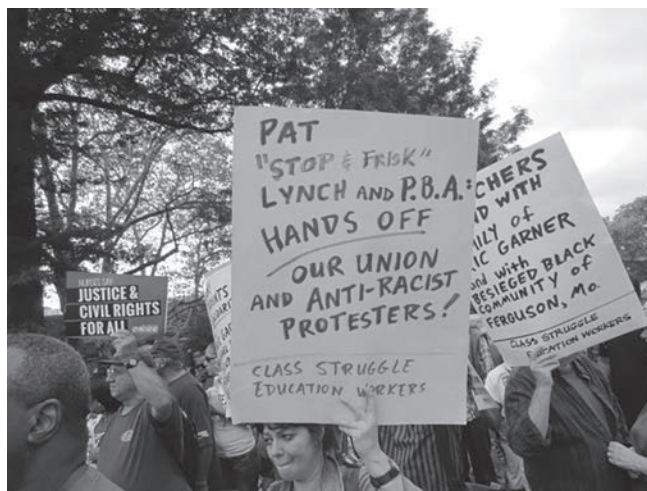
important respect: she attacked Bloomberg’s schemes as *racist*. “Look at the zip codes where they are closing the schools, it’s not in Riverdale or the Upper East Side, it’s in the poor, black and Latino neighborhoods,” she said. The UFT and the reformist opposition consciously stayed away from the issue of race, but as Marjorie was walking down De Kalb Avenue after a session at Brooklyn Tech, a prominent black activist from Bed-Stuy ran out of a deli to thank her for saying out loud the obvious truth that the others were tip-toeing around. She often noted that the fight against closing schools was key to overcoming the division between teachers and the black community that had lasted for 40 years since the 1968 UFT strike.

In 2013, the NYC school bus drivers and attendants, a largely Dominican and Haitian workforce whose crucial role in the school system was often ignored by both the UFT mainstream and dissident unionists, went on strike. On Day One, Marjorie was on the picket line in the rain at 6:30 a.m., expressing teacher solidarity with the strikers. The next day she put forward a motion at the UFT Delegate Assembly for the union to pledge its full support and call a mass rally of NYC labor to back the strike (it was not allowed to come to a vote, although it had a lot of support). The CSEW, which seeks to unite all education workers, not just professionals like the UFT, was on the picket line almost daily. M.O.R.E., as Marjorie put it, was “missing in action” (it had one token rally on the steps of D.O.E. headquarters).

The issue of what kind of opposition needs to be built against the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy came to a head with the July 2014 police murder in Staten Island of Eric Garner, who was choked to death as he repeated eleven times, “I can’t breathe.” This crystallized outrage against racist cop repression throughout the city. Marjorie and the IG went to Garner’s funeral in Brooklyn, where they didn’t see anyone from the union. But when black Democrat Al Sharpton called a mass march in Staten Island in August, UFT leader Michael Mulgrew wised up and the union endorsed.

The Internationalist Group has many times denounced the role of Sharpton, who with his signature chant “No justice, no peace,” always seeks to divert protest into pressure on the bourgeois politicians. Still, the IG and CSEW marched in the Staten Island protest, which was in actuality a referendum on racism. *M.O.R.E.* did not. Why not? Partly because some of their members from Staten Island, where many teachers are married to police, were influenced by local pro-cop sentiment. But even worse, *M.O.R.E.* put out a grotesque statement against the union’s decision to participate in the march and calling for “the leaderships of the UFT and PBA, to find ways to work together and unite”! “Unity” with the fascistic organization protecting the racist killer cops of the NYPD?!

M.O.R.E. claims to stand for “social justice unionism.” But here we saw the program of simple trade-unionism in action, covering up for racist police murder. Marjorie put out a sharply worded “Open Letter to *M.O.R.E.*” (10 September



Internationalist photo

The acid test. While Class Struggle Education Workers marched in August 2014 protest in Staten Island against police murder of Eric Garner, the *M.O.R.E.* caucus, despite pretensions of “social justice unionism,” called for unity with the police and the fascistic police “union.” CSEW calls for cops out of the unions and out of the schools.

2014), saying: “Far from being our ‘brothers and sisters,’ the police are professional strikebreakers and enforcers of racist ‘law and order.’ That’s their job for the ruling class.” Its outrageous statement, she added, “flows directly from *MORE*’s basic premise of ‘uniting’ all and sundry against the Unity misleaders. It flows directly from its avoidance of all issues of race and class, the fundamental questions in this country.”

Marjorie emphasized over and over, “the public schools are where race and class come together.” She called for *cops out of the unions, and cops out of the schools*. And she stressed that in city after city, all across the country, *Democrats are the bosses of the racist killer cops*.

Teachers Lead Mass Revolt in Oaxaca

In 2016, Marjorie took a six-month sabbatical to go to Oaxaca, Mexico, where she had been several times before, to study indigenous education. She interviewed teachers in Zapotec, Mixtec and Mixe communities and gave some classes to grad students at the state university named after Benito Juárez, the indigenous president of Mexico who in the mid-1800s, after waging a civil war against clerical reactionaries and defeating a French invasion, launched a system of free, secular public education. After returning to New York she gave a presentation as a professional development day in her school, P2G, on “Language, Culture and Identity: An Investigation into Teaching and Learning in Oaxaca.” While she was in Oaxaca a new teachers strike broke out, that as in 2006, engulfed the entire state, lasting from May to September. Marjorie actively supported our comrades in the Grupo Internacionalista, who were in the front lines of battle.

All highways in and out of Oaxaca were cut off for several months. Soon, the only way in or out was on the teachers’ bus. The teachers had 37 major roadblocks across the state and check points at the state line where they inspected all



Screenshot from Internationalist video

At 1 February 2011 meeting of billionaire mayor Bloomberg’s puppet Panel for Educational Policy, UFT D79 delegate Marjorie Stamberg denounced Bloomberg’s school closing program as racist, an obvious fact which other educators who spoke tiptoed around. The audience of hundreds cheered.



After the 2016 teachers strike in Oaxaca had gone on for a month and a half, on 19 June 2016 the army and federal police massacred eleven indigenous people in Nochixtlán. At every town along the highway to the state capital the military faced tenacious resistance. Marjorie, in Oaxaca on sabbatical, supported our comrades of the Grupo Internacionalista, who were in the front lines of the battle (above, in Hacienda Blanca on the outskirts of Oaxaca city).

vehicles. The teachers have their own FM and Internet radio, Radio Plantón, that the GI has a program on, Frecuencia Obrera Internacionalista. The Zapotec, Mixtec and Triqui indigenous areas were mobilized in support of the teachers, who often act as spokesmen and advocate for these impoverished communities. There were repeated demonstrations of tens of thousands, and on a couple of occasions, hundreds of thousands in the state capital. During the strike the GI had a film club that showed films every night in the street outside the headquarters of the teachers union, Sección XXII of the CNTE, a dissident union that had largely broken free from the stranglehold of the corporatist education workers “union” (SNTE), which was and is essentially a government agency for controlling teachers.⁴

After the strike had gone on for about six weeks, in mid-June the army and federal police came in, killing eleven indigenous people and wounding over 100 in the town of Nochixtlán. As they proceeded to the state capital of Oaxaca, they met massive resistance at every town, with flaming barricades. Our comrades participated in the fighting, and the next day our health worker comrades went to the town clandestinely with a mobile surgery unit to treat the wounded. In New York, the CSEW organized solidarity protests. But even the murderous army and federal police attack didn’t break the strike, which continued three more months. That was a real lesson in the power of teachers’ struggles, not in defense of narrow professional goals but as a leader and champion of the working class and oppressed communities.

⁴ See Marjorie’s article “CNTE-SNTE, What’s the Diff? And Why It’s Important” (August 2016), on the CSEW site (edworkersunite.blogspot.com/2016/08/mexico-teachers-strike-cnte-snte-whats.html).

For the last 25 years in Mexico, the federal and Oaxaca state governments have sought to impose educational “reform” plans promoted by imperialist agencies like the World Bank and OECD. Because of the teachers’ resistance, they have been largely unable to implement these union-busting and privatizing plans. But neither have the teachers been able to win a resounding victory, as they have limited their struggle to one state, not bringing in the powerful industrial working class, and they have looked for salvation to the populist president Andrés Manuel López Obrador (who wants to reincorporate the dissident teachers, reasserting the chains of government control) rather than building a workers party. Mexico remains a capitalist state and Oaxaca is still an impoverished region. Nothing short of an international socialist revolution can change that. Marjorie’s experiences in 2006 and 2016 show the power class-struggle unionism, and the need for revolutionary leadership.

Defending Immigrant Students

In early 2017 newly elected president Donald Trump launched an offensive against immigrants, beginning with the ban on travelers from seven predominantly Muslim countries. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) began raids around the country, including in New York City. I.C.E. agents showed up at schools looking for undocumented students. Marjorie and other Internationalists went to JFK to protest the “Muslim ban,” and she launched a “UFT P2G Immigrant Students Support Committee” to defend immigrant rights and to keep I.C.E. out. This was not abstract. At her site in Manhattan, they located back doors for students to leave in case the immigration police showed up, and she contacted a nearby sanctuary church, bringing the priest to the school to meet officials.

Then, on May 15, the UFT sponsored an immigration forum, with AFT president Randi Weingarten as one of the featured speakers. They highlighted the chancellor’s instructions that I.C.E. agents were not to enter the schools without permission from the D.O.E. In the discussion, Marjorie got up to say that was not enough, that if the *migra* came, teachers and staff should line up outside to say that those are our students, you will not touch them, and if you try to go in, you will have to go through us. There was a lot of applause but no reaction from the panelists. But as the meeting was breaking up, Marjorie reported, Weingarten called out to say, essentially, “And Marjorie, if you form such a line, we will defend you.” That was all we needed. It was a green light. Marjorie never expected anything more from the union bureaucracy.

Marjorie did a lot more over the years. In 2007, she put



Marjorie fought for union action to defend immigrant students and keep the I.C.E. police out of the schools.

out a leaflet defending Debbie Almontaser, a Yemeni American principal of what was slated to be the first Arabic-focused school, who was purged by Mayor Bloomberg, with the approval of the AFT/UFT's Weingarten, after a months-long Muslim-bashing campaign by the virulently anti-teacher Zionist *New York Post*. As a delegate from 2009 to 2019, Marjorie put out a listserv, which people referred to as her blog, with her reports on the DA and other materials, which was circulated to several hundred teachers, mostly in P2G. In 2012, when Chicago teachers went on strike, as soon as she learned of it, Marjorie hopped on a 6 a.m. flight the next morning to go there to show solidarity from New York teachers. She voted against every UFT-D.O.E. contract, and in 2014 put out a sticker (with a union bug) which she distributed widely, saying "Don't Blame Me – I Voted No." She also fought insistently to integrate New York City schools, calling for free, equal, quality secular public education for all.

"Retirement"

Marjorie retired on January 1, 2020. By February, the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Suddenly schools were desperate for teachers. So at the age of 73, she learned how to teach remotely, familiarizing herself with different programs and apps. By the fall of 2020 she was teaching again. She taught remotely in regular school and adult education right up to the start of the week when she was rushed to the emergency room on 26 February 2022. She only made it there because, as she and Jan were desperately searching for a gastroenterologist on Friday afternoon of presidents' week, when asked about her insurance, they answered "UFT" and no further questions were

asked. If she had been on Medicare Advantage, as Mulgrew and the Municipal Labor Committee are trying to impose in order to save money for the (capitalist) city government, who knows what would have happened.

By the late spring of 2020, as many teachers unions, and the reformist internal oppositions like M.O.R.E. in New York and C.O.R.E. in Chicago, were calling to keep the schools closed, Marjorie insisted, and we wrote on placards, that "Remote education is an oxymoron." All education is social, as Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky taught, and every teacher in New York learned in ed school. Marjorie and the CSEW called to use union power to make schools safe, to form committees of teachers, students, parents and school workers to inspect the buildings, to check out ventilation and make sure the new ventilators worked. The union did not need the administration's permission, it could just do it and insist on compliance. And by involving the parents it could undercut the kind of anti-teacher backlash that the right wing predictably instigated. The CSEW called for this insistently but at the time, we did not have sufficient strength in the schools to wage this fight.

Marjorie went back to the university after retiring, thinking of getting another master's degree in history from CUNY. Among the powerful papers she wrote "Interpretations of 1989 and the 'Socialist Reform' Currents in the German Democratic Republic" (DDR), taking apart the Cold War ideology of Western anticommunist academics, who portray the struggles of 1989-92 in the Soviet bloc as "totalitarianism" vs. liberal democracy. In it she explained why the socialist reform movements of dissident intellectuals, isolated from the workers and lacking a revolutionary program could not fulfill their dream of an independent DDR cleansed of bureaucracy, existing between the Soviet and Western blocs. Another paper dealt with various modern-day "Interpretations of CLR James' *The Black Jacobins*" who find the Haitian Revolution wanting for not conforming to current standards of "human rights" imperialism.

Marjorie received the best medical care available. After an emergency operation in February 2022, she was treated at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, the premier institution for this disease. It was a hard regimen, taking 13 pills multiple times a day, dealing with neuropathy and indignities. Then, when further chemotherapy was no longer possible, she received considerate attention at the only acute-care accredited end-of-life hospital for advanced cancer patients in the U.S. When they asked at intake if she was depressed, she said "yes – because I'm dying." Marjorie had tremendous will power, as communists must have, but eventually her body gave out.

During the two years' time won with chemotherapy Marjorie accomplished some important things. She gave a three-part talk on the 1968 New York teachers strike, about which much has been written and which is still sharply disputed today, dissecting the forces at work, and explaining how a leadership armed with the Bolshevik revolutionary program of educator-led teacher-student-parent-worker control of the schools could have cut through the community control vs. teachers rights standoff. She gave another talk during these months, on the counterrevolutionary role played by the Shachtmanite anti-communist leadership of the UFT and

AFT, from the Pinochet coup in Chile to Polish Solidarność. The CSEW plans to publish these talks, together with others of her writings, in the next issue of *Marxism & Education*. Marjorie also mentored a group of young teachers starting out in this demanding job.

Marjorie's life was not easy. One thing that helped her, both facing hostility in the SL and with the demanding schedule of teaching, was running. Her father, Bill Stamberg, had been a semi-pro basketball player and after getting cancer used to go on long walks every day. Marjorie watched the NBA finals every year, and was an avid runner. She ran eight New York City Marathons. She ran all through the pandemic, when people (including her) were afraid to go out. Later, after she fell ill with cancer, she had Parkinsonian symptoms and found it hard to walk. But after seven months of slowly recovering from surgery and little by little being able to walk again, she adopted a daily routine of walking two and a half miles. It was slow-going but she did it. Then she had to negotiate 46 stairs to get up to her and Jan's fourth-floor walk-up apartment.

It was a measure of Marjorie's fortitude that in November 2023, when it was increasingly difficult for her to walk, she participated in three Gaza solidarity protests in one week. On November 9, she made her way into a crowd of several thousand on the steps of the New York Public Library main building in a National Shutdown for Palestine student walkout. Her sign called to "Defend Palestinians Against Genocidal U.S./Israel War." On November 15, she joined a rally at the UFT offices in downtown Manhattan with a sign declaring, "Israel Out of Gaza and the West Bank Now!" The next day, outside the D.O.E. headquarters, holding a sign calling "For the Right of Students and Teachers to Protest War on Gaza!" she spoke at a protest called by the CSEW against a gag order issued by NYC schools chancellor David Banks seeking to squelch any pro-Palestinian talk, even on their own time and out of school.

Marjorie was determined to show her opposition to the slaughter by the Israeli Zionists and U.S. imperialists, who furnish all the bombs and planes that make this mass murder possible; to refute the slander by the purveyors of genocide who equate anti-Zionism with antisemitism; to speak out on behalf of the Palestinian Arab people under attack, and to defend the rights of others to do so as well.

Having written for several left papers as she evolved politically, Marjorie Stamberg made the leap from being a New Leftist and pioneering women's liberationist to the communism of Lenin and Trotsky, and then held fast. She was an editor of *Workers Vanguard* and *The Internationalist*, along with the CSEW journal *Marxism and Education*; she was a member of the Central Committee of the Spartacist League when it stood for revolutionary Trotskyism, and for the last 28 years a central leader of the Internationalist Group and of the League for the Fourth International. She was a professional agitator, and a very good one, able to appeal to a crowd, to explain clearly the essence of the issue at



Jan Norden

Marjorie and Jan in the 1980s. Jan wrote to her comrades the night she died: "She was the love of my life, my comrade in struggle, my compañera and girlfriend forever, who will continue to inspire me tomorrow as she did yesterday, and for years before.... I'm sure many other comrades feel this loss deeply as well."

hand, and the need for a revolutionary answer. As one comrade who worked with her for decades commented, "She was hard as nails politically, and also kind, always there when you needed someone at your back." Marjorie was respected by pretty much everyone who knew her.

Over the half century of their life together, from *Workers Vanguard* and the Spartacist League/ICL to *The Internationalist* and the Internationalist Group/LFI, Marjorie and Jan collaborated politically so closely that they sometimes forgot who had said what. In the SL they were embroiled in many fights – to the point that when they walked in together to a Political Bureau meeting in the early 1990s, party leader Jim Robertson remarked, "Oh, here comes the alternative leadership." They lost some fights, but probably won more and worked together effectively with others in the leadership for over two decades despite tensions. In the IG/LFI Marjorie continued to fight for the program that she was won to decades before, and that today is more urgent than ever. As Rosa Luxemburg stated, the choice before humanity is socialism or barbarism, and we're getting a horrifying preview of that barbarism in the genocide in Gaza.

The leader of the East German Stalinist regime, Erich Honecker, had a fatuous slogan, "*Vorwärts immer, rückwärts nimmer*" (Always forward, never backward), which is absurd – it is sometimes necessary to fight rearguard actions. As labor and left misleaders have capitulated before the imperialist offensive in recent decades, giving up union gains and acquiescing to – even joining – the drive to gut public education, Marjorie and her comrades have had to become adept at waging defensive struggles, but always preparing to go on the offensive. Yet Marjorie never gave up, or stepped back, she was always in the forefront, fighting for the oppressed. Her example, and the lessons she drew from those struggles, will help show the path of those who continue her struggle for a socialist world. ■

After November 24...

(A Contribution to the Discussion)

By Marjorie Stamberg

At the demonstration on 24 November 2008 to demand positions for teachers who had been placed in the Absent Teacher Reserve (ATR), Marjorie Stamberg, who was a principal organizer and main speaker at the united-front protest, did not limit herself to the immediate job security issue. She also addressed the overall capitalist attack on public education by both Democrats and Republicans, criticizing president-elect Barack Obama by name. This sparked controversy and led to a sharp debate over what strategy was needed to fight the union bureaucracy. We print below her call for a class-struggle opposition.

Recent postings by Angel Gonzalez and Sean Ahern underscore a broader discussion that has gained force in the wake of our successful demonstration in defense of teachers being held in the limbo of the Absence Teacher Reserve this past November 24. After years of givebacks, as the UFT leadership abandons one gain after another while critical voices in the union are marginalized; in the face of a broad offensive to gut public education, which puts children last and ensures that no vendor is left behind, how can we take the readiness to fight that energized everyone on November 24 and go forward?

What gave the mobilization for the ATRs its energy was that it was a united-front action built by union activists which drew in several opposition groups, as well as many unaffiliated teachers – because we all understood the common danger and the need for a powerful response. The slogan, “If you’re not an ATR today, you could be tomorrow” summed it up. That’s why we fought for it to be an official union demonstration – this affects everyone. And that’s why teachers and other school workers turned out in a real *teacher rebellion* despite the best efforts of the UFT leadership to divert and derail the struggle.

As both Angel and Sean note, the ATR issue is the “tip of the iceberg.” It is the current point of attack of the privatizers and corporate “reformers” who are waging a frontal assault on public education. A few months ago, the issue was “merit pay.” Tomorrow it will be teacher tenure. But it’s important to see the big picture: that beyond the particular attacks, there’s a war going on here, a class war. And if it’s “one-sided class war,” as many have commented, that’s because of the role of the labor bureaucracy in keeping workers in check. It’s not about Randi Weingarten personally.

The united front is a method for *common action*. It is not the basis for building an on-going opposition to the present Unity Caucus bureaucracy, which is busy selling out what union gains are left. For that, we need *leadership based on a class-struggle program*, and that is what we need to build now.

Angel links the teachers’ struggle to the current financial/economic crisis, the worst since the Depression of the 1930s. This is quite correct – teachers are under attack while the



Internationalist photo

Marjorie Stamberg at 24 November 2008 ATR rally.

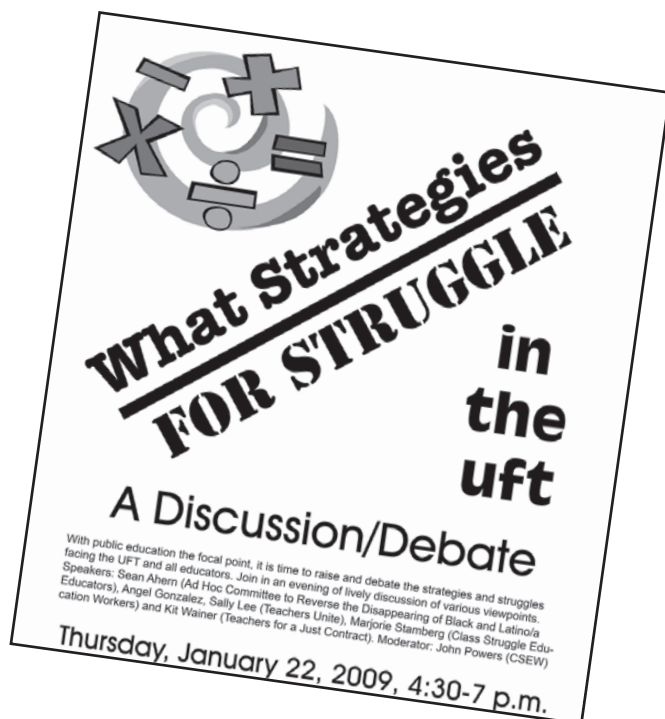
government is showering \$8.5 trillion to save the Wall Street banks. To fight this poses questions of class, power and leadership. Sean’s posting emphasizes how the struggle against the corporate education “reformers” is a multi-faceted struggle. His emphasis on the racist hiring policies of the Bloomberg/Klein administration is a key element of what we need to fight.

It’s also true that the response to this has been fragmented, with a number of different blogs, caucuses and groupings struggling on issues of class size, ATRs, high-stakes testing, union democracy, police brutality against minority students, etc.

The answer is not to simply amalgamate all the opposition groupings in one big mega-caucus. The result will be mega-confusion. Many colleagues were greatly encouraged by the turnout and militancy of the November 24 demonstration. Those of us involved in organizing it were taken by the power of the response, despite the active sabotage by Unity. Running off endless leaflets, and distributing them all over the boroughs more than paid off, as it touched a chord of struggle among teachers.

A common action is one thing, and there will be others. A common caucus, or coalition or “rank-and-file” movement is something else again. The rule in such coalitions is that the program gets determined by the “lowest common denominator,” where everyone can agree. And that LCD will be simple trade unionism. But simple trade unionism in this period where working people are under attack across the board, where every union gain is being taken away, is impossible. In this period of capitalist decay, reformism is a dead-end: if you are not prepared to fight the system as a whole, you are destined to fail.

Case in point: Michelle Rhee and the Washington D.C. school system fight against teacher tenure, which is shaping up as the formative education battle of the next administration. If it’s broken there, the fight will come to New York. If you haven’t seen it, read *Time Magazine’s* chilling cover story of Rhee as the wicked witch of corporate education reform, complete with



Class Struggle Education Workers hosted a debate on what kind of opposition was needed to fight the ever-dominant bureaucracy of the UFT, the largest local teachers union in the U.S.

broomstick to “sweep away” teachers who don’t toe the line.

You can’t fight against these attacks within the framework of the capitalist system that created them. That is why the UFT leadership supports the thrust of the so-called educational “reforms” (read: union-busting) while trying to make them marginally more palatable. They are loyal to this system and the politicians who uphold it, from Democrat Eliot Spitzer, who enforced the Taylor Law against the TWU, to Republican billionaire Bloomberg, and now Barack Obama. Obama’s election represents a significant social shift in this country, which was founded on chattel slavery and has been a bastion of racism ever since. But Obama in the Oval Office will rule in the interest of capital, from bombing Afghanistan to keeping the U.S. in Iraq to “reforming” D.C. schools.

We also need to be clear on the nature of the union bureaucracy, which acts as a transmission belt from the bosses to the workers, what Daniel DeLeon called the “labor lieutenants of capital.” Randi Weingarten is carrying out the program of Joel Klein and Mayor Bloomberg, while trying to sugar coat the bitter pill so we’ll swallow it.

It’s necessary as well to understand the role of the government and the state. Both the Puerto Rican teachers in their recent strike and New York teachers face draconian anti-labor laws. The minute we step out on strike, when we do, we’ll be hit in the face with the Taylor Law, just as the FMPR had their representation cancelled under Puerto Rico’s Law 45. The fundamental fact is that it is a class struggle, and what we need is a leadership with a class-struggle program and the determination to fight this through.

Program is key. It’s not enough to just oppose Michelle

Rhee in D.C. – or Joel Klein as Education Secretary. Those who support Obama will be paralyzed when his education minister comes out for those policies or a soft-core form of them. Weingarten can’t fight them, because she supports the Democratic Party. That’s why she is busy “putting everything on the table,” from charter schools to “merit pay” to teacher tenure. And neither can union oppositionists who join the UFT bureaucrats in supporting Democrats mount a real fight.

Obama is in favor of “performance pay,” doubling money for charter schools, making it easier to fire teachers and reforming rather than abolishing No Child Left Behind. When the UFT/AFT switched its support from Hillary Clinton to Obama, they conveniently “forgot” these facts. Clinton, by the way, has supported “merit pay” since the 1990s when as a lawyer in Little Rock, Arkansas she got a \$100,000 contract from one of the main organizations pushing for this.

Likewise, it’s not enough to be for “union democracy.” For example, in opposing Weingarten/Unity’s attempt to gag the opposition in the guise of prohibiting videotaping (which the union has a right to do), some have cited the Landrum-Griffin Act as an authority. This anti-labor law was passed after the Teamsters won the first national Freight Agreement in the mid-’50s, in order to control the labor movement, in the name of defending ... “union democracy.” We want to rip up these labor laws, not stand on them.

What’s next? Taking the union to the bosses’ courts like so many union caucuses have done over the past couple decades. What happens when they win? A new layer of bureaucrats get in, who proceed to sell out struggles because they “owe” the government. Just look at the TWU, and how Roger Toussaint called off the December 2005 strike that shut down the city, and has just signed a no-strike pledge.

These are just a couple of illustrations of why we cannot all “join together” in one big happy opposition family caucus. It will fall apart at the first test. A lot of colleagues have done a lot of good work on class size, on ATRs, on high-stakes testing and other issues. They should continue to do so. It’s necessary to address other issues as well, including immigrants’ rights. There has to be a serious discussion about the history and future of this union, from the “AFL-CIA” “state department socialist” Albert Shanker, to his wannabe imitators of the fourth reincarnation.

I am putting forward the program of the Class Struggle Education Workers, a newly formed group including members of the UFT, PSC and other education workers. The issue of public education today raises every question of racism, class and imperialism. As we fight on every issue of social justice, we need to understand their roots in and to struggle against the capitalist system as a whole. That’s why we call for a class-struggle workers party.

We will be proposing a public forum on the battle over public education, in the hopes of furthering this crucial discussion. In the meantime, I encourage people to read our CSEW leaflet that was distributed at the November 24 demonstration and the CSEW program on our web page: edworkersunite.blogspot.com.

Marjorie Stenberg
December 2, 2008

A Crucial Battle Against Liberal Union-Busters, Undermined by Pro-Capitalist Bureaucrats Who Fostered Racist Reaction



“Community control” activists leaving Junior High School 271 in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville section of Brooklyn, on 21 November 1968, after blocking union teachers from entering the school.

The 1968 New York City Teachers Strike and Teacher-Student-Parent-Worker Control of the Schools

By Marjorie Stamberg

The following presentation to supporters of Class Struggle Education Workers was given in three parts, in November 2021, July 2022 and July 2023.

Part I

We often say that the schools are where race and class come together. We stress this to underscore that the issues affecting teachers and education generally are not isolated from, but largely determined by, the broader conditions of capitalist society, particularly in its epoch of decline. And problems in the schools are a direct reflection of social decay, from mass homelessness affecting over a tenth of all students in the New York City schools to the COVID-19 pandemic that led to schools being shut and then only partially reopened, with the disaster of “remote learning” – an oxymoron, we said, a contradiction in terms – most affecting the poorest and most socially vulnerable students.

More specifically, race and class interests can come into apparent direct conflict, serving to obscure the fundamental fact of the exploitation and social oppression by the capitalist rulers of *all working people and oppressed sectors*. This is what happened in the 1968 New York City teachers strike, when we saw ghetto populations, black militants and most of the left

manipulated by bourgeois politicians and powerful corporate forces against the teachers union – the United Federation of Teachers. And the social-democratic leadership of the UFT responded with a narrow trade-unionist outlook, that was at best insensitive to and at times antagonistic to the needs and desires of the African American population, instead of *leading black, Latino, Asian and white working people* in struggle against the city authorities and their Wall Street patrons.

But “class” and “race” are not just different sectors, or sociological categories as the “intersectionalists” would have it.¹ Exploitation and political domination by the capitalist ruling class are fundamental, and constitute the basis of racial oppression. And when push came to shove, when the bourgeois politicians decided to “play the race card,” and to hypocritically use legitimate black grievances against the union, class-struggle militants had to stand with the union.

¹ “Intersectionality” arose in response to the divisions between different categories of identity politics, positing the need to take into account often overlapping social identities (gender, race, ethnicity, class, etc.). Marxism, in contrast, holds that the various forms of social oppression are centrally engendered by class society, and that there should be a united revolutionary struggle of all the oppressed, led by the working class, which alone has the power to overthrow the capitalist system and eliminate the material basis of oppression.

To be clear from the outset, Class Struggle Education Workers (CSEW) and the Internationalist Group uphold the position of the Spartacist League, which we came out of, namely that we support the 1968 strikes by the UFT – which were utterly necessary in the face of blatant union-busting – while sharply criticizing the union misleadership of Albert Shanker that played into the hands of the corporate “community control” fraud. I want to say, speaking personally, that this understanding, of critically but emphatically supporting the strikes, was key in my being won over to the SL, as I had been on the other side, writing in the New Left *Guardian* in favor of community control. At the same time, we point out that the program of the CSEW for *educator union-led teacher-student-parent-worker control of the schools* could have gone a long way to overcome the poisonous racial polarization that lasted for four decades.

I want to come back to that later, after we have looked at the background and origins of the strikes and the specifics of how this played out. Today I want to talk about the background. The three strikes in the fall of 1968 were one of the most bitter episodes of NYC labor and black history, so it’s important to study them carefully. It’s also worth noting that both the UFT bureaucracy and the various reformist oppositions (currently the M.O.R.E.,² New Action Caucus and Solidarity, before that ICEUFT,³ TJC,⁴ TAC,⁵ CSW⁶ and others) have generally stayed well away from the hot potato of 1968.

So, first off, it’s important to note that New York City today is very different than it was six decades ago. In 1960, when the UFT held its first strike for union recognition and collective bargaining, very few public workers at all were unionized, whereas today, 98% of NYC and New York State teachers and staff are unionized. As for the racial and ethnic composition, in 1960, 97% of NYC teachers were white and the overwhelming majority of them were Jews, while in 1963, 40% of New York City public school students were black or Puerto Rican. Today, 85% of NYC public school students are African American, Latino or Asian, as are 42% of the teachers. There is still a racial disparity, and in the Bloomberg years⁷ the number of black teachers was cut in half – falling from 27% in 2002 to 13% in 2008, while the number of Hispanic teachers fell from 18% to 11%. But they have since picked up again.

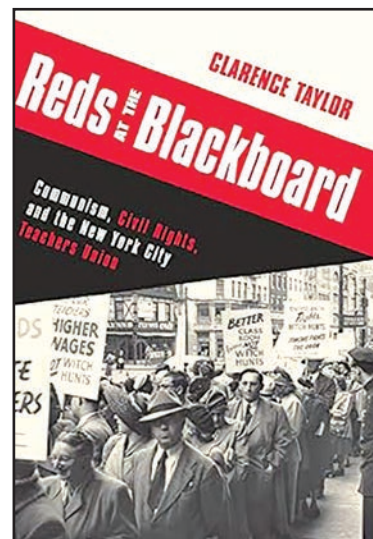
This is no accident but the result of a conscious effort. By 2008 we had formed the CSEW, and we became involved in the campaign to “Stop the Disappearance of the Black and Latino Teachers,” which was led by Sean Ahern. There was a resolution in the Delegate Assembly, which passed, and it has actually had an effect. One of the ways that Bloomberg

made the teaching force whiter was by recruiting from Teach for America and his own outfit, the Teaching Fellows, which brought in large numbers of teachers from Colorado, for some reason, who had never seen the inside of an urban classroom and were utterly clueless. We had our own experience with this when the Fellows said that one of our supporters, a young Latina woman from the Bronx, was “not up to their standards.” But after we went to bat for her, they “relooked at it.”

So the context is very different from the 1960s, and this is probably part of the reason that the UFT in the fight over the last several years against charter schools has been able to counter the appeals to black parents by the charter operators and their Wall Street hedge fund backers. Also, the UFT has learned from 1968, belatedly, and has made an effort in outreach to the black community. As comrades know, in 2014 the UFT marched in Staten Island to protest the police murder of Eric Garner, while the M.O.R.E. did not – partly because it was appealing to Staten Island UFT members, many of whom were married to cops. Also, today black workers are significantly more unionized than whites, whereas in the 1960s, the unions were often perceived by many in the black ghettos and Latino barrios as a white preserve.

A second important factor is that in the 1960s, big social changes and movements were underway across the country. A decade earlier, U.S. society was in a kind of Cold War deep freeze, with the population regimented by anti-communism. Hundreds

of teachers were fired or forced out just in New York City for being reds. This was written about in the book *Reds at the Blackboard* by Clarence Taylor. The Communist Party largely went underground. Meanwhile, in the schools, students practiced crawling under their desks for a Soviet nuclear attack! This rigid social control was broken by black struggles for equality, particularly after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision ordering desegregation of the schools. That developed into the civil rights movement and once the ice broke, everything cracked: there was a huge social upheaval. There was SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) with the Freedom Riders and lunch counter sit-ins in



This study by Clarence Taylor documents the history of the NYC Teachers Union, led for decades by supporters of the Communist Party, and the witch hunt that destroyed it. From 1949 to the late 1950s, over a thousand TU members were investigated and hundreds were fired or forced out, labeled “subversives” under the state’s Feinburg Law. None were ever found to be negligent in the classroom.

² Movement of Rank-and-File Educators

³ Independent Community of Educators

⁴ Teachers for a Just Contract

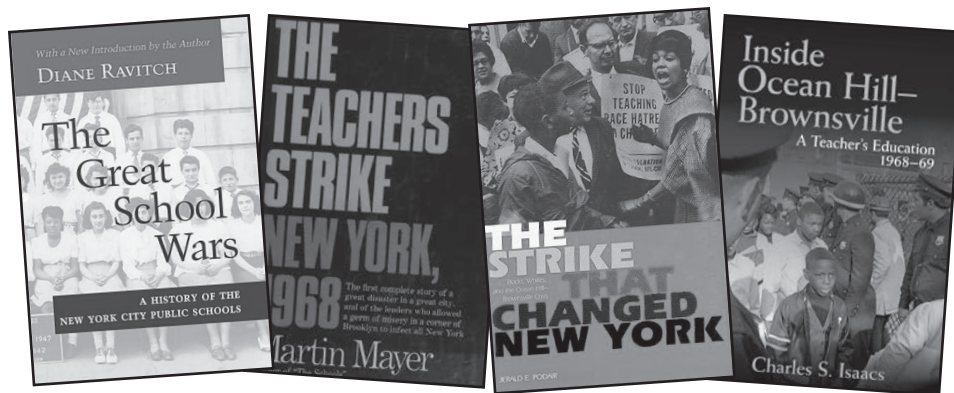
⁵ Teachers Action Caucus

⁶ Coalition of NYC School Workers

⁷ NYC’s billionaire former mayor Michael Bloomberg instituted mayoral control of the schools during his 12 years (2002-13) in office, replacing the Board of Education with a NYC Department of Education, which continues today. Bloomberg governed as a Republican, but both before and after he was and is a Democrat, and always a representative of Wall Street.

the South. There was SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) and the New Left and later the anti-Vietnam War movement.

When the civil rights laws of 1964-65 changed little for black people in the North, there were a series of ghetto explosions of enormous magnitude. This began in 1964 with the so-called "Harlem Riot," triggered by the police shooting of a young black man. In 1965, Malcolm X was assassinated. In 1966, Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture), the head of SNCC, raised the call for "Black Power," and the Black Panther Party was formed in Oakland. These events led to the lasting split in the civil rights movement between the reformist liberal-integrationist wing and the black power radicals. At the same time, there was a large-scale move of white people from New York City to the suburbs beginning in the 1950s, and consequently, the proportion of non-white students in the schools grew, becoming a majority in 1966.



The three strikes by the United Federation of Teachers in 1968 were, taken together, the largest and longest walkout by educators in U.S. history, with an impact on "race relations" that lasted for decades. The '68 NYC teachers strike is also one of the most studied labor battles, mostly by liberals who take different sides in the strike, but none from a revolutionary Marxist standpoint.

In the midst of this, there was a wave of unionization, particularly of public sector workers. AFSCME⁸ took off, organizing state and municipal workers across the country. Its District 37 won collective bargaining representation for NYC public hospitals, school staff and other municipal workers. Local 1199, one of whose main leaders was Communist Party supporter Moe Foner, unionized the private hospitals. There were a series of strikes: the 1960 teachers strike which led to recognition of the UFT as bargaining agent; the 1966 transit workers strike; the 1968 sanitation workers strike. Even the media said it: "New York is a union town." We chant that today, and this week when the leader of the Amazon Labor Union in Staten Island was asked why he thought an organizing drive here would be successful when it failed in Alabama, his answer was: "because New York is a union town."

That became true in the 1960s and is still true today. Whereas in the U.S. as a whole only 6 percent of workers are members of a union, in New York about 25% of all workers in the city are unionized, everybody from bodega workers to Macy's, the major supermarkets and particularly city workers. That took a dip during the pandemic as many union workers were laid off, like in hotels or the construction trades. But now that's back up.

The Defeat of Liberal Integrationism in New York City

The third major development that played a key role in the 1968 was the fact that school integration had been defeated in New York City. When we think of the demise of desegregation in the North it calls to mind the 1974 battle of Boston, with racist councilwoman Louise Day Hicks and white mobs stoning school buses with black children. Or we think of Joe Biden, who led the anti-busing movement in Congress later in the '70s that basically put an end to school integration in the North, a fact which we have called attention to in our press. But the fact is that school integration was first defeated in New York City, and the racist reaction began almost immediately

⁸ American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees



When half of all public school students walked out on "Freedom Day," 3 February 1964, demanding integration of NYC schools, the *New York Times*, the house organ of the bourgeois establishment, went ballistic, denouncing the "violent, illegal" and "adult encouraged truancy."

after the 1954 Supreme Court ruling. References to this are in Diane Ravitch's book *The Great School Wars* (1974) and Matthew Belmont's *Why Busing Failed* (2016).

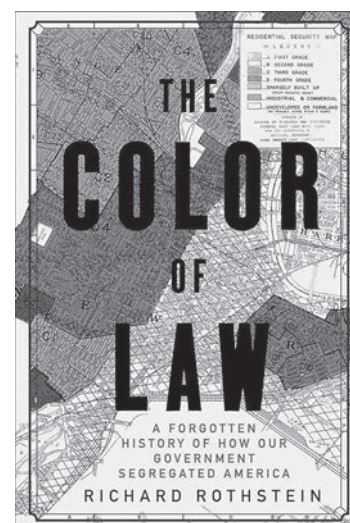
So, for example, in 1957, when a Commission on Integration handed in a report proposing rezoning, the head of the Board of Education declared there would be no long-distance busing and the "principle" of the neighborhood school would be maintained. When a black minister in Brooklyn, Rev. Milton Galamison, formed a City-wide Coordinating Committee for Integrated Schools, it met a solid wall of racist reaction against whatever strategy they came up with. They tried them all: free transfers, rezoning, sister-schools, creation of new schools, busing – these were some of the attempts. At the end of each wave of agitation, boards would be created to investigate, studies would be commissioned, implementation plans would be designed, and ignored.

There were protests and counter-protests. The biggest attempt was in February 1964, when Bayard Rustin and Rev. Galamison coordinated a citywide boycott of public schools to protest de facto segregation. It was huge: 460,000 students stayed out of school. NYC rulers had conniptions. A *New York Times* editorial headlined, "A Boycott Solves Nothing" and another labeled it a "violent illegal" movement of "adult-encouraged truancy." This house organ of the bourgeois establishment decreed that the demands for integration were "unreasonable and unjustified." Meanwhile, white racists formed "Parents and Taxpayers" committees; 15,000 marched across Brooklyn Bridge to oppose integration.

By the mid-1960s, the refusal to integrate by the Board of Education, city rulers and the media, all conciliating the white backlash, was notorious. The *Times'* education reporter wrote that among "educational experts," the "generally felt,

but never publicly stated, belief [was] that integration of the schools ... is impossible, either now or on any future timetable." In her 1974 book, Ravitch wrote that because black and Hispanic students were now the majority in the New York City public schools, therefore "Integration, which many people had relied on to equalize education, was no longer numerically or politically possible." This is radically false.

What is true is that *liberal* integrationism failed, and this failure has endured: In 2014, Gary Orfield and the UCLA Civil Rights Project reported that 60 years after *Brown v. Board of Ed*, New York schools are still the "most segregated in America." This segregation deepened under mayors Rudolph Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg. Programs to improve education were slashed, and whole schools in African American and Latino communities were labeled as "failing" and shut down. At the end of the

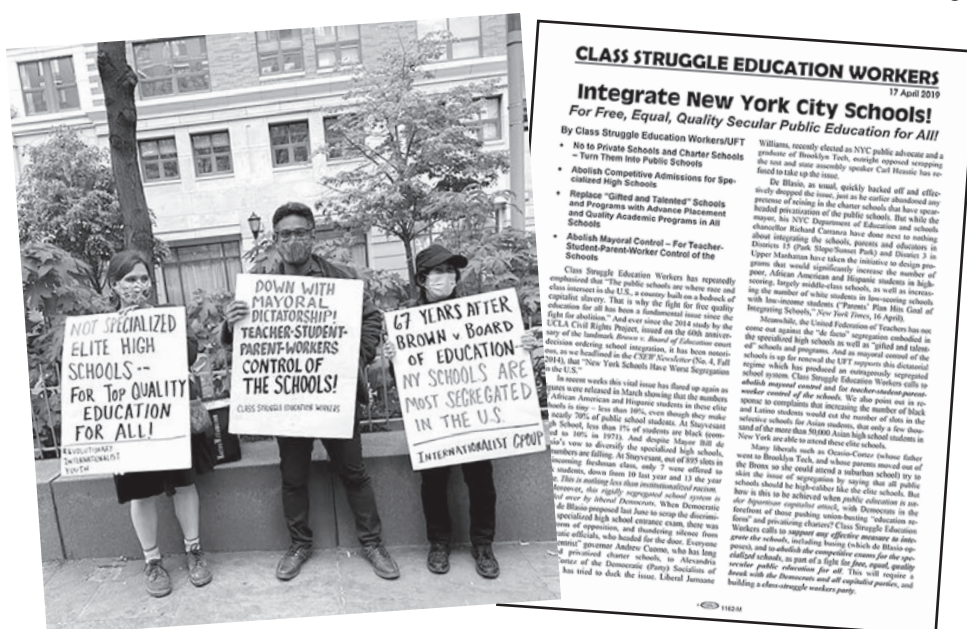


Richard Rothstein's ground-breaking analysis showed how residential segregation in the U.S., key to the de facto segregation of the schools, was the direct result of government policy. See review by Charles Brover, "American Apartheid by Design" (November 2018) at edwork-ersunite.blogspot.com.

2000s, we participated in furious meetings of hundreds of parents, students and teachers where we denounced this as racist – which neither the UFT nor the reform groups would say.

City rulers tried to keep white middle-class students in the public schools with zoning manipulation (as in the District 2 plan that gave preference to students living in the lily white posh Upper East Side), with the specialized high schools, and with "gifted and talented" programs. This segregation remained intractable under "progressive" Democratic mayor Bill de Blasio as well, who as we warned would be "Bloomberg lite." Although he campaigned against school segregation, appointed yet another commission to study integration and brought in Richard Carranza as chancellor vowing to end segregation, de Blasio

Internationalist photo



CSEW protested notorious segregation of NYC elite schools outside Stuyvesant High School in Manhattan, May 2021. In the 2025-26 school year, out of 781 incoming students at Stuyvesant, 8 (1%) are black and 27 (3.3%) are Hispanic, while 62% of students in NYC public schools are black or Hispanic.



AP

New York's Republican/Liberal Party mayor John Lindsay (right) was met on his first day in office with the 1966 TWU Local 100 transit strike, defying the 1947 no-strike Condon-Wadlin Act. Thousands of transit workers protested (above) the jailing of TWU leader Mike Quill. The strike won, setting off panic in the ruling class, which passed the no-strike Taylor Law, which was then used in 1968 against the striking teachers.

quickly backpedaled whenever there was conservative, liberal and/or ethnic opposition. So the struggle to integrate NYC schools remains one of the most urgent tasks for revolutionaries, requiring fierce struggle within the UFT and organization of parents, teachers, students and all school workers.

We have written about this many times, for example in the April 2017 CSEW leaflet "Integrate New York City Schools!" One of the main arguments of those claiming integration is impossible was that it was just the result of residential segregation. But as Charlie Brover underlined in his article on "American Apartheid by Design," reviewing Richard Rothstein's book, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, the "redlining" to keep black people out of "white neighborhoods" – for which Donald Trump's father, the former Ku Klux Klansman, was notorious, constructing huge segregated housing complexes in Queens – was government mandated.

Liberal integrationism failed, but we stand on the Marxist program of *revolutionary integrationism*, emphasizing that **the fight for free, secular, high-quality, integrated public education for all, although it is a simple democratic demand, requires a socialist revolution to be fully realized.** And along the way, it is entirely possible – and we fight for that – to make certain gains, such as abolishing the specialized high schools, turning the charters into public schools, abolishing all private schools and so on.

But to come back to the struggle culminating in the 1968 NYC teachers strike, it is important to understand how support for "community control" of schools in black neighborhoods was a response to the defeat of integration. For many black parents and activists, the initial demands were for integration with white students *or* community control. And for city officials, as Ravitch points out in her book, "Community control appeared to be a way out.... If the parents assumed control, they would have only themselves and their appointees to blame." She notes that "the idea of black control of black schools appealed to a surprising cross-section of whites," that foundations saw it as a way to "engage the energies of black militants by ceding to them a part of the system at no sacrifice to anyone outside the ghetto." And, Ravitch wrote:

"Conservative whites recognized that black control of black schools implied white control of white schools, which they could comfortably support, for it guaranteed that black problems, black dissidence, and black pupils would be safely contained within the ghetto."

So the liberal, conservative and ruling-class support for "community control" was centrally in order to get integration off the agenda. The obstacle was the teachers and the UFT.

The Players

So that's some of the background and context. Now let's look at the players.

First there is the liberal Republican mayor *John Lindsay*, who took over from "progressive" Democrat mayor Robert Wagner Jr. in January 1966. Lindsay was a wealthy, aristocratic, "silk stocking" district Republican (and Liberal Party) politician. He was a liberal, not an out-and-out reactionary like Rudolph Giuliani. He was a featured speaker along with Coretta Scott King at the biggest antiwar rally, at the Central Park Sheep's Meadow in 1967. He was going to make New York "fun city" with lots of glitz, like the newly constructed Lincoln Center playhouse for the rich. Shanker commented that Lindsay epitomized the "sanctimonious upper-crust moralist with an added whiff of genteel antisemitism." But at bottom, Lindsay was a ruling-class operative, elected to take on the unions.

By 1966, the city was in the midst of a strike wave, first by the construction trades, then transit, sanitation, taxi drivers, hospital workers and teachers. Lindsay was elected on a program to resist what he called the "coercion" of the strong unions in vital services. The Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100 strike broke out on his first day as mayor. The city got an injunction declaring the strike "illegal." At a rally of thousands of striking transit workers, TWU leader Mike Quill made his famous defiant reply: "The judge can drop dead in his black robes." Quill vowed to "rot in prison" before he'd call it off. Quill was put behind bars, but unfortunately he was the one who died, collapsing of a heart attack in jail.

Until then, public employees could be prosecuted and fired under the Condon-Wadlin Act, which was passed in 1947 at



UFT leader Al Shanker (center) during 1968 strikes at picket line of the CSA, representing administrators. UFT/CSA rhetoric against “mob rule” in the schools inflamed racist reaction.

the height of the Cold War “red purge” of the unions. But the 1966 transit strike had shredded that, and so the next year the state passed the Taylor Law, which provided for heavy fines for strikers and the union, and jailing of the leaders. Lindsay was determined to use the Taylor Law to force settlements on the unions. And he constantly played the race card, blaming the TWU, then the garbage union, then the UFT for striking against the needs of the “black community.”

Then we have *Al Shanker*, president of the UFT. Born and raised on the Lower East Side, his parents were Russian immigrants and his mother had been an activist in the social-democratic-led garment trades unions. In college, Shanker joined the YPSL,⁹ the Socialist Party youth, and developed into a hard-core anti-Soviet Cold Warrior, and a Vietnam War hawk. Shanker was an early activist in civil rights, but as a liberal, in favor of integration through a supposedly color-blind “meritocracy.” Shanker was first active in the Teachers Guild, which was set up to counter the Communist Party-led Teachers Union.¹⁰ After the McCarthyite purge of NYC teachers and defeat of the TU, he went on to found the UFT in 1960.

⁹ Young People’s Socialist League

¹⁰ Supporters of the Communist Party were influential in the Teachers Union in New York City from the 1920s on, and from 1935 until its demise in 1964 due to McCarthyite witch-hunting, CP supporters led the TU. By 1949, the TU came under heavy fire from the state government, backed by the Board of Education, under the state’s Feinberg Law aimed at rooting out teachers deemed by investigators to be “subversive.” From 1949 to the late 1950s, over 1,150 TU members were investigated and some 400 educators were fired or forced out in this vicious “red hunt.”

Shanker’s closest collaborator was the UFT administrator Yetta Barsh, who was married to Max Shachtman.¹¹ The Shachtman-Shanker collaboration became the defining political profile of the UFT. It was this that made the UFT and its parent, the American Federation of Teachers, into key operatives in the overthrow of leftist prime minister Cheddi Jagan in then British Guiana (now Guyana) in 1964; in overthrowing the Unidad Popular government of Socialist Salvador Allende in 1973; and as the channel for funneling CIA dollars to the anti-Soviet, nationalist Solidarność in Poland during the 1980s. The UFT/AFT was a linchpin of the “AFL-CIA.”¹² The Shachtmanite Albert Shanker was an all-round anti-communist counterrevolutionary who we opposed tooth and nail. I remember well how the SL protested outside UFT headquarters in 1981 with signs denouncing Shanker as a “CIA stooge,” which earned us

a warning from the *Wall Street Journal*.

¹¹ Max Shachtman broke from Trotskyism in 1939-40, refusing to defend the Soviet Union in World War II. After a period of centrism, by the early 1950s Shachtman became a propagandist for U.S. imperialism, from the Korean War on. Those who followed his course became avid Cold Warriors, lining up with the most anti-Soviet counterrevolutionary sectors. This history is extensively discussed in the Internationalist pamphlet *DSA: Fronting for the Democrats* (February 2018).

¹² This is a shorthand expression describing the international counterrevolutionary actions of the AFL-CIO labor federation. While domestically AFL-CIO affiliates were labor unions, their international activity was run as a conduit for and often as an operative arm of U.S. spy agencies. Currently these international operations are carried out by the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center, most of whose funds come from the U.S. government.



National Security advisor McGeorge Bundy (left) and General William Westmoreland (center) in Vietnam in 1965. Bundy was architect of failed “strategic hamlets” counterinsurgency program in Vietnam and phony “community control” in New York City that sparked the 1968 strikes.



Brownsville in Brooklyn in 1969. The impoverished ghetto areas of New York had decaying, overcrowded schools with inexperienced teachers. This was the result of government policy, not teachers unions.

So you had the arch-anti-communist “color-blind” liberal integrationist and proponent of meritocracy, who insisted that teachers could only be hired from among those who were certified by the racist NYC Board of Examiners, which put him at loggerheads with the black community and the demand for more black teachers, which as I’ve said we strongly support.

Then there was *McGeorge Bundy*, the head of the Ford Foundation. Bundy wrote the school decentralization plan and designed the three “demonstration districts” for community control, one in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, one on the Lower East Side and the other in East Harlem, centered on IS 201, a windowless monstrosity that became the site for the first UFT strike in 1967. Bundy had been the national security advisor for John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson during the Vietnam war, a hard-core war hawk, and also during the U.S. Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. He was the No. 1 Cold Warrior. And when he was made president of the Ford foundation, he brought his old Vietnam War hawk pal, former U.S. Secretary of Defense (war minister) Robert McNamara, with him.

The Ford Foundation had money, a \$3 billion endowment. With that, Bundy sought to co-opt the militancy of the black struggle, to build an “entrepreneurial” layer in the black community and to stop union power cold. According to Shanker, “Bundy has been the guiding hand behind the forces that are out to destroy the union,” and in that the UFT leader was right. There is an insightful article by Richard Armstrong in the *New York Times Magazine* (20 April 1969) titled “McGeorge Bundy Confronts the Teachers.” The article describes how the UFT had sent 500 lobbyists to Albany to support some legislation, when 45 chartered buses from New York City showed up with 2,000 people, as Armstrong describes them, “middle-class housewives, slum mothers in new spring frocks, Black Panthers in leather jackets, berets and jeans – to lobby for a sweeping decentralization of the New York schools.”

Shanker charged that they were paid for by the Ford Foundation, and while it was not possible to pin down how many of the bus tickets were paid for by the foundation, the article shows how it financed the whole community control

project. How the Queens College professor who ran a training program for administrators in Ocean-Hill Brownsville got a grant of \$542,000 (\$4.2 million in 2021 dollars); Galamison got \$160,000 for his Scope program, which financed Kenneth Clark, another main proponent of community control; \$334,000 (\$2.6 million today) in direct grants to the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district, etc. A Foundation official declared, “We are very active in developing minority leadership and a minority entrepreneurial class.”

For McGeorge Bundy, supporting community control in New York City schools was a counterinsurgency operation to buy off black militancy and undermine the “enemy,” the union. The community control districts would be like Bundy’s “strategic hamlets” operation against the Viet Cong in Vietnam. In fact, the districts had no real power, they were creations of the Ford Foundation and the school administration, with the backing of Mayor Lindsay, and in the aftermath of the ’68 teachers strike, the Board of Education simply dissolved them.

1967: The First Round

So, it’s important to see the experimental districts as growing out of the defeat of integration, and the substitution of black capitalist enclaves, where local entrepreneurs could patch together a system, paid for by the Ford Foundation, installing their own administrators, unincumbered by the unions or union rules. As parents argued for more control over the failing schools and for more black teachers in the community, the mayor and ruling class promoted the scheme in which the black community could be set against the union. In fact, Ravitch notes the irony that “local control” was the slogan of the racists who opposed integration.

Another irony is that the UFT had been in favor of special projects in Ocean Hill-Brownsville. They had pushed the More Effective Schools project and were involved in a proposal of funding creative educational programming, for which they sought Ford Foundation funding. But the ruling class had a different idea.

The ghetto schools were in fact in a desperate state. Jerald Podair writes in *The Strike that Changed New York* (2002) that by the 1960s New York City had in effect a dual public school system. There was the white cohort of experienced teachers, high test scores, the majority of National Merit and Westinghouse scholarships in the comprehensive high schools in white areas, and specialized schools like Bronx Science, Brooklyn Tech and Stuyvesant. And in the de facto black school system there were decaying facilities, overcrowded classrooms staffed by struggling first-year teachers who were probably not going to stay very long. Podair cites statistics stating that by the mid-1960s, black students were 30 percent of the city’s public-school students, but earned only 2.3 percent of academic (college-bound) diplomas. So there was a very real crisis.

And who was teaching in the schools? By 1967, two-thirds of New York City teachers, supervisors and principals were Jewish. A generation before, for Jews, education was the main route out of poverty. Pervasive antisemitism of a white Protestant ruling class meant there were only limited career paths in the private sector. The way out was through the free-tuition

city colleges like CCNY and access to the G.I. Bill.¹³ And the Jewish teachers met increasing hostility. Richard Kahlenberg in his biography, *Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles Over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy* (2007) cites the oft-repeated remark, that of the five whites that black people saw in the ghetto, the cop was Irish, the other four were Jewish: the landlord, the corner store-owner, the teacher, and the social worker (who came to throw you off welfare if it was discovered a man was living in the house, evidenced by shoes under the bed).

So this charged situation would lead to an explosion of very real antisemitism in the course of the 1968 strikes, which the UFT leadership exploited, playing into the hands of the anti-union forces. But we will come to that next time. For now, let's just say New York City was at a flashpoint waiting to explode.

A showdown came in the fall 1967, as the UFT launched a strike with contract demands calling for smaller class size, a wage increase, professional development and prep time, more funding for the UFT-supported More Effective Schools program and a clause that would give the teachers greater leeway to suspend unruly students. There is a clause in the DOE-UFT contract today which allows teachers to remove students "who so seriously disrupt the classroom as to impede effective instruction," provided they give a written statement with substantiating material. But at the time this became known as the "disruptive child" clause, a conception loaded with racism. Many black people saw it as a white assault on the culture of poor black children, criticizing it as giving teachers police powers. Many members of the African American Teachers Union who were also in the UFT withdrew from the UFT at this point.

This was the most problematic UFT strike of the five that occurred in 1967-68, and under the circumstances a class-conscious leadership would not have raised the demand for that clause. So teachers went out on September 11, 1967, ignoring an injunction. The strike lasted for 14 days. In the Ocean-Hill Brownsville demonstration district, schools stayed open as black teachers crossed the picket line. Rev. C. Herbert Oliver, chairman of the demonstration district governing board, declared that "no union, or Board of Education, has the inherent right to educate children." When the teachers came back after the strike they were met with angry protests. In later accounts, written in the light of the 1968 strike, the 1967 walkout is portrayed as just about the "disruptive child" clause. But that is not what the city rulers who were pushing the community control scheme were objecting to, and for which they jailed UFT leader Shanker.

A comrade dug up a *New York Times* (17 September 1967) editorial linking the UFT's 1967 strike, and I'm quoting here, to "disturbing recent signs of a rise in strike sentiment among letter carriers, hospital workers and other Federal employees. In terms of the New York school system, the lesson in lawlessness the teachers are giving is doubly disturbing." The *Times* editorial continued:

"The teachers' resort to power tactics has had the further ill effect of encouraging advocates of 'black power' in the poverty neighborhoods to impose their rule-or-ruin policies on school administrators. In any such attempts, the example of lawlessness set by the U.F.T. will provide a handy precedent, to the detriment of the teachers as well as the schools.... The

¹³ A 1944 law that provided benefits for returning World War II veterans, including paying for tuition and living expenses for college education. It expired in 1956.

The New York Times

17 September 1967

The Teachers' Strike

The issue at stake in New York's outlaw strike of public school teachers is of national consequence. This state has just put into effect a model law, drafted by five of the country's outstanding specialists in industrial relations, to prevent civil service strikes by ensuring equity for both public employer and the

NYC rulers denounced the 1967 UFT school strike for breaking the state's no-strike Taylor Law.

city cannot yield to U.F.T. irresponsibility."

So that brings me to the leaflet on the 1968 teachers strike put out by the Spartacist League in November of that year under the headline "Beware Liberal Union Busters!" (see facing page). We will talk of that in more detail in the next session when we go into the development of the strike. But here I want to talk about the section of that leaflet dealing with the '67 strike. It said, and I'm going to quote a section of it:

"The roots of the current impasse can be traced to last year's [1967] school strike and the narrow, self-interested approaches of the UFT and the middle-class Black Nationalists who put themselves forward as spokesmen for the community. At that time the Spartacist League issued a leaflet ('Smash the Taylor Law,' 24 Sept. 1967) which criticized both the gratuitous scabbing of Floyd McKissick¹⁴ and H. Rap Brown,¹⁵ which exacerbated the fears of the teachers that black militants would not support their demands for higher wages, and the UFT leadership's continued indifference to the needs, fears and concerns of the black students and their parents. Under the heading 'Support Ghetto Struggles,' we warned: 'the equally middle-class policy of "professionalism" advocated by the UFT leadership has held the union largely aloof from many of the past struggles of the ghetto communities, widening the gap between teacher, student and parent. Such a situation [of UFT indifference combined with Black Nationalist calls for "keeping the schools open"] provides a ready excuse for the development of racist attitudes.' We called for a radical alliance of teachers with the doubly oppressed black and Puerto Rican working people and the first steps toward building a labor party to lead united, militant struggle against the liberal union-busters."

So while the SL supported the 1968 teachers strike, it was sharply critical of the way the Shanker leadership conducted it, and it put forward an alternative class-struggle perspective. The Spartacist League was uniquely able to hold the class line against Lindsay's union-busting precisely because it had devoted much effort and study to the struggle against black oppression, and actively supported black radicals from as early as the 1964 Harlem ghetto explosion. In that period, two main groups on the left came forward to support the struggle against racist police brutality – Progressive Labor with Bill Epton, and the Spartacist

continued on page 65

¹⁴ Floyd McKissick was the national director of the Congress of Racial Equality (C.O.R.E.) during 1966-68. He sought to take the organization in a more militant direction, and at the same time was a registered Republican.

¹⁵ H. Rap Brown was chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in 1967-68, when SNCC was in alliance with the Black Panther Party under the watchword of Black Power.

Spartacist Leaflet, November 1968

New York City School Strike:

Beware Liberal Union Busters

New York City has long been faced with an immense financial crisis. While corporations rake in millions of dollars, the City government has been unable to “find” the money to provide adequate public services. Liberal Mayor Lindsay has attempted to meet this crisis in part by trying to break the power of the public employee unions. From the Sanitationmen’s strike (when Lindsay tried to call in the National Guard as scabs) to the current UFT strike, Lindsay has made it clear that he intends to break the unions. The Lindsay administration has fought a long war to legitimize the Taylor Law, which prohibits strikes by public employees, on the grounds that such strikes endanger the “public interest.” The teachers’ strike has provided him with his most potent weapon so far, as the growing liberal sentiment against the strike has reinforced the spectre of the self-interested unions as enemies of the general public.

“Community Control” Fraud

The City’s financial crisis has hit the school system this year, a year in which the City has actually made the first cut in the school budget in many years. So all of a sudden Lindsay, whose cops maintain the daily oppression of the black ghetto, suddenly comes out for black “community control” – actually a new experiment in school decentralization funded by such “community-minded” organizations as the Federal government’s Office of Economic Opportunity and the Ford Foundation. The concept of “the community” masks the question of who in the community controls the schools, and for what purpose. The real interests of black workers and their children are not geographic or even simply racial, but above all class, and as such are basically counterposed to the destruction of the teachers’ union which, if successful, will only strengthen the hand of the bosses and the capitalist politicians who serve them against all unions in the city.

The demand for “community control” lacking a specific class content is even dangerous in some situations. The same group of people can be radical or reactionary depending on what aspect of their lives they are mobilized for. The same group of “ethnic” white workers who if approached on the job as workers will carry out a militant strike along with their black fellow workers can also, if approached as residents of their community, be capable of firing every black teacher in their district. We must recognize what classless “local control” could mean not only for teachers of “the other”

race but also for rebels, radicals and “reds” of every stripe who will find themselves with only a broken union incapable of protecting their jobs in the aftermath of the substantial Wallace vote.¹

In Ocean Hill-Brownsville, “community control” has meant the appointment of a \$30,000-a-year black administrator, Rhody McCoy, who was given a high degree of administrative autonomy, although he had no particular connection with the black population in the district. One of McCoy’s first acts was to dismiss without due process a number of union leaders at J.H.S. 271. When 250 teachers walked out in protest, they were “transferred,” after which non-union replacements were hired. This sparked the current dispute.

Were it not for the complicating racial factor, the central issue of union busting would be clear. But the City has created a heavy smokescreen by crying: the black ghetto children must be educated, we are helping by encouraging community control, and this racist union stands in the way. Using these arguments and some government-paid “anti-poverty” workers, Lindsay has swept the black community sentiment heavily against the union and has encouraged union-busting, school break-ins, etc.

Replace UFT Leadership

Unfortunately, the Shanker leadership has played into Lindsay’s hands by taking a purely “business union” approach to defend itself, remaining indifferent to the general needs of the oppressed and exploited black population. Much of the union’s propaganda has catered to conservatism and racial fears, with talk of “mob rule” and “extremism.” This has exacerbated the racial division between the union and the black working people, thereby preventing a real solution to the crisis. The union’s present rotten course of seeking help at higher levels of government (including an appeal to [Republican governor Nelson] Rockefeller, who inspired the “community control” experiment, and requests for “protection” by the racist New York City police) can lead only to further alienation from the black population and disaster for the union.

¹ In the 1968 elections (when Republican Richard Nixon was elected president), the Alabama governor George Wallace – who famously declared in his 1963 inaugural speech “segregation now, segregation forever” – got almost 10 million votes, 13% of the total. (Footnote added by M&E.)

The roots of the current impasse can be traced to last year's school strike and the narrow, self-interested approaches of the UFT and the middle-class Black Nationalists who put themselves forward as spokesmen for the "community." At that time the Spartacist League issued a leaflet ("Smash the Taylor Law," 24 Sept. 1967) which criticized both the gratuitous scabbing of Floyd McKissick and H. Rap Brown, which exacerbated the fears of the teachers that black militants would not support their demands for higher wages, and the UFT leadership's continuing indifference to the needs, fears and concerns of the black students and their parents. Under the heading "Support Ghetto Struggles" we warned: "the equally middle-class policy of 'professionalism' advocated by the UFT leadership has held the union largely aloof from many of the past struggles of the ghetto communities, widening the gap between teacher, student and parent. Such a situation [of UFT indifference combined with Black Nationalist calls for "keeping the schools open"] provides a ready excuse for the development of racist attitudes." We called for a radical alliance of teachers with the doubly oppressed black and Puerto Rican working people and the first steps towards building a labor party to lead united, militant struggle against the liberal union-busters. Without such a radical alliance the situation could only have developed into the present battle – the teachers convinced they will meet with hostility and anti-union attitudes from the black militants and turning increasingly to conservative and even racist appeals in the attempt to find support elsewhere, the parents fed up with the UFT's unconcern with poverty and racism and bewildered by a strike which, if the rationale for the Taylor Law is correct, can be nothing but an act of racism and wanton viciousness on the part of the teachers.

A radical alliance must begin by pointing out that the central problem of black education lies not in the classroom but in the political-economic system of capitalism. The capitalist system needs the product of the ghetto schools not as creative human beings but as a pool of low-skilled and unemployed workers to keep the general wage level down. The Black Nationalists have not seen through the liberal myth that "becoming educated" is the way out of the ghetto for the mass of black and Puerto Rican youth. The black schoolchildren know that they will not find decent employment and a productive, satisfying life in adulthood, and even the most dedicated teachers become cynical in the face of the bitterness and disinterest of their students who realize that their "education" is a farce. No change in the structure of the school administration can "reform" ghetto education without a revolutionary transformation of the society itself.

"Left-Wing" Scabs

In the liberal arena such figures as Murray Kempton, Jimmy Breslin, the *New York Post*, the *New York Times* and CBS News are screaming for the blood of the UFT. The liberal strikebreaking sentiment is not too surprising, since liberals consider the government the primary agent of change and "progress." But even so-called "revolutionary" and "Marxist" groups have been swept along by the liberal "local control" rhetoric. Such groups as Progressive Labor, the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party advocate simply crossing the picket line, and thereby busting the union, in order to break a "racist" strike. Even those groupings opposed to the strike should seriously consider the implications of the position that a worker is justified in scabbing whenever he disagrees with his union or does not want to strike, as it destroys the concept of a union as a body which acts together after determining its policies by a vote of the membership. For radicals to advocate scabbing only encourages any inherent racism and anti-radicalism among pro-union workers.

We ask PL and the SWP how they can now support the strikebreaking and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville administrators who justify the transfers of UFT teachers on the grounds that "we don't want any teachers who turned their backs on our children for six weeks" (to cite a statement made by one of McCoy's assistants over nation-wide television) – i.e., by going out on strike in previous UFT actions which the SWP and PL supported! We ask these organizations how they can ignore the blatant anti-union, anti-strike attitude of McCoy and his supporters. These "Marxists" in the SWP and PL are taking the easy way out by labelling the social-democratic UFT leadership as "racist" and washing their hands of the union instead of fighting in the union against Shanker for the correct policies. Serious radicals must ask themselves what New York City's black population will gain by the destruction of the UFT; by the legitimization of the Taylor Law and the phony, classless rhetoric that strikes are against the "public interest"; by the replacement of UFT teachers by docile, hand-picked teachers who have no weapon of struggle against the Board of Education; by the attempt to direct the anger and frustration of the poor working people of Ocean Hill-Brownsville against the teachers rather than against the system which guarantees the continuation of their oppression.

Militants in the UFT must fight to replace the Shanker leadership and its conservative and dangerous policies of "professionalism," elitism toward other trade union struggles and condescension toward the black working people. The union must recognize the militant parents as their needed allies against the liberal union-busters and must seek a radical alliance of teachers and militant parents and students based on student-teacher-parent control of the schools.

13 November 1968

1968 Strike...

continued from page 62

group with Jim Robertson, formed by the Revolutionary Tendency which had been expelled from the Socialist Workers Party.¹⁶ The SL's line on Black Power was to turn it into workers power. This is laid out in the *Spartacist* May-June 1967 special supplement, "Black and Red – Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom."¹⁷

The SL could understand what Lindsay and Bundy were up to, and also that what was being supported by the black nationalists was actually playing into the hands of the capitalist rulers, while the bulk of the left scabbed or supported scabbing in the '68 strikes and thus acted as tools of the racist ruling class. But before we get to that, I want to go through the development of the three citywide strikes in 1968, which we will talk about next time.

Part II

Just to briefly recap. Last time we talked about the background to the strike, how the United Federation of Teachers was part of, and had been playing a leading role in the drive of municipal workers organizing; that there was a completely segregated school system where all the struggles to integrate them had been defeated; where the teachers were 97 percent white and the majority of students were black and Latino. The city was ready to blow, and the country was already on fire, literally, with ghetto explosions in all the major cities. In Vietnam, black troops were radicalizing, fragging their officers and refusing to be cannon fodder in U.S. imperialism's war on Indochina.

Upon UFT (and later AFT) leader Al Shanker's death in 1997, a *New York Times* editorial commented that the time of the strikes, New York was "A City at War," saying that 1968 was an "annus horribilis like no other." It was marked by the assassinations of Martin Luther King in April, then Robert Kennedy in June. There was the Columbia University revolt in April-May, where it and other campuses were "paralyzed by turmoil," the *Times* editorialized. "Then came the 55-day '68 teachers strike, an event so corrosive that, a generation later, people say it determined many of their views about race and education."¹⁸

That was the climate in New York. In February 1968 the garbage strike began. When the sanitation workers in Teamsters Local 841 walked out, Liberal/Republican mayor Lindsay wanted to call in the National Guard to collect the garbage, but the Guard refused to scab. The garbage strike put New York City on edge and deeply shook its rulers. The *New York Times* headlined, "How to Avoid Strikes by Garbagemen, Nurses, Teachers, Subway Men, Welfare Workers, Etc."¹⁹ This establishment "paper of record" warned, "New York, the capital of cool" had reached "a point beyond which it could not be pushed."

¹⁶ see "Harlem Riot and After," in *Spartacist* No. 3, January-February 1965.

¹⁷ See Internationalist Group Class Readings, *What Strategy for Black Liberation? Trotskyism vs. Black Nationalism* (March 2010). This is a reprint of the SL's *Marxist Bulletin* No. 5 (Revised) originally published in 1978.

¹⁸ *New York Times*, 1 March 1997.

¹⁹ *New York Times*, 25 February 1968.



Republican/Liberal mayor John Lindsay wanted to call in the National Guard to break the February 1968 sanitation workers strike, but troops refused to scab.

So you had the country in turmoil and the local rulers in an anti-strike frenzy. That sets the stage for the next part of the story. What we are going to be looking at today is the concrete development of the 1968 teachers strikes, who supported them and who scabbed, and why was the Spartacist League uniquely able to recognize the class line.

Looking at the line-up, the United Federation of Teachers was led by the Shachtmanite Socialist Party, which four years later became Social Democrats USA, of which Shanker was a member. These Shachtmanites were the right-wing of the civil rights movement, led by Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph, both SP members. They were hardline anti-Soviet Cold Warriors, who used their union ties to topple left-wing governments around the world, leading the U.S. labor federation to become known in Latin America as the "AFL-CIA." Most, but not all, of local labor officialdom backed the UFT in the strikes.

On the other side, supporting "community control," you had the Black Power movement, the Black Panthers, the Young Lords, the Communist Party, the Socialist Workers Party, the various wings of the New Left Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), from Weatherman to Progressive Labor ... and much or most of the bourgeois political establishment, both liberal and conservative, including "wealthy patricians on the boards of

the city's leading social-welfare organizations; and representatives of the city's corporate elite," as Diane Ravitch put it in her book *The Great School Wars, 1805-1973* (1974).

In the discussion during the last session, one person asked a question along the lines of how come people were taken in by this scheme of community control? Well, if you put yourself back in that period, ask yourself what did the union look like to black and white radicals? The UFT leaders were screaming anti-communists, the very definition of "State Department socialists," supporters of the Vietnam War, whose politics domestically were based on the ideology of liberal "color blindness," and supporters of "meritocracy" in hiring, a mainstay of systemic racism. The ghetto schools were traps for black youth, with decrepit facilities, starved for funds, seeming like prisons. So much so that SDS, the main New Left group, was calling for high school revolts as "breakouts." Even when a new school was built, like I.S. 201 in East Harlem (El Barrio), it literally had no windows. And the kids had practically given up on graduating, the colleges were sealed off.

Meanwhile, every attempt to overcome the segregation of New York City schools had been stymied. So, as a result of the failure of school integration, the idea of community control came along, and it touched a chord. The sentiment was, "we will take control of the schools, we will run them, we will build schools where black people are respected, where black kids can graduate and go to college and have a chance to be hired." Anyone who stood in the way of this was considered a racist. White teachers were seen as the obstacle to this struggle.

What this missed, as we went over last time, is how top-level capitalist forces were pushing "community control." The Ford Foundation was handing out money in the ghetto to hire a slew of principals, administrators, teacher-trainers, etc., in a plan personally written by Vietnam war criminal McGeorge Bundy, along with fellow war criminal Robert McNamara. Their agenda was to build black capitalist enclaves in the ghetto and drain off black



Sam Falk / New York Times

Ocean Hill-Brownsville superintendent Rhody McCoy in 1968.

resistance, just as other poverty programs co-opted black militants, and to use the black population as pawns to break the unions.

May 1968: Ocean Hill-Brownsville Strike Over Teacher Firings

So on the teacher strikes: going back to the 1960 strike, the UFT won the right to collective bargaining. The 1962 strike won a huge pay increase, freed teachers from lunchroom duty and established a grievance system that put curbs on the principals' dictatorship. As we noted, already in the 1966 TWU transit strike, Mayor Lindsay played the race card, saying the strike hurts blacks and Latinos who rely on public transit. This is a preview of his line in the '68 teachers strikes. As I said last time, the 1967 UFT strike was the most problematic from our point of view, with a series of supportable contract demands, but also including what came to be known as the "disruptive child" clause, which became a flashpoint, leading many to see the UFT as racist.

In Ocean Hill-Brownsville, the schools stayed open in the 1967 strike, and black teachers crossed the picket line. When the teachers came back after the settlement, they were met by angry protests. The situation was very tense going into 1968, and that spring, on May 7, the OH-B governing board met to vote on a report by a personnel committee appointed by district Governing Board chairman Rev. C. Herbert Oliver which called for the removal of a principal, five assistant principals and 13 teachers. When a CUNY professor on the board objected that they should have some kind of hearing, Oliver "moved to the attack," and according to journalist Martin Mayer's account:²⁰

"[A]s though on signal, the door to the meeting room burst open and fifteen to twenty militants rushed in and ranged themselves against the wall. This was a community board, they said, and they were the community, and they were there to see that the board did what the community wanted."



Wide World Photo

UFT chapter leader at JHS 271 Fred Nauman and protesters.

²⁰ Martin Mayer, *The Teachers' Strike* (1968).



Al Shanker speaking to May 1968 UFT rally protesting dismissal of teachers by Governing Board of Ocean Hill-Brownsville School District.

The next day, Ocean Hill-Brownsville superintendent McCoy sent registered letters to the 19 telling them that they had been “terminated.” Eighteen of the 19 were white, and the other one was quickly reinstated when they realized he had been sent the letter because of a name mix-up. Two of the teachers were chapter leaders. Fred Nauman, the chapter leader at JHS 271, the focal point of the fight, was a Jewish refugee from Hitler’s Germany.

The apologists for community control argued that these were just “routine transfers out,” which the union blew out of proportion in its war against community control. The New York Civil Liberties Union wrote that “the UFT has used ‘due process’ as a smokescreen to obscure its real goal, which is to discredit decentralization and sabotage community control.” This is false. Mayer printed the termination letter in full. I’ll read from it:

“The Governing Board of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville School District has voted to end your employment in the schools of this district. This action was taken on the recommendation of the Personnel Committee. The termination of employment is to take effect immediately.”

The teachers were fired. Were there any further doubt, McCoy was quoted in the *New York Times* saying, “No one of these teachers will be allowed to teach anywhere in the city. The black community will see to that.”

Even if it were only a transfer, it was clearly punitive and the teachers had the right to receive written charges and a hearing, as Diane Ravitch noted. But McCoy at first refused to file charges, and then when he did, they were full of holes. It seems there were a few ineffective teachers (one was a devotee of the British radical pedagogy Summerhill model in which children were “free from adult authority,” and his classroom reflected it), but in the large majority the charges were baseless. For the OH-B Governing Board and McCoy it was a test case of their assertion of the right to get rid of teachers at will, for whatever reason. As Board president Oliver later wrote, “we were talking about hundreds of teachers.”

The UFT rightly demanded the 13 teachers be returned to the classroom. With the schools in the district shut, the UFT went to court. The Board of Ed brought in a respected retired black judge, Francis Rivers, as a special trial examiner. Rivers ruled that the teachers must be presumed innocent unless shown otherwise. Three of the 13 had been charged with “expressing opposition to the project,” but there were no witnesses and no evidence was produced. Five teachers were charged with “incompetency,” yet they had consistently received good ratings and commendation letters from their principals. One teacher had been charged with allowing students to throw chairs, but a photo of the classroom showed the furniture was bolted to the floor.

So the judge upheld the teachers’ First Amendment rights and ruled that their dismissal was an unfair labor practice, and ordered the return of the teachers. The governing board ignored the decision.

McCoy sent a registered letter: “Decentralization means we decide. No Donovan [the school board superintendent], No Shanker, No Lindsay. We Decide.” As an aside, a few words on McCoy. He was a Black Muslim, attended Mosque No. 7, which had been Malcolm X’s mosque, and had visited Malcolm in his home. We rightly see Malcolm as a radical, but by that point the Nation of Islam in New York was led by Louis Farrakhan and appealed in particular to black small businessmen, middle-class and petty-bourgeois layers. That certainly included Rhody McCoy, who saw himself as a boss, and aggressively asserted that.

When the district schools reopened in May without the 19 educators, the UFT correctly called a walkout of teachers in Ocean Hill-Brownsville. They had to, otherwise the union there would be gutted, which was certainly McCoy’s intention. Three hundred fifty teachers walked out. The Governing Board declared they were gone for good. Remember that both the community board and the OH-B district itself were on the Ford Foundation payroll. This was not the UFT facing off with “the black community” but the union facing powerful bourgeois forces that were cynically manipulating the community. The bottom line was a class issue: whether teachers had rights to resist bosses who wanted to blame them for the outcomes of underfunded, overcrowded, racially segregated schools.

McCoy spent the summer lining up “replacement workers” for the 350 teachers who had walked out. Who were they? Ironically, there were not enough black teachers to hire, because they could not get certified through the Board of Examiners which enforced the so-called “meritocracy.” Some were young liberal and radical teachers, many of them Jewish. The New Left saw unions – not just the leadership – as “bought off,” or worse, racist job-trusts. As Jerald Podair writes in *The Strike That Changed New York*, many “replacements” came from elite Ivy League private universities. This is the same recruitment pool that two decades later Wendy Kopp turned to for her union-busting Teach for America corps. They saw themselves as outsiders and were willing to serve the black nationalist leadership. The



Bethmann Archives

UFT membership voted overwhelmingly on 8 September 1968 to strike the next day. 93% struck.

UFT resented them, dismissed them as new teachers just out of college, or just teaching to get a draft deferment.

Fall 1968's First Strike

So school was getting ready to open for the fall semester. On September 6, the UFT Delegate Assembly voted for a city-wide strike to demand that the terminated teachers who wished to return (now down to ten, all of them Jewish) plus the 350 who were fired for walking out get their jobs back. Shanker told the delegates, "If we don't strike, there will be no union." That was absolutely correct. Firing 350 teachers? That is proof right there that the community control project was designed to break the union and its ability to protect its members against arbitrary management action. Against that threat it was necessary to mobilize union power. On September 8, the UFT membership voted by a seven-to-one margin to walk out on the 9th, the first day of the school year.

The first strike lasted two days. Almost 54,000 out of 57,000 teachers struck, or 93%, compared to 77% in the 1967 strike (and 12% in the 1960 UFT walkout). The central school board quickly settled with the union. By this point, it was becoming clear that the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district had no real power; a judge had ruled saying the community control districts were simply a division of the Board of Education. The settlement provided for the return of all ten of the dismissed teachers who wished to come back, full salary and return of the

350 teachers who walked out in the spring, plus a commitment that going forward, teachers would have guarantees of due process in termination proceedings. McCoy argued the local board had not been part of the settlement, that he would take the teachers back under protest, but also he would keep those he had hired to replace them. Central could pay for double staff.

When the teachers came back on September 11, it was mayhem. As they reported for work, they were told to go to the auditorium of PS 155 for an "orientation session." When they got there, black protesters led by Brooklyn C.O.R.E. leader Sonny Carson tried to block their entrance. Carson had 50 people with sticks, helmets and bandoliers chanting "Jew pigs."²¹ As Podair described the scene: "While the men cursed the teachers, threw the bullets at them, and threatened to 'carry you out in pine boxes,' McCoy entered the room, and quietly observed the scene, offering no assistance to the terrified educators." He then told them to report back to their respective schools, but when they arrived, there were no class assignments.

As for Carson, he was a demagogue, a hard black nationalist whose defense against charges of anti-Semitism was that

²¹ Ravitch notes that "Carson and his followers were on the front lines of the action in Ocean Hill throughout the strikes of 1968," and cites a top advisor of the district superintendent to the effect that McCoy had an understanding with Carson and other "militants," so that he could call them in or call them off.



Shanker brought in fellow Shachtmanites Bayard Rustin (second from left) and A. Philip Randolph for support, but they were shunned even by establishment civil rights leaders.

he was against all whites.²² There was a forum in Newark, where Carson was a speaker along with Amiri Baraka (then known as LeRoi Jones) and Ron Karenga, the head of the US Organization that was used by the feds and the LAPD against the Black Panther Party, killing John Huggins and “Bunchy” Carter (in January 1969). At the forum, Carson said that “Adolf Shanker” got the shock of his life when the “governing board fired all 350 pig teachers” and that “the community” would keep the teachers out of the schools by any means necessary. This was uncritically quoted by the Socialist Workers Party’s *Militant* (14 July 1968).

²² Carson was also a shakedown artist. In a letter to Lindsay from June 1967, at the height of the ghetto upheavals across the country, Carson promised the mayor that he would “have a real cool summer” if funds for his organization were forthcoming (see Podair).



Brooklyn C.O.R.E. leader Sonny Carson with his attorney F. Lee Bailey in 1974.

The Second Strike

So on the first actual day of classes, September 11, when the Ocean Hill-Brownsville teachers tried to come back, they were blocked at the door and given no class assignments. The UFT executive board met and voted to call a second strike demanding reinstatement of the OH-B teachers. The strike was portrayed in the media as white teachers against black parents. A *New York Times* (16 September 1968) editorial, “To Open the Schools,” arrogantly speaking in the name of “the community,” said of Shanker’s vow to continue the strike despite a ruling by the state education commissioner: “This is a threat to carry illegal labor union tactics beyond the point of public tolerance; and if it is pursued it will have the devastating effect of placing the teachers of this city at war with the community.”

Stung by the bad reception in the liberal press, Shanker called on his black Shachtmanite cronies Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph for support.

They held a press conference, saying it is the “right of every worker not to be transferred or fired at the whim of his employer,” and got some black trade-unionists to sign on to an ad in the *Times* supporting the UFT. In response, they were promptly “read out of the civil rights movement,” even by establishment black leaders.²³

The strike was justified, but in the face of liberal opposition, Shanker adopted policies that appealed to right-wing conservative constituencies. UFT signs to “End Mob Rule in the Schools” were deliberately inflammatory, whipping up racial fears. An anonymous flyer showed up in OH-B teachers’ mailboxes demanding that the “blood sucking exploiters” and “middle east murderers of colored people” must “shut up and get out.” This might have been seen as the ravings of a lunatic, but Shanker saw it as an opportunity and ordered 500,000 of the anonymous anti-teacher fliers to be printed and handed out everywhere. So he effectively portrayed the governing board and all of Ocean Hill-Brownsville as antisemitic. The governing board disavowed the leaflet and said it would not tolerate antisemitism. But the incident served to galvanize the Jewish community, which was already turning sharply to the right, due to the 1967 war in which Israel occupied the West Bank.

The second strike lasted almost three weeks, until a settlement was reached after an all-night session with Mayor Lindsay. All the fired teachers would be returned to Ocean Hill-Brownsville, but the scabs would also be allowed to stay. When the teachers went back on September 30, there were 1,000 cops on duty. The Ocean Hill-Brownsville governing board ordered McCoy to fire the disputed UFT teachers. With the UFT poised to call another strike, Board of Ed chief Donovan said he was reassigning seven principals who had been hired by the governing board.

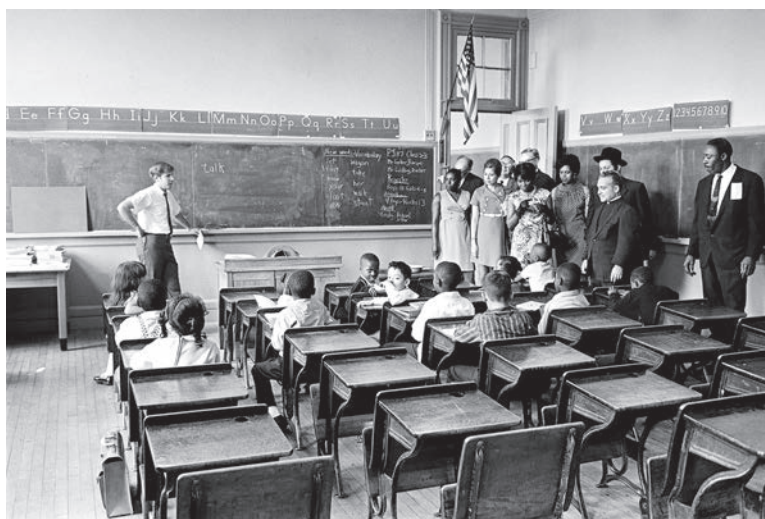
²³ Richard Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles over Schools, Unions, Race and Democracy* (2007).

This time the teachers worked for two turbulent weeks until on October 11, Superintendent Donovan reinstated the seven principals, and declared that the principals had a legitimate right to reassign teachers to hall and lunchroom duty. On October 13, the UFT Delegate Assembly voted again to strike and on Monday, October 14, 50,000-plus teachers returned to the picket lines for the third time that fall.

The Third Strike

The third strike lasted five weeks, from mid-October to the end of November. This time, what had been a more-or-less localized dispute in Ocean Hill-Brownsville went citywide. Taken together with the September strikes, the New York City school system, with over 1 million students, was struck for more than eight weeks in the fall of 1968. Almost every school outside the demonstration district closed. The OH-B superintendent and governing board claimed the right to run the schools as they wished, including getting rid of teachers who were “unwanted,” in the name of community control. Shanker demanded the governing board be dissolved. There were death threats to UFT members. There were outbreaks of antisemitic ravings. New York City was completely polarized.

The battle lines were drawn, and the two sides confronted one another with pickets and counter-pickets, and mounted cops in between. The city labor tops lined up with the UFT. They were mainly Jews and white Catholics, led by New York Central Labor Council (CLC) president Harry Van Arsdale, who (along with AFL-CIO

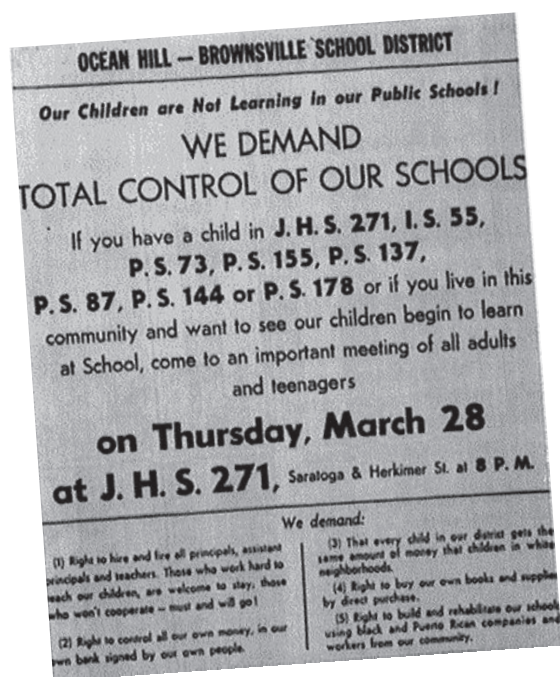


Neal Boenzi / The New York Times

Members of the City Council visit a classroom in PS 87 in Ocean Hill in 1968. In the 1960s, almost all of teachers in NYC public schools were white, and overwhelmingly Jewish, while by 1968 most of the students were black or Puerto Rican. A class-struggle leadership would have fought for an emergency hiring of black and Hispanic teachers.

chief George Meany) was also a Vietnam hawk like Shanker and his Socialist Party pals. The CLC held a huge pro-strike demonstration at City Hall with up to 40,000 striking teachers present. The newly founded municipal union DC 37, on the other hand, supported the community control district, as did Local 1199, both unions with large black membership. Podair sees it as the white middle class against the black poor. Diane Ravitch portrayed the situation in her book *The Great School Wars*:

“Picketing teachers claimed that they were subjected to antiwhite, antisemitic invective. Governing board partisans charged the teacher pickets with using antiblack invective. Tension increased each day. Parents were angry because the schools were closed; blacks were angry because a small, black school board was being stepped on by a powerful union; union members were angry because it appeared that the mayor was



Flier for a public meeting in 1968 promoting phony “community control” of the schools in Ocean Hill-Brownsville. School leaders were on the payroll of the Ford Foundation, which together with the Republican/Liberal mayor was on a union-busting drive.



Daily World



schoolcolors.podcast.com

Les Campbell and Al Vann taught at JHS 271 in 1968. Vann went on to lead the Brooklyn Democratic Party.

union-busting; Jews were angry because Jewish teachers were pushed out of their jobs without cause while the Board of Education complacently tolerated outbursts of anti-Semitism at its public meetings.”

Focusing on the line-up of social forces on each side, as most writings on the '68 NYC teachers strikes do, obscures the basic issues at stake, and the class forces at work. Supporting, bank-rolling and manipulating black “community control” advocates at the local level were not only wealthy white business leaders and “philanthropists” and the liberal Republican mayor Lindsay. So, too, was virtually the entire bourgeois press and the capitalist “establishment,” avidly seeking to quash municipal worker strikes and to keep a lid on the seething black neighborhoods. For the ruling class, “community control” was a form of urban counterinsurgency just as much as military occupation of the ghettos: the carrot and the stick. And not a whole lot of carrot: NYC superintendent of schools Bernard Donovan explained to the Ocean Hill-Brownsville governing board in the summer of 1967 that there would be no more money for the district. As Mayer put it, he told them, “in effect, that anybody could run better schools if he had a lot more money, and that the purpose of the experiment in community involvement was to find out whether its advocates could run better schools on the same money.”

And behind the racial and ethnic dynamics, there was a fundamental class question at stake, defense of the union against a union-busting attack by the capitalist state.

Without the financing of the Ford Foundation and authority of the Board of Education and the city government, the Governing Board of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Demonstration School District would not have existed for one minute. In digging in its heels against arbitrary removal of teachers, the United Federation of Teachers' 1968 strikes were utterly justified, and necessary, but the policies of UFT leader Al Shanker, a pro-war anti-communist, whipped up a racial backlash that undercut the strikes. Shanker poisoned relations with the African American population (including many teachers and other union members) by pitching the battle as one against black vigilantes and anti-Semites. A class-struggle leadership would have put forward a program to unite black and white working people in a fight against capital for integrated quality education for all, beginning with the black ghettos and Latino barrios.

Jerald Podair writes that this third strike changed the political landscape of New York. Whereas before, Jews and blacks had been natural allies (as in the civil rights movement), now New York blacks and Jews were at loggerheads. Black teachers Al Vann and Leslie Campbell (Jitu Weusi), both of whom were at Junior High School 271, a focal point of the OH-B struggle, played a noxious role in this, quoting from the anti-Semitic forgery by the tsarist police, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. On WBAI radio, Campbell recited one of his students' poems, “To Albert Shanker,” beginning “Hey Jew boy,” and saying “You came to America the land of the free, Took over the school system to perpetuate white supremacy.” But instead of whipping up frenzied fears of antisemitism, union leaders should have pointed to the racist practices of Henry Ford, whose fortune was financing the “community control” hoax.

Above all, a class-conscious union leadership would have fought for a union program to provide quality education for all by



The New York Post (19 November 1968), then a liberal newspaper, and the rest of the bourgeois media breathed a sigh of relief at the end of the UFT strike, which they unanimously opposed.

drastically improving the overcrowded, underfinanced, racially segregated and physically dilapidated schools in poor black and Latino neighborhoods. It would have called for emergency hiring of thousands of black and Latino teachers. It would have involved parents, students and workers, under teachers' leadership, to rip control of the schools from the disastrous management of the racist educrats, and to fight the aspiring black capitalist bosses who sought to take their place. That would necessarily mean waging a fight for genuine integration of the schools, combating government-sponsored residential segregation. And it would require a break from the Democratic, Republican and other bourgeois parties and politicians – they, not teachers, are the ones responsible for the sorry state of public education.

As city rulers grew more desperate, a deal was worked out in late November. The UFT returned to the schools. The Ocean Hill-Brownsville governing board was suspended and the district was put under state trusteeship. Three principals were assigned to Central. Lost pay due to the strikes would be made up with a lengthened school day and holidays. The Governing Board was not at the bargaining table. The community control experiment was over. Later the Board of Ed divided New York City into 30 community districts. There was a gradual decentralization which became a gravy train for local politicians. The outcome: The OH-B administrators and many other supporters of community control went on to cushy jobs in academia, think tanks and the like. Al Vann went on to run the Brooklyn Democratic Party. The racial divide that Shanker exacerbated took decades to overcome, and his bureaucratic successors run the UFT up to today.

So next time we'll deal with the role of the left and the aftermath of the '68 strikes, their relevance today, and the program of Class Struggle Education Workers to cut through the black-white polarization and take the battle to the racist bosses.

Part III

In this final part of our analysis of the 1968 New York City teachers strike, we will look at the role of the left, at the outcome of the strike, and at its longer-term consequences. The strike established the power of the United Federation of Teachers, and at the same time the way it was run by the UFT leadership under Al Shanker polarized the city, leading to a deep black-white split that marked New York

City political and social life for decades. It erected a political – and emotional – DMZ [demilitarized zone, as between North and South Korea], a line that could not be crossed between the UFT and black New York. Only with the 2000s did it become possible to unite teachers with African Americans and Latinos against the capitalist forces seeking to corporatize and privatize public education.

Even today, more than half a century later, the '68 teachers strike is highly controversial, with diametrically opposed views within the union and on the left. Actually, there were four UFT strikes that year, one in the spring in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district, and three citywide in the fall. Involving over 50,000 teachers, and lasting eight weeks – 55 days, most of the fall term during which time they were front-page news every day – taken together, the 1968 NYC teachers strikes were the biggest school strike in the history of the United States. That is still true today. And they set the stage for a series of teacher strikes around the country in the 1970s, so that today, over 70% of all teachers nationwide are represented by unions, and in many northern states, over 95%.

The strikes – all of them – were also illegal, under New York state's Taylor Law outlawing strikes by public employees. Eventually the United Federation of Teachers was fined \$250,000 and Shanker went to jail for a few days. But these were token measures, because the bottom line was that the UFT won and the "experiment" of so-called community control of the schools lost. Keep in mind that this was pseudo-community control, since real power rested with the mayor and the Board of Education. Despite Shanker's misleadership that played into the hands of the corporate "community control" fraud, the '68 NYC teachers strike was waged against blatant union-busting, asserting union power to defend teachers against punitive discipline by the bosses.

That's big, and we still have that power today, despite the best efforts by the UFT leadership to undercut it. Moreover, for the last decade and a half, public school teachers have been under attack by supposed "reformers" who want to blame educators for the sorry state of schools in inner city areas, just as the forces pushing "community control" did in 1968. And just as the Board of Ed in '68 refused to give more money to the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district, today the Department of Ed refuses to spend the \$1.6 to \$1.9 billion it would take to hire the *17,700 more teachers* it would take to lower class sizes to the level required by the state law it is ignoring. And when white racist parents in suburbs like Loudon, Virginia go after teachers for teaching about systemic racism or about sexuality, they echo the arguments for "community control."

We in the CSEW, and the Internationalist Group, have a very different program: for educator-led ***teacher-student-parent-worker control of the schools***. More about that later.

Before getting into the particulars on the response of the left, I want to make a more general point. We have gone into how ruling-class forces designed and financed the community control "experiment," but what is striking in the many books written about the '68 strike, and looking back at the newspaper coverage, is how *almost the entire ruling class lined up against the UFT*, with the left in tow. Richard Kahlenberg, in his hagiography of Al Shanker, *Tough Liberal*, titles his chapter on Ocean Hill-Brownsville the "Liberal Assault on Labor." It was certainly that. The *New York Times*, the *New York Post* (which

at the time was liberal), the New York Civil Liberties Union, and the rest all vituperated against Shanker and the strike.

But they weren't the only ones. The *Wall Street Journal* ran front-page stories on educational progress in Ocean Hill-Brownsville under community control. *Time* magazine did an article on "Teachers Who Give a Damn," praising the OH-B scabs. The head of Time, Inc. was a member of the Citizens Committee for Decentralization of the Public Schools, as was the head of IBM; the committee's chair was the CEO of electronics giant RCA (Radio Corporation of America). Republican Lindsay, the original "limousine liberal," was pushing for "community control." The mayor, elected to quash labor militancy, had been vice chairman of the Kerner Commission on the 1967 upheavals in Newark and Detroit. He was out to prevent a "riot" in New York City, and the UFT was in the way.

There is a famous scene in Woody Allen's 1973 film *Sleeper*, a sci-fi spoof in which the main character (Allen) awakens in 2173, after being cryogenically frozen for 200 years, and is told that the old world had been destroyed after "a man named Albert Shanker got hold of a nuclear warhead." That kind of captures the apocalyptic way the 1968 teachers strike was viewed at the time by the media, corporate and political establishment: New York City, the center of world finance, was in danger of exploding, and the UFT was about to set off a civilization-destroying conflagration. This is ironic since as national security advisor to presidents Kennedy and Johnson, Ford Foundation chief McGeorge Bundy, the author of the "community control" scheme, set nuclear policy for U.S. imperialism!

The Left Scabs on 1968 NYC Teacher Strikes

So how did the left view the strike? Pretty much the same as the bourgeois liberals, although of course the several groups had various explanations.

First and most important was the Communist Party. The CP continued to have support among teachers, going back to when they led the Teachers Union (TU) until it was broken by McCarthyite repression in the early 1950s. The UFT when it was founded included an explicit clause banning communists. But by 1968 CP supporters, including some children of former TU members, were in the Teachers Action Caucus, which opposed the strike and acted as strikebreakers, some working as "replacement teachers" (scabs) in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district. Others who continued to teach there, crossing UFT picket lines daily, were members of the African American Teachers Association, led by Al Vann and Les Campbell at JHS 271.

The TU had a good record defending black rights, and after the red purges (in which it lost hundreds of members to anti-communist witch-hunting, as well as being barred as collective bargaining agent for NYC teachers), it continued to function as a civil rights organization. But the long-since reformist, Stalinist CP was wedded to the politics of the "popular front," of allying with liberal bourgeois politicians. Thus in World War II, in the name of the imperialist "war effort," the CP supported a ban on strikes. On paper it said the '68 UFT strike had "strong overtones of racism" (*Daily World*, 24 October 1968), but in practice it treated it as an outright racist strike, while pretending that issue of due process could be easily resolved and backing OH-B superintendent McCoy 100%.

Early on, a statement (“CP’s Proposals for Effective Community Control of Schools,” 13 February 1968) admitted that McGeorge Bundy, the Ford Foundation and the mayor were pushing community control “to further their own interests,” namely to “shift the blame for future educational failures onto the backs of parents and local communities,” “to see further divisions between parents and teachers; among Negroes, Puerto Ricans and whites,” and to see “local communities fighting against each other for limited funds.” That is in fact what the bourgeois politicians intended and what “community control” would mean under capitalism. Nevertheless, the CP said “we favor many of the decentralization proposals” of Lindsay and Bundy.

It was clear that McCoy would only back down ever so slightly from his assertion of total control, and only under orders from his bosses, the Board of Ed (“hand-picked by the large banks and corporations,” as the CP put it) and NYC mayor Lindsay. So the CP’s line was that the UFT should just eat it on job security, in the interests of reestablishing political alliances with black and Puerto Rican bourgeois politicians, which the strike disrupted. And while supporting black comedian Dick Gregory for president on the minor-league bourgeois Peace and Freedom Party ticket, it also highlighted black Democratic Party “progressives” like Gary, Indiana mayor Richard Hatcher, who got a two-page spread in *The Worker* [formerly *Daily Worker*] (9 June 1968).

A second major left group that opposed the 1968 UFT strikes and supported scabbing was the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which was 1,000% in favor of community control. In the 1950s, the SWP rejected the program of revolutionary integrationism and by the ’60s had embraced the politics of black nationalism.²⁴ So after the assassination of Martin Luther King, the SWP issued a call for “Black Political Power” (*Militant*, 15 April 1968). Lots of rhetoric against capitalism, but nothing about a multiracial revolutionary workers party. Instead it said that “Afro-Americans

²⁴ See “In Defense of Revolutionary Integrationism,” published in *Spartacist* No. 49-50, Winter 1993-94, when the Spartacist League stood for revolutionary Trotskyism. Also see the speech by Charles Brover “Revolutionary Integrationism vs. ‘Critical Race Theory,’” in the CSEW journal *Marxism & Education*, No. 6, January 2022.

THE MILITANT

22 November 1968

N.Y. UFT head presses racist school shutdown

As the New York City United Federation of Teachers’ reactionary school shutdown against decentralization goes into its fifth week, Albert Shanker, UFT president, is rapidly spending whatever capital he had by way of public support. His adamant stand that he will settle for no less than the complete destruction of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville community controlled, experimental district and with it, in actuality, the whole concept of community control, is bringing more and more parents and community organizations, as well as some unions, into open opposition to the shutdown.

The National Picketline

The ad also traces the history of a vicious piece of hate literature Shanker is using to smear the Ocean Hill-Brownsville governing board as anti-Semitic. Early in the strike two anonymous, separate leaflets appeared. Shanker and his public relations department have made a composite of these

The Socialist Workers Party’s *Militant* called the UFT strike “racist,” advocating and engaging in scabbing on behalf of the capitalist rulers.

must have their own independent political party” – that is a black bourgeois party. And instead of socialism it called for a “new society based on human dignity, justice and brotherhood.”

In the middle of the second strike, a rally of several thousand supporters of community control was held at the Manhattan Center, sponsored by the NYC Council on Poverty (a city government agency that distributed poverty program funds) and the New Coalition, an opposition group inside the UFT that opposed the strike (and scabbed on it). Lead speakers were McCoy and Rev. Oliver, while the spokesman for the Coalition was SWP supporter Jeff Mackler (*Militant*, 4 October 1968). The SWP claimed that Lindsay supported the UFT and opposed community control, when in fact his appointees on the Board of Ed supported the OH-B governing board against the union, but only backed down in the face of the UFT’s solid strike.

As I mentioned in Part II, the SWP’s tailing after black bourgeois leaders in ’68 took a grotesque turn, publishing without criticism the ravings of Sonny Carson against “pig teachers.” It equated the “militants” who played a key role in the ’68 teachers strike with Black Power advocates like the Black Panther Party. No, they were careerists posing as radicals. As noted, Carson tried to shake down Lindsay for some city funding in 1967. His predecessor as leader of Brooklyn C.O.R.E., Major Owens, went on to head the city’s poverty programs. And in the years after the strike, Owens and Al Vann from JHS 271 became the leaders of the Brooklyn black Democratic machine, with Owens in Congress and Vann in the state senate and later city council.

In 1968, the by-then reformist SWP was avidly pursuing popular-front alliances with capitalist politicians in the antiwar movement, leading up to the formation in 1970 of the National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC) with Indiana senator Vance Hartke on its board. Also on the NPAC board was the same Jeff Mackler who was the voice of the SWP’s teacher supporters in the ’68 strike. And some years later, after Mackler and other leaders of NPAC had been booted out of the SWP, his Socialist Action group prettified communal violence between black people and Jews in Crown Heights as a “rebellion” by black youths, adding that “Black leader Sonny Carson outlined the demands of the rebellion” (*Socialist Action*, October 1991).

Also active in opposing the 1968 strikes was a Shachtmanite social-democratic group, the International Socialists (I.S.), whose founders had split from Shachtman when he entered the Socialist Party. (The I.S. was different from the ISO, followers of Tony Cliff,²⁵ which some may have been familiar with. Both I.S. and the ISO are now history.) The anti-communist I.S. was known to many radicals for long opposing calls for a victory by the Viet Cong in the Vietnam War. In the ’68 strikes, the I.S. was part of the New Coalition with the SWP and other would-be radicals. Afterward, it put out a pamphlet, *Crisis in the Schools*, which is cringe reading for any real Marxist. Its line was that 1968 was “a reactionary strike against the black community.”

But that was only for starters. The pamphlet alibis the Ford Foundation, saying that some radicals wanted to see its com-

²⁵ Tony Cliff, in later years leader of the British Socialist Workers Party, broke from Trotskyism in 1948, at the height of the first anti-Soviet Cold War, refusing to defend the bureaucratically deformed Soviet workers state, claiming it was “state capitalist.”

munity control plans as a diabolical scheme to pit black people against the union, whereas “the most progressive sectors of American capitalism” wanted a more educated black workforce. According to the I.S., it could be that “the Ford Foundation saw its grants ... as legitimate experimentation with improving the quality of ghetto education at relatively little cost.” So these social democrats called for “demanding that the liberals live up to their own rhetoric.” The I.S. didn’t see the class line, just as on Vietnam, where it agreed with Democratic “doves” who wanted to get out of the war because the U.S. couldn’t win it.

One of the I.S. pamphlet’s articles declared, in capital letters, “IT WAS ABSOLUTELY CORRECT, AS WELL AS ESSENTIAL TO BREAK THE UFT STRIKE AND TO CROSS THOSE PICKET LINES.” In justifying scabbing, it wrote “White people in general, and teachers in general, are partially motivated by racial prejudices.” This is liberal white guilt to the max. Even admitting that McCoy projected “total disregard for teachers’ rights” and that the local boards were demanding “more-or-less arbitrary powers over teachers” (as the Central Board had), still it held that under community control, local coalitions should have the right to move teachers whom they deemed had racist attitudes out of the district.

Then there was the New Left, in the form of SDS, and the various factions within it. This included the Guevarists who became the Weathermen (since disappeared), the Maoists who became the October League (also defunct) and the Revolutionary Union (later Revolutionary Communist Party, now revcom.us) and the Progressive Labor Party. All these supposed “communists” blithely waltzed across the picket line or supported scabbing. Their argument was fairly simple: they supported the black community, what some called the “internal colony” in the name of self-determination. PL was all over the map, first explicitly supporting community control, only to do a complete 180 in early 1969 to declare that all black nationalism is reactionary.

The Black Panthers, for their part, patrolled some of the schools in Ocean Hill-Brownsville. They were in a life-and-death struggle as the FBI’s COINTELPRO was shooting them down in the streets, and jailing the Panther 21 for the cop fantasy of allegedly plotting to bomb the Bronx Botanical Garden and Macy’s. The Panthers were well aware of the bourgeois program of co-opt or kill. So there was some criticism in “the movement” about the aims of McCoy and the other community control administrators. But they were mainly caught up in the anti-union demagoguery of Carson, Les Campbell and Al Vann.

At bottom all these left groups were suckered in by the bourgeoisie’s community control ploy because they lacked a Marxist understanding of the class line between capital and labor, between the bourgeoisie (in all its varieties) and the proletariat. The picket line is the class line in real time, the battle line of the class struggle. It makes concrete the choice posed in the song *Which Side Are You On?* written by Florence Reece, the wife of the National Miners Union organizer in Harlan County, Kentucky at the time of the 1930s coal wars known as “Bloody Harlan.” But the CP and SWP popular-frontists were seeking black bourgeois allies, while the sectoralist New Left radicals were tailing after the sector that was deemed the most progressive.

In contrast to this popular-frontism and tailism, the Sparta-

cist League, which we in the Internationalist Group came out of, stood fast. The SL leaflet, “New York City School Strike: Beware Liberal Union Busters” (pp. 63-64 of this issue) warned about the Ford Foundation, exposed illusions in the “‘community control’ fraud,” denounced the scabbing by leftists, but sharply criticized and called to oust the Shanker leadership for its “conservative and dangerous policies of ‘professionalism,’ elitism toward other trade union struggles and condescension toward the black working people.” It ended with a call to forge “a radical alliance of teachers and militant parents and students based on student-teacher-parent control of the schools.”

The SL was able to uphold the class line because it had long fought for proletarian leadership of the struggle for black liberation, as the Revolutionary Tendency did inside the SWP against the black nationalist line of George Breitman and for the revolutionary integrationist program of Richard Fraser, synthesized in the 1963 document by Jim Robertson and Shirley Stoute, “For Black Trotskyism.”²⁶ After the RT’s expulsion, the Spartacist League intervened in the 1964 Harlem “riot” against racist police murder, raising a program of transitional demands:

“to bring the Negro masses to the recognition in struggle that fundamental solutions to their problems are not possible within the framework of the capitalist system.”

—“Harlem Riot and Beyond,” *Spartacist* No. 3, January-February 1965.

Another factor was that the SL was active among municipal workers, and witnessed up front how the city rulers were out to bust the unions.

I also want to add, on a personal note, that the Spartacist League’s line on the ’68 teachers strike played a key role in winning me to Trotskyism. I had covered the strike for the New Left press, on the other side. After having arguments with West Coast comrades, I flew to New York to speak directly with Jim Robertson about the strike. What won me over as we talked was that the SL was not ignoring the struggle for black rights, but on the contrary

²⁶ Available in *What Strategy for Black Liberation? Trotskyism vs. Black Nationalism*.



MAY-JUNE 1967

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

BLACK AND RED—

Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom

I. INTRODUCTION

The struggle of the Negro people for freedom and equality has been the most dynamic struggle going on in the United States in the past ten years. It has taken place in the context of, and has been conditioned by, the general passivity of the organized labor movement. The militancy of the Negro people and the tempo of their struggle increased enormously in the fifties and early sixties, but the achievements have been minimal—limited entirely to token advancement of democratic rights. In fact, the fundamental conditions of life for the vast majority of Black people, particularly in the key areas of employment, wages, housing and education, have worsened. The Civil Rights movement, geared to the aspirations of the small Negro middle class, though professing to speak for all Negroes, has been stepped dead in its tracks in dealing with these fundamental needs, and in fact has functioned partly as a brake on the unorganized and leaderless pressures from below. In the absence of an alternative, revolutionary,

of their living standards by the inflationary pressures generated by the war on a booming economy, and to their readiness to fight for real gains. Black workers, bearing an even greater disproportionate share of the burden of the war, would be the most militant and ready for greater struggle.

On the other hand, if the war is ended or even continued at the present level of war spending, the economic downturn would prevail. While the black workers would be hit hardest by the ensuing unemployment, lay-offs would also rapidly accelerate among white workers. Again, this poses the perspective of a unity in struggle of black and white workers, and a leap in the level of consciousness of basic sectors of the working class.

Black Workers and Imperialism

Thus the struggle for Negro freedom takes place not only within the national arena, but within an international context. U.S. capitalism, which doubly exploits black workers, is the cornerstone of world imperialism.

The Spartacist League, when it stood for revolutionary Trotskyism, put forward a class-struggle program for black liberation through socialist revolution, while most of the left tailed after black nationalism, and scabbed on the 1968 NYC teachers strike.

was fighting against the bourgeoisie's cynical misuse of that struggle. After about three minutes, I was convinced: *the class line is key, including and especially in the struggle for black liberation.*

The Aftermath

How did it end? Podair writes: "When civil servants with master's degrees and mortgages became angry enough to take to the streets, Lindsay knew not only that the UFT had beaten him at Ocean Hill–Brownsville, but that his brand of racial politics had failed as well." The capitalist powers-that-be doubtless made it clear to the mayor that he had to have labor peace in New York. It took another month to work out the final deal, but Lindsay and the Board of Ed gave in to most of the UFT demands. The community control experiment was over. McCoy remained as district superintendent, but stripped of his power. There was intermittent skirmishing for some weeks, but by early the next year things calmed down.

But things had begun to change. One important development in 1969 was the winning of open admissions with free tuition at the City University of New York (CUNY). This was the result of a militant occupation of City College by African American and Latino students, but was pushed through with support from the unions in the Central Labor Council. It brought a vastly positive benefit for the black population, a truly radical step that grew directly out of the civil rights movement, providing the children of black, poor and working-class parents access to higher education. The deal was, if you graduated from any city high school and managed to get a diploma, you gained admission to one of the CUNY schools, and you didn't have to pay for it.

This was widely popular and made a huge difference in terms of black youth entering careers of all kinds, notably generating a growing pool of black educators. But by the mid-1970s, in the wake of the municipal fiscal crisis, tuition was introduced, and as the gains of the civil rights movement were methodically chipped away over the years, open admissions was also scrapped under Giuliani in 1999. We have written about the fight over this in the article "Smash Racist Purge of CUNY – Fight for Open Admissions, Free Tuition!" which is reprinted in the special supplement to *The Internationalist* (January 2008) on *Marxism and the Battle Over Education*. The fight to restore those gains remains a battle cry of the CUNY Internationalist Clubs today.

The Lasting Impact

Podair (along with many other opponents of the 1968 teachers strike) essentially blames the UFT for every defeat suffered by workers and black people in subsequent decades. His thesis is that the strike turned New York City into a seething cauldron setting the black poor and middle-class whites at each other's throats. He blames the strike for pushing Jews from being historic allies of black freedom struggles into joining with Catholics and outer-borough white racists. It is certainly true that for at least the



Keith Meyers / New York Times

Thousands of NYPD white cops rioted against black Democratic mayor David Dinkins over proposal for reform of toothless Civilian Complaint Review Board, 16 September 1992.

next three decades, the city would be divided by the bitterness stemming from the strike. But there were other factors at work as well, such as Israel's 1967 war, which pushed the liberal Jewish community sharply to the right.

Mainly Podair's focus ignores or masks the fundamental class forces that were at work. A few years later, in 1975 the New York banks proclaimed a "fiscal crisis," jacking up interest rates on outstanding loans. Democratic mayor Abe Beame saluted and proceeded to cut off social services, close hospitals in ghetto areas, freeze housing allowances, slash welfare rolls and introduce tuition at CUNY. Although NYC's debt paled in comparison to that of the federal government, under both Democrat Johnson and Republican Nixon, due to paying for the Vietnam War and huge poverty programs with deficit financing, the federal government under Republican president Ford refused to "bail out" New York City, a policy summed up in the famous *Daily News* headline: "Ford to City: Drop Dead."

Beame was followed by Ed Koch, the lapsed liberal who continued the vicious austerity policies, working closely with the Emergency Financial Control Board to extend the freeze on welfare benefits and housing allowances. Koch closed a number of municipally owned hospitals, virtually all in black neighborhoods. He raised tuition at CUNY, which by the later 1970s had been creeping up. I ran against Koch as the Spartacist candidate for mayor in 1985 on a program of "From Soweto to Harlem: Smash Racist Terror." He got some 868,000 votes, whereas we got a couple thousand. But that's another story.

Four years later came David Dinkins, a liberal black Democrat (and member of the Democratic Socialists of America), who from Day One of his administration was up against a blue wall of police opposition, culminating in an ominous demonstration of thousands of armed cops who turned their backs on the mayor as he was speaking. This was when in 1991 a Hasidic Jewish motorcade careening through Crown Heights struck and killed a black youngster. This



Randi Weingarten, then UFT president, with billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg and his schools chancellor Joel Klein (in background), 17 October 2007. Weingarten and Bloomberg agreed then to “bonus pay” for teachers based on school test scores. Marjorie Stamberg campaigned against this, winning a majority of several hundred teachers in her citywide school to vote down what would have been a \$3,000 per teacher bribe. The program died.

set off the communal violence I mentioned earlier, when a Yeshiva student from Australia was pinned against a parked car and stabbed to death by a black youth, as the mob screamed, “Kill the Jew.” And as the tumult continued, egging on the angry crowds was Sonny Carson, of 1968 teachers strike fame, who in 1990 led a racist boycott of Korean greengrocers in Flatbush.

Then in 1993 came the fascistic Republican mayor Rudy Giuliani, and in 2001 the billionaire Republican mayor Michael Bloomberg. The black community had been completely alienated from the UFT for more than three decades, but that changed. It began under Giuliani who went after both the UFT and African Americans with a vengeance. And then Bloomberg, the voice of Wall Street, imposed a mayoral dictatorship on the schools – with the aid of the UFT under Randi Weingarten, it should be noted. He proceeded to decree viciously racist policies, closing schools in black areas and even naming a disastrous schools chancellor, Cathy Black, who knew nothing about education and whose only “qualification” was that she dripped with hatred of black people.

So the Giuliani-Bloomberg onslaught, along with the eclipse of black separatism as a political force, laid a basis for reconciliation. Bloomberg in particular tried to line up the black community and replay the script of 1968. He tried to play the race card with the non-union charter schools, but this time it didn’t work: the black community by and large sided with the teachers to defend public education. Why didn’t it work? One reason is that the UFT made a conscious effort to work with black organizations, bringing in African American students and parents to meetings of Bloomberg’s Panel, or what we and other opponents called Puppets for Educational Policy, the PEP. That was different from 40 years earlier.

Another reason is the ’68 demonstration districts like Ocean Hill-Brownsville had a lot of perks for black entrepreneurs and middle-class professionals, with positions in poverty programs, school staffing, paid PTA positions, etc. All the elected members

of the OH-B governing board were already on the district payroll as “election consultants,” for example. This time the charter schools have few perks for the community. They are creatures of the hedge fund capitalists, who after the 2008 Wall Street crash needed a steady cash flow, while the CEOs like Eva Moskowitz give themselves juicy salaries. Meanwhile, the charters’ cherry-picking of students (very few English Language Learners, or ELLs) and dropping “underachieving” students, soon became known to black and Latino parents.

But while the UFT under Randi Weingarten and her successor Michael Mulgrew rebuilt ties to black organizations, they are still wedded to capitalism. Today Mulgrew is spearheading city rulers’ drive to cut health care costs by forcing retired city workers off Medicare, in favor of a privatized “Medicare Advantage” which lets giant insurance companies decide what medical treatment retirees receive. Next up, the health care of in-service teachers is on the chopping block. The UFT and AFT tops, like all of labor officialdom, are literally acting as the bosses’ agents in the workers movement. They must be kicked out in order for the teachers union to lead a struggle for quality, integrated, public education for all, first and foremost the most oppressed.

But what is to replace them? The several opposition caucuses in the UFT, including the Movement of Rank and File Educators (M.O.R.E.), New Action, Solidarity and others, grouped together in the United for Change coalition, do not have a qualitatively different program than the bureaucracy’s Unity Caucus. And by and large, they are just as anti-communist.

Class Struggle Education Workers

Class Struggle Education Workers, which is fraternally allied with the Internationalist Group, has fought since its inception in 2008 on a program calling for educator-led *teacher-student-parent-worker control of the schools*. This is the same program put forward in the Spartacist leaflet on the 1968 teachers strike. Some, such as the latter-day SL, which has renounced just about everything the SL stood for when it led the fight for revolutionary Trotskyism internationally, claim that this is the same as “community control.” Not at all. Leaving aside that the 1968 “experiment” was a blatant fraud, with actual control in the hands of city rulers, “community control” under capitalism inevitably means control by local bourgeois politicians.

The CSEW in the New York City public schools grew out of a fight in 2008 to defend the teachers who had been “excessed” as their schools were closed. They were put in a pool called the Absent Teacher Reserve, but they weren’t fired. If the UFT had not waged and won the 1968 strikes against punitive “transfers,” those teachers would simply have lost their jobs. Also early on, as Bloomberg’s Department of Education, rather than hiring from CUNY, was bringing in white trainees from Wendy Kopp’s union-busting Teach for America operation who knew nothing about urban schools, we actively supported the fight to increasing the hiring of African American and Latino teachers.

The CSEW also played a prominent role in opposing Bloomberg’s racist closing of schools in black and Latino areas. This included testifying at a January 2011 hearing on the closing of Paul Robeson High School in Crown Heights, Brooklyn where we noted



Class Struggle Education Workers sign at 27 January 2011 protest against Bloomberg's racist closing of schools.

the racist hostility to Robeson, a Communist leader who was jailed in the McCarthyite witch hunts and blinded in jail, and that the school was being closed to provide a training school for IBM. I said:

“Was there ever a more concrete example of corporatization and privatization of schools and what is going in this country than that? ... I want to say one good thing has come out of this mayoral control, and that it has united the immigrant, black, Latino, majority-minority people of this city with the teachers union who were separated for a long time but we are united today in struggle to fight against privatization.”

This, we added, won't happen through the ballot box, but by building a class-struggle workers party. And at a PEP hearing, the CSEW called the school closings racist, while the UFT and other opposition groups carefully avoided making that crucial, and obvious, point.

The CSEW also fought very concretely for teacher-student-parent-worker control of the schools during the COVID pandemic. At that time when many teachers, and union opposition groups in particular, were calling to keep the schools closed, we fought to use union power to make the schools safe to reopen. We pointed out that “remote education” is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms; that all education is social; that keeping schools closed hurt black, Latino, immigrant and homeless students in particular, as well as their parents, who had to work through the pandemic while white middle-class parents could work from home. Our fight for this is documented in a series of articles in *Marxism & Education* No. 6, the journal of Class Struggle Education Workers.

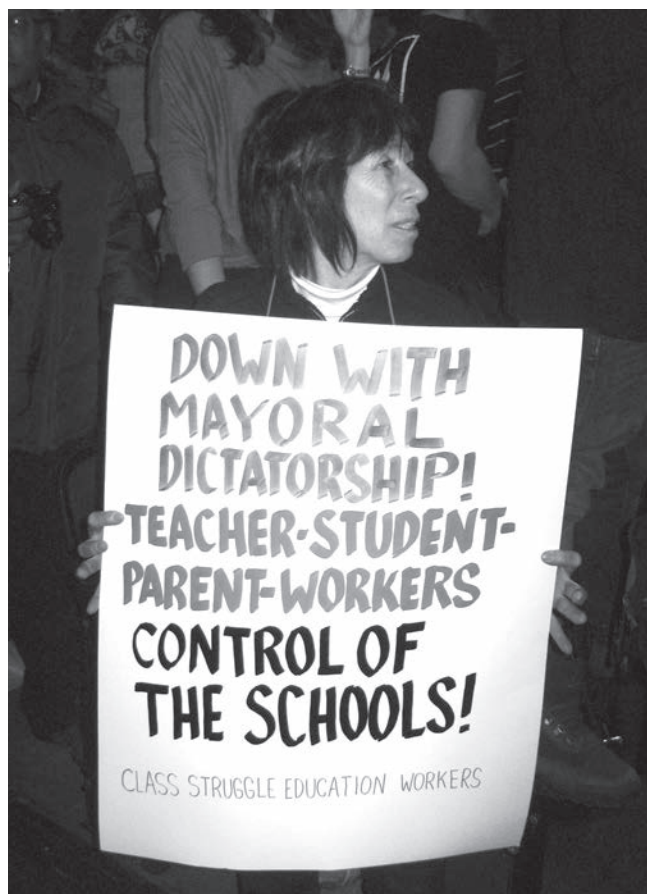
Had the UFT leadership in 1968 put forward a program of building councils, under union leadership, of teachers, students, parents and workers, that could have undercut the appeals of the white capitalist rulers and aspiring black bourgeois politicians who were pushing the illusion of “community control” – which is just another form of capitalist control of public education. But as we have seen in the struggles over the last decade, the present union and black leaders *cannot* fight the racist, capitalist drive to corporatize and privatize public education, because they are

all beholden to capital, particularly through the Democratic Party. Yet this is the same party whose hedge fund operators are financing, and whose politicians are authorizing, anti-union charter schools.

In 1968, it would have been very difficult to break through the smokescreen obscuring the union-busting alliance of corporate elites, capitalist politicians and black nationalists, supported by the overwhelming majority of the left, lined up against the teachers union. Today the Weingartens and Mulgrews, as well as the Al Sharptons and the Alexandria Ocasio-Cortezes, are all Democrats, responsible for strike-breaking – as with the railroad workers who had a contract they voted against stuffed down their throat by Biden and the Democratic Congress – and for the imperialist war being waged today against Russia in Ukraine and tomorrow against China.

The struggle for teacher-student-parent-worker control of the schools can only succeed as part of a broader struggle throughout society for the liberation of all the oppressed through socialist revolution. That

is why we need a Trotskyist party, like we of the Internationalist Group are building, and why we need transitional organizations like Class Struggle Education Workers. ■



Marjorie Stamberg called for teacher-student-parent-workers control of the schools at February 2012 meeting of the mayor's rubber-stamp Panel on Education Policy.

Mass Murderers Equate Anti-Zionism with Antisemitism

Weaponized Zionist Big Lie: A Cover for Israel/U.S. Genocide

By Charles Brover

The following article was written in May 2024.

U.S. politicians and Zionists have weaponized the charge of antisemitism with support from the Biden White House. They claim the cops storming peaceful campus protests are protecting Jewish students from the scourge of antisemitism. That is a Big Lie oft repeated. The real purpose of the campaign is not to fight antisemitism but to witch-hunt pro-Palestinian and anti-Zionist students into silence. They have set up McCarthyite congressional committees with the aim of disciplining colleges they see as cultural well-springs of liberal and tolerant thought. The liberal group, Jewish Voices for Peace, for instance, has been thrown off campuses including Columbia. Many of these Jewish youth are responding to the best ethical teaching in their religious background.

The McCarthyite campaign rests on a false political syllogism: Israel is a Jewish state founded on Zionism; therefore, criticism of Zionist Israel is anti-Jewish, or as right-wingers like the *New York Post* would put it, “Jew hatred.” The liberal Zionist anti-Defamation League has propagated this Big Lie for decades to shield the Zionist state from legitimate criticism. The truth is that Israel is a state, not a representative of Jewish people. That Israel calls itself a Jewish state doesn’t make criticism of the Israeli state and Zionism anti-Jewish any more than criticism of the Saudi state renders the critic Islamophobic. A religiously defined Jewish state is necessarily an exclusionary state, just as is an Islamic state or a Christian state or a Hindu state. The idea of a Jewish State leads to the furtherance of legally sanctioned Jewish supremacy.

There is plenty of antisemitism in the U.S. and elsewhere, but historically in the U.S. it is almost exclusively the violent agenda of the Christian nationalist far right. Neo-Nazis marched in Charlottesville chanting, “Jews will not replace us,” and the next day killed Heather Heyer. A right-wing antisemite gunned down 11 Jewish worshippers in the Pittsburgh Tree of Life synagogue. These were not anti-Zionists protesting genocide in Gaza. The swastikas defacing Jewish institutions are drawn by right-wing racist followers of Hitler’s “final solution.” They link their murderous antisemitism to their main target – black people in the U.S.

There is certainly a documented rise in antisemitism, as there is whenever Israel has gone to war. From its founding in 1948, the Zionist state has been based on driving out the Palestinian Arab population, claiming a mythical right to the land. Antisemites have welcomed the horrific images of Gaza’s destruction flashed on screens around the world. These live-streamed images of Zionist cruelty feed the legion of deranged antisemites. The fact is that Israel cannot keep Jews safe, and certainly not by obliterating the Palestinian people

of Gaza, using U.S.-supplied 2,000-lb. bombs dropped from U.S.-supplied warplanes. The horrific genocide taking place before our eyes is carried out by the mass-murdering army of the Zionist state, but it would not be possible without the arms supplied by U.S. imperialism.

What Is Zionism?

Zionism is fundamentally a national movement to form and defend a Jewish state, not Jewish people. It is born of deep political pessimism in the possibility of overcoming the oppression of Jews and fueled by obscurantist religious mythology. Nineteenth-century Jewish activist and journalist Theodor Herzl is considered the godfather of the modern political Zionist movement. The early Zionist movement promoted immigration to Palestine, but until the Nazi Holocaust it represented only a slender margin of Jewish thought and opinion. Most Jews opposed the Zionist project from the start. They understood intuitively that Zionism would feed the widespread antisemitic claim that Jews didn’t belong where they were living outside of Israel. Furthermore, the majority of Jews tended to be social-democratic liberals; as social and economic outsiders, they were international in perspective. Many understood instinctively that nationalism was the source of their oppression.

The Zionist movement gained its foothold with the Holocaust carried out by the Nazis and their allies (including anti-communist Polish and Ukrainian nationalists) which seemed to confirm Zionism’s deepest pessimism about the enduring murderous intentions of Christian nations. After the Holocaust, immigration to Israel was turbocharged by the anti-Semitic refusal of the so-called democratic countries – including both the United States and Britain – to accept Jewish refugees. Socialist Jews opposed the Zionist founding of the Israeli state in 1948, based as it was on the dispossession and expulsion of masses of indigenous Palestinians. The *nakbah* or “catastrophe” turned more than 750,000 of indigenous Palestinian population into desperate refugees, many of whom fled into Gaza and surrounding areas where they have lived for decades in refugee camps of what even the United Nations calls the world largest open-air prison.

Zionism, the movement to create a Jewish state, has always contained an eliminationist thrust and the fascistic and outright fascist elements so visible today in Gaza and the West Bank. In the year of its founding in 1948, Albert Einstein and 26 other prominent Jewish intellectuals and leaders published a letter in the *New York Times* (4 December 1948), warning:

“Among the most disturbing political phenomena of our times is the emergence in the newly created state of Israel of the Freedom Party [Menachem Begin’s Herut], a political party closely akin in its organization, methods, political philoso-



Class Struggle Education Workers in protest at NYC Public Library, 9 November 2023, during national student walkout.

phy and social appeal to the Nazi and Fascist parties. It was created out of the Irgun Zvai Leumi, a terrorist, right-wing, chauvinist organization.”

The Irgun was guilty of many atrocities, including the horrendous April 1948 massacre of the entire population of the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin. The Likud party of Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu is the lineal descendent of the Irgun and Herut, while the destruction of Gaza is Deir Yassin writ large.

It would be a mistake to think that the genocidal impulse we see playing out today in Gaza belongs only to its most outspoken fascist leaders such as Itamar Ben Gvir and Bezeel Smotrich. The fundamental denial of Palestinian humanity is mainstream Zionist ideology. From the outset Zionists held the idea that Palestine was not inhabited by Palestinians but by disparate Arabs with no legitimate claim to their towns, villages, and farms. David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s ‘founding father’ and first Prime Minister, formulated the Zionist demand, at the Biltmore Conference of 600 Jewish leaders in 1942, for the future State of Israel, “not as a Jewish state in Palestine but as Palestine as a Jewish state.” Golda Meir, the fourth Prime Minister, who helped establish the Labor Party, was probably among the more liberal of Israel’s Zionist leaders. Her contribution to the Palestinian question was “there is no such thing as Palestinians.”

Although fundamentally a nationalist movement, the Zionist project also promoted theocratic elements that continue to influence Israel policy. The theocrats wrap their ultra-nationalism and racism in a biblical myth that their god had granted ancient Hebrews an eternal lease on all the real estate from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. For such religious zealots the non-Jews who live in this “promised land,” some of whose ancestors lived there going back more than a thousand years, are just impediments to god’s will. For a selection of bloodcurdling quotes from leading Jewish supremacist rabbis about how non-Jews have no rights and no mercy should be shown to Palestinians, see Henry Lesnick, “The Road to Genocide: The Moral Foundations of the Zionist

State” (2024) at academia.edu.

Thus, from the outset Zionism contained the kernel of Jewish supremacy. Unfortunately, in a society where at least half the population is non-religious, this founding myth continues to generate a “god-given” pretext for Israeli domination of the Occupied Territories and the denial of the rights of its non-Jewish Palestinian inhabitants. This myth is also promoted by fanatic U.S. Zionists, and not least by U.S. Christian nationalists.

Serious scholars of genocide have analyzed the criteria for genocide and found the Israeli state guilty. After the atrocious indiscriminate terrorist attack by Hamas on October 7, the Israeli government declared its genocidal intention. Defense Minister, Yoav Gallant: “I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed” (*Times of Israel*, 9 October 2023). Other fascistic members of Israel’s current cabinet have called the Palestinians, “animals,” and promised to flatten Gaza. Netanyahu referenced

the biblical myth of the wholesale slaughter of the Amalekite tribe: “...remember what Amalek has done to you, says our holy book – we do remember: now go attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to the them. Do not spare them. Put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep.”

The Gaza siege is clearly a joint military and political operation by Israel and the United States. The Democratic Biden administration feigns concern about civilian deaths and destruction in Gaza. They are unhappy about their diplomatic international isolation and embarrassed by the images of genocide flooding television and computer screens worldwide, so they pretend they are trying to restrain the Netanyahu government. Biden even used the words, “indiscriminate bombing.” How cynical are the fake tears of Biden and Secretary of State Blinken as they continue to pump more lethal weaponry to the Israeli military.

Zionism today is a mix of nationalist expansionism and murderous religious fundamentalism. There is tension between these camps, but there is agreement on the denial of Palestinian rights. This lash-up is reflected in Israel’s current “war cabinet” and its annexationist policies on the West Bank and Gaza.¹ The dehumanization of Palestinians is concomitant with a military mobilization for genocide. Anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab hatred has been cultivated for decades in Israel, and given religious authority by a steady stream of anti-Palestinian loathing from a pantheon of reactionary rabbis.

That Zionism is necessarily an eliminationist ideology is more clearly visible today. The current government in Israel is its

¹ The mainstream Zionist militarists Benny Gantz and General Gadi Eisenkot joined a “war cabinet” together with Netanyahu in the earliest days of the war in October 2023, accompanied by the fascists Gvir and Smotrich in a parallel “security cabinet.” Both Gantz and Eisenkot are former chiefs of staff of the Israeli armed forces, and responsible for killing thousands of Palestinians on their own account. Gantz and Eisenkot left the war cabinet in mid-June 2024, after which it was dissolved.

most right-wing in its history and contains some genuine racists, fascists and theocrats. But the assault on Gaza and the intensified settler violence in the West Bank is mainstream Israeli policy. The fascists in its government are the sign of just how far right that policy has evolved over the decades of occupation. It would be wrong to fail to understand that it is not just Netanyahu of Likud, heir to the fascistic wing of Zionism of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, and his most right-wing ministers running some kind of rogue operation. The ever-increasing oppression of Palestinians, including the current genocide in Gaza and the state-backed pogroms in the West Bank, are the policies of mainstream Zionism – the result of 56 years of occupation and 17 years of blockade in Gaza.

Zionism and “the Jewish Question”

The historic irony and tragedy of the Jewish people is that right-wing nationalism has been the source of the oppression of Jews. Yet Zionism invented and propagates the dangerously false idea that the Jewish people can find safety from oppression only in its own right-wing nationalism. The most unspeakably horrific genocide of the modern era was carried out in the name of nationalism in the world's most culturally advanced and educated bourgeois society. The apparent paradox is captured in the iconic image of the Nazi death camp guard reading Goethe.

Isaac Deutscher the great Marxist biographer of Trotsky and anti-Zionist Jewish intellectual, remarked that the tragedy of the Jewish people was that they discovered nationalism after it no longer served any progressive purpose. In this observation Deutscher was following the analysis of the masterful Trotskyist historian of Jewish experience, Abram Leon, who died in the Nazis' Auschwitz extermination camp. Unlike Zionist historians who present Jewish history as unrelieved and relentless oppression, Abram Leon records that Jews actually played an essential economic role in medieval and Roman societies, and lived in relative peace in the Ottoman Middle East. Leon explained that “Jews lived within the pores of medieval society” and had an indispensable secular function. But Jews, traditionally petty bourgeois and artisan, were “wedged between the anvil of decaying feudalism and the hammer of rotting capitalism.” They were the natural enemies of domestic petty-bourgeois competitors. As Leon explains, “Placed between two fires, the Jews were exposed to the hostility of the petty-bourgeoisie and the peasantry who sought to find a place for themselves at the expense of Jews.”²

Zionism tried to find a solution in the heart of their essential problem: nationalism and capitalism. “Whereas the national movement is the product of the ascending period of capitalism, Zionism is the product of the imperialist era,” Leon argued. “The Jewish tragedy of the twentieth century is a direct consequence of the decline of capitalism.” The Jewish bourgeoisie tried to create a national state, to assure itself of the objective framework for the development of productive forces, precisely in the period when the condition for such a development had long since disappeared. Therefore, in a

divided colonial world, Zionism came into collision with Arab nationalism. “Zionism” writes Leon, “wishes to resolve the Jewish question without destroying capitalism which is the principal source of the suffering of the Jews.”

Now Israel is in the throes of genocidal revenge and fury. But it has over the years also produced political opposition. There are some brave Israelis who struggle along with Palestinians for their rights and to end occupation. But such principled opposition is marginalized today after October 7. Even before the Hamas attack when hundreds of thousands of Israelis took to the streets to protest against Netanyahu and the ultra-religious right, Palestinian rights were not on the agenda, including the rights of Palestinians living in their midst in Israel. On the contrary, any protesters who carried Palestinian flags were excluded.

Marxist revolutionaries are the most intransigent fighters against antisemitism and every form of racism and bigotry including Zionist hatred and oppression of Palestinians. That fight for decency and democratic equality can be won only as part of the struggle to overcome the capitalist system of exploitation, racism and war – the class struggle for socialist revolution. ■

I.C.E. Out Now!...

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from deportation or bigoted attacks,” it encourages UFT local chapters to initiate school-based committees to defend immigrants and calls on “all of labor to initiate such defense committees and mobilize its power in defense of immigrants.” It concludes: “these are our students, our fellow workers, our neighbors, and we will act to support them in this, their hour of need, and always. We will not let them take our students.”

The school-based committees in New York have prepared resource kits for educators, made bulletin boards, held “red card” making sessions and held distributions of KYR materials in English, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, Russian, Ukrainian and Bengali at subway and bus stops in Brooklyn and the Bronx. Many unions including AFSCME, SEIU, UFCW, UAW, AFT, NEA and the AFL-CIO have prepared immigration information kits. In New York, supporters and officials of six Teamsters locals are participating in the LCDI, and Joint Council 16 reaffirmed a 2017 resolution declaring itself a “sanctuary union.” The LCDIs seek to cohere a core of worker activists so that when the time comes, they can help spark a labor-led outpouring to make workplaces and immigrant communities “no go” areas for I.C.E.

At the Labor Conferences to Defend Immigrants, reference was made to the response in the North to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, when cities rose up to stop the slave catchers. In Boston in 1854, the federal government brought in troops, making it an occupied city. Now Trump has brought troops into Los Angeles. Today what is needed is a working-class mobilization, independent of the capitalist parties, to uphold the call for full citizenship rights for all immigrants, and to ensure that all those who have made it to the U.S. can stay here. Those fleeing the devastation caused by U.S. imperialism must be defended as working people mobilize against the criminal government that would expel them. ■

For more information, write to laborconference@gmail.com, cs_edworkers@hotmail.com or cswp@cs-w-pdx.org.

² Abram Leon, *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation* (1942).

Marjorie Stamberg Protests Gag Order, Speaks Up for Palestinians

Marjorie Stamberg died on 29 May 2024 after a lifetime, cut short at age 79, of fighting for socialist revolution. She was a defender of the communism of Lenin and Trotsky, a key leader of the League for the Fourth International and its U.S. section, the Internationalist Group, a Marxist educator, a militant trade unionist and a champion of all the oppressed. In November 2023, when it was becoming more difficult for her to walk, Marjorie attended three Palestinian solidarity protests in one week.

On November 9 she made her way into a crowd of several thousand on the steps of the New York Public Library with a sign that said “Defend the Palestinians Against Genocidal U.S./Israel War.” On November 15 outside the United Federation of Teachers headquarters, while the official demands were for a ceasefire in Gaza, Marjorie’s sign called for “Israel Out of the West Bank and Gaza Now!” And on November 16, she spoke at a rally called by Class Struggle Education Workers on the steps of the New York Department of Education, denouncing a gag order intended to silence any support for Palestinians by teachers, students or staff.

Marjorie would not be silent. She was determined to speak out against the genocidal war on Gaza by Israel and the U.S., which furnishes all the bombs and planes that make the slaughter possible. A video of what she said is online at: <https://youtu.be/B7H6deSTuAA>.

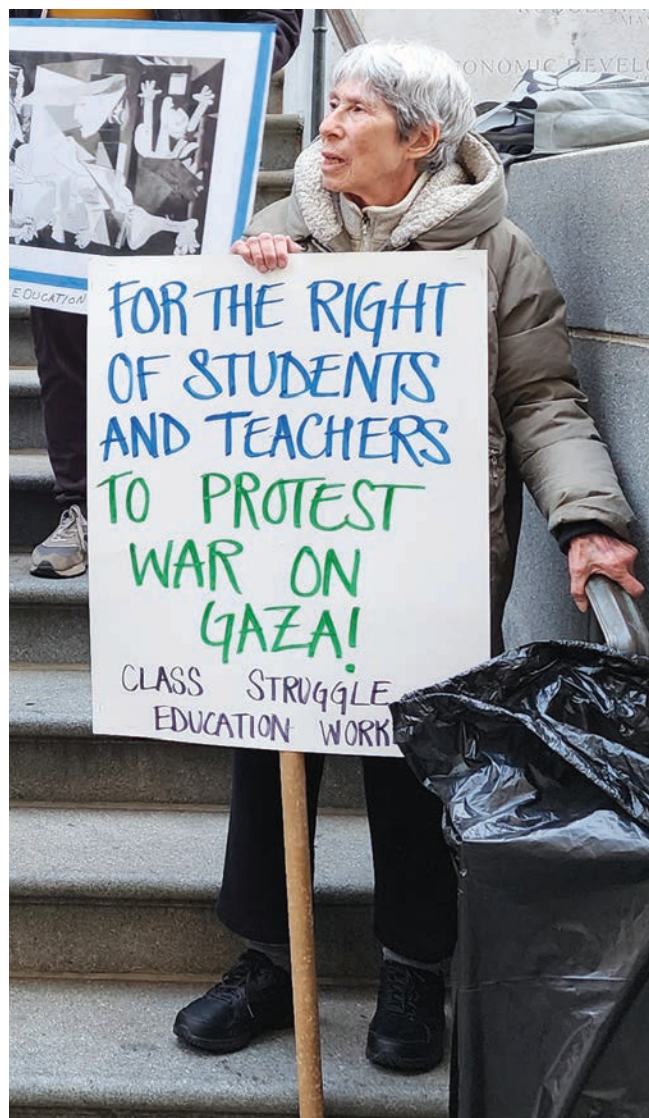
Text of her remarks:

My name is Marjorie Stamberg, I’m a retired teacher in the Department of Education, and a very proud member of the UFT (the United Federation of Teachers). We have always said the UFT is not the leadership. The UFT is the teachers, it’s the paras (paraprofessionals), it’s the nurses, it’s the people who make up the body of the UFT. We’re always fighting with the Unity leadership [the UFT bureaucracy caucus] that right now, in terms of health care, in terms of Palestine, I see them as working for [Mayor Eric] Adams. We’re working for the UFT.

Now, there is a lot of stuff going on, a lot of threats against teachers ... for teaching. Basically, as teachers, our job, in the classroom, is to talk with people about how for 75 years Gaza has been the world’s biggest open prison. We’re not allowed to show our personal preferences in the classroom. Alright, that’s something that’s been there for a while. But the letter from Chancellor Banks says teachers may not talk about their personal feelings about this issue anywhere on school grounds. That means not in the lunch room, not in your prep (preparation time), not before and not after. That’s point one. Point two is worse: you may not talk about your personal feelings on the issue outside of the school day.

So you know, you guys can come and get me, but I’m retired and I have tenure, so come on. But for many, many teachers who do not have tenure, their jobs could be on the line if they come into the forefront. Still, many people are doing it.

Yesterday we had about a hundred people down at the UFT to pass a motion for a ceasefire. It did not pass, but it



Internationalist photo

Marjorie at 16 November 2023 CSEW protest at D.O.E. headquarters against chancellor’s gag order.

split the body much deeper than I’ve ever seen anything go. Now we in my group, Class Struggle Education Workers, are not for the ceasefire, because that would mean stop right now, with Israeli troops in the hospitals, taking over half of Gaza, pushing the Gaza people into the desert, into the Sinai. We are for a Palestinian and Hebrew united workers struggle, because there are many contradictions in Israel as well, and people who do not want to be part of a Zionist state.

And I want to tell you, one of the big lies that is going on around here is that anybody who defends Palestine has got to be an antisemite. They’re just trying to intimidate you. They are anti-Zionism. [Anti-]Zionism is not antisemitism. Jewish

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Class Struggle Education Workers Protest D.O.E. Attempt to Ban Opposition to U.S./Israel War Down with the Gag Order Against NYC Teachers!

By Class Struggle Education Workers/
UFT

NOVEMBER 2023 – Almost immediately after Israel launched its massive bombing campaign against Gaza in response to the breakout attack by Islamist Hamas fighters, followed by their indefensible killing of several hundred Israeli Jews in nearby communities, Israel's imperialist backers went on the warpath to squelch opposition to the unfolding Zionist slaughter. In various European countries Palestinian solidarity demonstrations were repeatedly banned outright. In the United States the repressive campaign was directed at universities in particular, where support for the Palestinians is widespread, but also against K-12 schools. Any and all protests against Israel's mass murder were labeled antisemitic, including those by anti-Zionist Jewish groups. The drive to shut down opposition to U.S. president Joe Biden's emphatic support for, and arming of, Israel intensified as people could see how the Zionist militarists' bombing and subsequent ground invasion of Gaza amounted to a genocidal assault against the entire Palestinian population.

In New York City, the ex-cop mayor Eric Adams slammed celebrities, leftists and unnamed "influencers" who supposedly "spew out hateful thinking" and "specifically antisemitism" by expressing solidarity with Palestinians. He vituperated that "college campuses have now become breeding grounds of hate" (*New York Post*, 14 October). Adams' schools chancellor David Banks issued a statement that denounced "attacks by Hamas on Israeli civilians" but said zero about Israeli bombs raining death on a far greater scale on civilians in Gaza, or about 75 years of oppression of Palestinians by the Zionist state. At the same time, Banks circulated to teachers an "Israel-Hamas War Resource Guide" including pro-Israel lesson plans. As Palestinian solidarity protests mushroomed, Adams and Banks issued a joint statement on October 28 blasting "dangerous slogans and chants" and "toxic rhetoric and division at educational institutions."

Then, on the day before a November 9 "Schools Out for #CeasefireNow" day of action, walkout and after-school rally, which was endorsed by several teacher groups – Teachers Unite, Movement of Rank-and-File Educators (M.O.R.E.), New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCoRE) – among others, Chancellor Banks fired off an email decreeing that "School leaders, teachers, and other school staff should not express their personal views about political matters during the school day"



Internationalist photo

Supporters of Class Struggle Education Workers, the Internationalist Group, the CUNY Internationalist Clubs and high school students demonstrated outside the NYC Department of Education protesting D.O.E. attempt to squelch solidarity with Palestinians.

or while on school grounds, and even that "expression of one's personal views, even outside of the workplace and via social media posts or otherwise, crosses a line" if it disrupts the work "environment," interferes with New York City Public Schools "operations" (walkouts), etc. In case you didn't get it, the boss of NYC schools spelled out that "When speech and action – even on one's personal time – undermines the mission or core functions of NYCPS, we will review and take appropriate action on a case-by-case basis." I.e., disciplining or firing.

This was no idle threat. Already when Mohammad Jihad Ahmad, a math teacher at Gotham Tech HS in Queens, wrote on his personal Facebook account that Banks' sending out of "Zionist propaganda" in the guise of "resource guides" showed that the boss of the NYC Department of Education is a "white supremacist" and "imperialist," the rabidly pro-Zionist *New York Post* vilified him, pro-Israel parents demanded his ouster, and the D.O.E. opened an investigation. Especially after Banks' repeated denunciation of protests as "antisemitic" and distribution of pro-Israel teaching materials, this was a blatant attempt to force one and all to march in lockstep in support of the war. Many were enraged by this dictatorial attack on teachers' freedom of speech, and some spoke out, but many more were intimidated. Could they utter the word "Palestine"

on their lunch time, or in the teachers lounge? What if they were photographed by the *Post* at a Palestine solidarity rally? The NYC Department of Investigations witch-hunters will decide.

So what was the response to this assault on teachers' basic rights? The New York Civil Liberties Union wrote on X (November 9), formerly known as Twitter, that NYC schools "should spend more time giving teachers the tools to support robust political debate, navigate students' high emotions, and address serious issues – and less time monitoring their social media accounts." But while opining that "attempting to restrict teachers' and staff members' political speech – especially speech that occurs outside the workplace – is often an overreach" that can "chill" debate and discussion, and that "NYC schools must do better," the NYCLU's conclusion was that "the DOE's may be inside the bounds of the law." So these bourgeois "defenders" of civil liberties say that the boss can dictate what employees do on their own time! This was then repeated by education website *Chalkbeat* (8 November).

But students were not intimidated. The next day, a crowd of 5,000+, overwhelmingly young people, participated in the rally that wound through Midtown streets starting at 3 p.m., and was still going later in the night. (The D.O.E., which forced students leaving schools early to sign out individually, now has a list of 770 names.) Class Struggle Education Workers and the City University of New York Internationalist Clubs were there with signs calling to defend the Palestinians against the genocidal U.S./Israel war, for workers action to stop arms to Israel and proclaiming "CUNY Students in Solidarity with High School Protesters." Two days earlier, on November 7, the CUNY Internationalists had initiated a protest at Hunter College to "Stop McCarthyite Witch Hunts at CUNY and Other Campuses" (see "Hunter College Speak-Out Defies Intimidation Campaign," at the *Revolutionaries in the Class Struggle* blog).

On November 15, educators in the CSEW and CUNY Internationalists joined a rally of some 150 outside a delegate assembly of the United Federation of Teachers called by M.O.R.E. and others supporting an amendment calling for a ceasefire in Gaza to a resolution on the war. CSEW signs declared "No to the Gag Order! Free Speech for Teachers on Their Own Time," and "Israel Out of the West Bank and Gaza Now!" (While we do not call for a ceasefire, which would leave the Israeli occupation in place, we would have critically voted in favor of the amendment as it expressed the desire to end the U.S./Israeli slaughter and was, in effect, a referendum on the Zionist/imperialist war on the Palestinians, with the Unity Caucus of the UFT bureaucracy dead-set opposed.) While the amendment was defeated, it received 44% of the votes, an unheard-of development in the historically vehemently pro-Zionist UFT.

The next day, November 16, Class Struggle Education Workers held its own protest on the steps leading up to the Department of Education headquarters in the Boss Tweed Court House calling for "Down with the Gag Order Against NYC Teachers!" While small, some 30+ supporters of the CSEW, Internationalist Group, CUNY Internationalists, as well some students from NYC high schools and others attended. They denounced the Banks email ordering teachers to keep their lips

zipped on Palestine, and protested the U.S./Israel war, calling for working-class action against the ethnic cleansing and genocide currently taking place in Gaza. A student from City College spoke, linking the protest against the D.O.E.'s gag order to ongoing struggles on different campuses and organizing by workers in the city. Speakers noted that McCarthyite repression is part of the imperialist war drive – as it was during the anti-Soviet Cold War – which is aimed at fostering counterrevolution in China.

In subsequent days, after stirring up a hornet's nest of opposition with his ban on teacher expression on Palestine – ultimately aimed at strangling student protest against the war – Chancellor Banks has been backing off, saying that he was "not trying to silence anybody," just to make this a "teachable moment" (*City & State*, 14 November). A staff member at Brooklyn Tech was quoted as saying "No one wants to say anything because no one wants to get into trouble," but a round-up article in *Chalkbeat* (21 November) headlined "NYC students want to talk about Israel and Gaza. Schools are struggling to keep up," reported that teachers have gone ahead and organized optional lunchtime teach-ins and after-school meetings, including Jewish and Muslim student groups, to talk about the war and the history behind it. This was possible because of the massive backlash against the D.O.E.'s attempt to censor and suppress student and teacher views.

We print below speeches from the November 16 CSEW demonstration, excerpted and edited for publication.

Mark Lance

My name is Mark Lance. For last 22 years, I've been a math teacher at BMCC (Borough of Manhattan Community College). I teach math to adults who are trying to get their GEDs (general equivalency diplomas) – in other words to students whom the D.O.E. has already failed.

Today, Israeli rockets continue to pound Gaza into rubble and Israeli soldiers occupy the Al Shifa hospital. Babies are dying in their incubators due to the deliberate denial of electricity. Doctors are operating in the dark on children who have been denied anesthesia. At least 11,000 Palestinians are dead.

But the New York City Department of Education doesn't want teachers to talk about it. In fact, they forbid it.

On November 8, on the eve of a planned student walkout over the continued destruction of Gaza, the D.O.E. informed teachers that "express[ing] their personal views about political matters" on school grounds and "even outside the workplace" "crosses a line" and could subject teachers to disciplinary action.

It's not just in New York. In California, an eighth-grade student was suspended for saying "Free Palestine."

The McCarthyite censors don't want us to talk about the U.S.-backed mass murder in Gaza, but we do want to talk about it. We want to shout about it! And protest about it. And we want the labor movement to be in the forefront of these protests and put their muscle into it.

We've seen this before.

My poster is Picasso's *Guernica* where he depicted the 1937 bombing of that Basque town in Spain by the Condor Legion of Hitler's Luftwaffe. Hundreds were killed. If you

look at photos of Guernica after the attack, it looks like Gaza. But the destruction of Gaza is vastly greater.

We do not condone Hamas' attacks on civilians but what Israel is conducting now is mass murder on a vastly larger scale. Today, the Israeli government speaks the language of genocide, describing Palestinians as "animals." Netanyahu makes biblical references to the destruction of ancient enemies including men, women, children and infants. A minister in Netanyahu's government raised the idea of dropping a nuclear bomb on Gaza, adding that there was no such thing as a non-combatant there.

Netanyahu's staunchest ally in this mass murder is the U.S. government which has armed Israel to the teeth. Biden has stood by Netanyahu as each bomb fell on civilians and, like Netanyahu, he opposes even a ceasefire.

This too is not new.

We remember the siege of Falujah [in Iraq]. We remember Vietnam where the U.S. military said they had to destroy villages in order to "save" them. We remember Hiroshima and Nagasaki. All of these atrocities were done by the U.S. government in the name of "democracy."

So, we have no illusions in the U.S. government playing the role of peacemaker. Quite the contrary, the U.S. government is the architect of these war crimes and the #1 perpetrator of them.

So who can stop the joint U.S./Israeli war machine?

I was at a protest last night [outside the UFT delegate assembly] where a chant was "If we don't get it, shut it down!" That sounds good, but who is going to shut it down?

We in the Class Struggle Education Workers look to the labor movement, especially internationally, to oppose this genocidal slaughter.

Some people say "Come on, man. That'll never happen."

In Canada, the public employee union CUPE called on the government to end arms sales to Israel. In Britain, the rail and transport workers called on members to join Palestine solidarity protests and called on the government to stop arms sales to Israel. Workers in Unite, Unison and other unions in the UK blocked the entrance to an Israeli arms company in Kent. Workers in Italy marched at a U.S. base and called to stop arms to Israel and Ukraine.

In Genoa, Italy, dock workers are preparing to block weapons in transit to Israel. In Spain, the union representing Barcelona's dockworkers promised Monday not to load or unload military materials onto any ship bound for Israel or any other warzone where they could be used against civilians.

This is a modest start. The point is to turn sentiments of solidarity into action such as "hot-cargoing" [refusing to move cargo that's "too hot to handle"] arms shipments at the factories, ports and railheads.

I'll tell you what is a utopian fantasy. Thinking the U.S. government is ever going to oppose Israel's genocidal slaughter.

We have emphasized that this is a U.S./Israel war. This war is funded, armed and backed by the U.S. government, headed up today by Democratic president Joe Biden. The Vietnam War and the atom-bombing of Japan were also imperialist wars, also executed by Democratic Party-led administrations.

We call on workers and to break with the Democratic Party

and form a workers party based on a program of class struggle.

One more thing.

The Nazis' bombing of Guernica was a dress rehearsal for World War II. They tried out their shrieking Stukka dive bombers there, designed to simultaneously kill and terrorize. "Shock and awe."

The crazed warmakers in Washington and Jerusalem are hell bent on driving to World War III. Their #1 target – and they admit it – is China.

If class struggle is needed – and it desperately is – then it's necessary to organize it.

Class struggle is real. It works. It's the only thing that works.

For workers action to stop Israeli terror!

[The next speaker was Marjorie Stamberg, whose remarks are printed on p. 81 of this issue.]

Charlie Brover

I'm Charlie Brover and I'm a member of Class Struggle Education Workers. Mark and Marjorie have certainly laid out the case. I just want to say I grew up in a Jewish home and we have a special responsibility to speak out. I'm particularly offended when it's said that people who are raising the question of Palestinian rights are somehow antisemitic. For years, they've been selling that lie. So I was sort of gratified when I saw that there was a letter by Jewish writers saying that it is a danger to try to conflate antisemitism and anti-Zionism. But then there was that big [pro-Israel] demo in Washington, where they featured a Christian Zionist, John Hagee, who is pro-Israel because he wants all the Jews to be gathered in Jerusalem so that they can either be converted or burned, when the "second coming" comes. *That* they support.

What happens in a war like this is that language gets distorted in terrible ways. Not only the question of antisemitism and anti-Zionism, but if you turn on your TV and you listen to what people are saying, they're calling this a war on Hamas. This is not a war on Hamas, it is a war on the people of Palestine, and anybody with eyes can see it. Then they say it's about "self-defense." Where's the self-defense? They killed 4,000 children – that's not self-defense!

What's happening is the unfolding of genocide. And it's classical. The Center for Constitutional Rights is bringing a suit on general legal terms. That is, when you cut off their electricity, when you cut off their water, when you cut off their capacity to run their hospitals, that is war on a whole people. That's what's going on, and the language they use is the language of colonialism: "We represent civilization. You represent barbarism." Where have we heard that before? We heard it about Native Americans, we heard it about black people under Jim Crow. It is always the position they take, and we need to stand up to that.

Finally, whenever there's a problem, we always say the answer is socialism. Get rid of capitalism and we can solve that. And liberals respond that we can solve that under capitalism: we can solve climate change under capitalism, we can solve racism under capitalism, we can solve war under capitalism. And then they come to Palestine and Israel. How are you going to solve that? And they say, we have no idea. In fact, when you have interpenetrated peoples, it cannot be solved under capitalism, it can't be solved other than by an Arab-Hebrew workers state.

Sándor John

Speakers have referred to the fear of defending the besieged people, imprisoned in this open-air concentration camp of Gaza, where they are being bombed, every day with bombs made where? [*Crowd*: “U.S.A.”] From planes made where? [*Crowd*: “U.S.A.”] The fear of coming out against that, to protest that, to protest war criminals like President Biden and the Democratic Party, and Netanyahu and the Israeli state. They claim that to protest that is antisemitic. They want to smear everybody who wants to fight against this bloody, murderous war. By doing so, they are breeding Islamophobia, and they are breeding antisemitism. So against that lie we chant, “Arab, Jewish, black and white, Workers of the world unite!” [*Crowd chants*.]

Speakers have emphasized the power of the working class. We’re talking about workers action to stop those ships, carrying those weapons. There were community pickets in Oakland [California], and then in Tacoma [Washington] where longshore workers respected those picket lines, and the government had to send in military personnel to ship deadly weapons for mass murder in this U.S. war. But to unleash the power of the working class, we have to fight against the bureaucracy, the current leadership of the labor movement, that subordinates the unions and working-class organizations in general to the government party, the war party, the Democratic Party of U.S. imperialism presently in the White House, alternating with the other main party of U.S. imperialism, the Republicans. In fact, the Democratic Party is usually in power when U.S. imperialism carries out its wars.

Demonstrators chant: “Remember Hiroshima, remember Vietnam, Democratic Party, we know which side you’re on!”

About the gag order in the schools: the D.O.E. literally said that teachers and staff could not express their political opinions not only on work time but on their own time when they’re on school grounds. So if you’re at lunch and you’re sitting next to your friend and you say, “I can’t believe that they just bombed another hospital,” you could be disciplined. But the D.O.E. went further, and literally said, even on your own time and not at work – they put this in bold letters – you could still be disciplined for expressing a political opinion. This is McCarthyism, which was an attempt to silence opposition to the Korean War, to silence organizing against racist Jim Crow segregation, against lynching, during the Cold War. That was broken, above anything else, by the massive black freedom struggle in the 1950s and ’60s. This began to crack the “Cold War consensus.” But they couldn’t crack the repressive apparatus of the United States government – for that we need socialist revolution. ■

Marjorie Stamberg . . .

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people throughout the world have been victims who are not, fundamentally, for the most part, committed to having a garrison state in the Middle East. Many of them were victims of the Holocaust, and they could not come to the United States, which forbid them to come in, also in many other countries in Europe, so they came to Israel.

The problem is, when you have two groups of people occupying the same land, you really can’t solve it unless you have

socialism. Because if you have two states, which state is the stronger, which controls the fuel, which one controls the land, which one has the biggest army? So that idea [of a “two-state solution”] has gone down the way. And we say what we need is a revolution in Gaza, in Israel and throughout the Middle East. And we can’t forget the U.S. role.

Yesterday, at the demonstration at the UFT, the colleagues were saying “Michael Mulgrew, you can’t hide, you are funding genocide.” Well, I thought, we usually say “U.S., you can’t hide, you are funding genocide,” which is also true, but in fact, the UFT coffers are going into Israeli bonds and to support Israel. So we have a fight inside our union, for our students and for our teachers to have the right to express their own opinions and teach. That’s what they’re there for, and now they’re being threatened. Thank you very much. ■

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Neo-McCarthyite...

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In response to criticisms, former Massachusetts Teacher Association (MTA) president Merrie Najimy wrote: “The ADL consistently commits acts of anti-Palestinian racism by falsely conflating the criticism of Zionism and Israel with antisemitism, dehumanizing the Palestinian people, pushing to erase and censor Palestinian narratives in schools and targeting educators who speak up for Palestinian rights.” But on July 18, the NEA board of directors capitulated, overriding the Representative Assembly and declaring that it would *not* “boycott” the ADL. NEA president Becky Pringle issued a lame statement appealing to the ADL to support free speech and stop attacking teachers and students. Fat chance!

Despite this betrayal by the union tops, *NEA affiliates should carry out the resolution and break all ties with the ADL!* Capitulation to this Zionist, neo-McCarthyite intimidation and censorship will not protect the union and will only lead to more victimization of teachers.

For many decades the ADL has had a “ubiquitous presence in public schools around the country” supplying curricula and teacher training materials (*Forward*, 10 July). It has also acted as a propaganda arm of the Israeli state, such as defending the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon leading to the slaughter of thousands of Palestinians and Shia Muslims in the infamous Sabra and Shatila massacre. Lately, the ADL is pushing hard for repression of anti-Zionist viewpoints, denouncing anti-Zionist teachers as “ Hamas supporters” and supposed apologists for “terrorism.” The ADL’s embrace of the Trump administration (and alliance with antisemitic Christian Zionists) led its president Jonathan Greenblatt to grotesquely excuse Elon Musk’s Nazi salutes at Trump’s inaugural celebration in January.

Meanwhile, the ADL tracks protests by thousands of Jewish activists in the anti-Zionist Jewish Voice for Peace, labeling them “antisemitic.” Now the ADL is promoting the “STOP HATE Act, a bipartisan bill in Congress that would order social media companies to censor posts criticizing Israel, such as videos showing the starvation of children and other war crimes in Gaza. The ADL lobbies for the continuation of U.S. arms shipments to Israel, without which the Gaza genocide would not be possible,¹ as well as for U.S. cops to be sent to Israel for “training” (in how to control and terrorize oppressed populations).

In recent months the ADL has veered even more sharply to the right, vociferously defending the genocidal “war” aimed at wiping out the Palestinian people in Gaza after the 7 October 2023 breakout from the giant prison that is Gaza and its indiscriminate attack on Israeli communities by Hamas. The ADL supported the Trump administration’s withholding of \$400 million in federal grants to Columbia University for supposedly tolerating pro-Palestinian activism on campus. In March, ADL leader Greenblatt obscenely hailed the kidnapping by federal agents of Columbia graduate student Mahmoud Khalil, a campus protest leader.

The ADL has acted as informants for the FBI on Arab and pro-Palestinian campus groups since the 1950s. It used

to ostensibly combat anti-black racism, anti-gay bigotry, and even Islamophobia, but now references to “racial justice” have mostly been dropped. Even in the 1980s, the ADL was exposed for its spying and infiltration activities against left-wing groups, including passing information on anti-apartheid activists to the white-supremacist regime in South Africa.

The ADL is currently blanketing schools with its “No Place for Hate” campaign. This “anti-bias training” explicitly equates criticism of Israel with antisemitism and promotes “standing with Israel.” It calls on students and teachers to report anti-Israel “bias incidents” to the ADL and other authorities. This has led to the ADL filing Title VI “civil rights” complaints against several schools and universities for supposedly creating a “hostile environment” for Jewish students and teachers. Failure to comply with a White House *diktat* will lead to withholding of federal funds.

Last year, an ADL “civil rights” complaint against Philadelphia’s school system demanded “suspension and expulsion” of students and “suspension or termination” of teachers for anti-Israel protests or simply statements. In Massachusetts, a 2023 MTA resolution calling to halt military support for “the Netanyahu government’s genocidal war on the Palestinian people in Gaza,” and another for the union to prepare curriculum resources on the history and current events in Israel and Occupied Palestine” set off a firestorm. The ADL launched a smear campaign against the MTA in the media and in state legislative hearings, giving rise to death threats to MTA officials and staffers. On August 7, a new ADL civil right complaint was announced against the Baltimore, Maryland school district.

The other national teachers union, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), with 1.7 million members, is led by supposed “progressive Zionist” Randi Weingarten. At the July 2024 AFT convention, members and locals put forward resolutions calling for divestment from Israel (an illusory liberal program seeking to pressure U.S. imperialism and corporations), for defense of pro-Palestinian students and faculty from repression, and for ending U.S. military aid to Israel. These resolutions were not even brought to a vote, as the AFT bureaucracy would only back a resolution for a “ceasefire” (under the Zionist jackboot) in Gaza and a “two-state” solution, i.e., a Palestinian mini-state subject to the Israeli stranglehold. And after endorsing “Genocide Joe” Biden for president in 2023, when he dropped out, Weingarten switched to Democrat Kamala Harris with lightning speed. The NEA similarly endorsed first Biden, and then Harris.

As Class Struggle Education Workers stated on the eve of the 2024 election (see page 17 of this issue), whether it’s over gag orders about genocide in Gaza or attacks on pro-Palestinian demonstrators, opposing deportations, defending transgender rights or defeating a racist crusade to erase black history from school libraries and classrooms, we need “a *fighting workers party* prepared to lead hard *class struggle* to defeat the *bipartisan capitalist war on public education*.” As the witch-hunters in Congress target colleges and universities as well as K-12 schools, teachers unions must take a strong stand in defense of the Palestinians and against the new McCarthyism seeking to regiment education in the service of imperialist and Zionist war. ■

¹ See “Gaza Genocide Made in USA,” in *The Internationalist* No. 73, June-August 2024.

Genocide...

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infuriated the war criminals atop the Zionist state and their backers, in Israel and abroad. So much so, that in the United States, in December 2023 Congressional hearings, right-wingers such as the fascistic Elise Stefank called for disciplinary action, including expulsion, of students who charge Israel with genocide, claiming that this equaled “bullying” of Jewish students.

When Gaza solidarity encampments sprang up on campuses around the U.S. in the spring of 2024, they were met with vicious repression and the arrests of more than 3,000 pro-Palestinian demonstrators. Now, leading universities have begun expelling and even revoking university degrees of those who protest the Zionist murder machine. The central accusation is that anti-Zionism equals antisemitism, a vicious slander (in particular against the many Jewish protesters who oppose the slaughter being carried out in their name).¹

There have also been attempts to prevent faculty and public school teachers and staff from speaking out against the monstrous crimes being committed by the Zionist militarists and their imperialist arms suppliers, both under the Democratic administration of “Genocide Joe” Biden and under Republican Donald Trump, who has called for removing the entire Palestinian Arab population from the Gaza Strip to turn it into valuable beachfront property. The CSEW mobilized rapidly against such threats, both in NYC public schools² and, together with the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth, at the City University of New York.³

Even as the Zionist military has systematically destroyed

¹ See “Weaponized Zionist Big Lie: A Cover for Israel/U.S. Genocide,” on page 78 of this issue.

² See “Down with the Gag Order Against NYC Teachers!” (on page 82) and “Marjorie Stamberg Protests Gag Order, Speaks Up for Palestinians” (page 81).

³ See “Defend the Palestinians! Defy the Witch-Hunters! (24 October 2023) at <https://igclassstruggle.blogspot.com/>.

three-quarters of all buildings in Gaza, murdering upwards of 100,000 people (out of a total population of 2.1 million), many killed as their apartment buildings were bombed, Israel has particularly targeted schools. Out of 664 schools in Gaza, by August of last year 564 (85%) had been bombed in what U.N. experts termed “scholasticide.” This was not so-called “collateral damage,” but deliberately striking schools that were serving as shelter for tens of thousands of people whose homes had been destroyed. Moreover, all 13 universities in Gaza have been razed. In seeking to destroy an entire people, the genocidalists aim at destroying their culture and historical memory.

In these days, the Israeli government (with U.S. backing) has intensified the genocide by deliberately starving the people of Gaza. And with already minimal food deliveries slashed by 90%, well over 600 people have been killed near distribution sites by Israeli forces and mercenaries in the last two months. And now the Israeli government plans to push all Palestinians out of north Gaza. The horrific reality has become so patently obvious that now even the most prominent Israeli human rights groups have declared the war to be genocide. One pro-Israel academic wrote (*New York Times*, 15 July), “I’m a Genocide Scholar. I Know It When I See It.”

But registering the undeniable fact will not change that reality, nor will consumer boycotts, appeals to powerless courts, humanitarian pleas to governments or endless calls for a ceasefire. It is necessary to appeal to the workers of the world to take action, as the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions – Gaza did in a July 23 “Cry in the Face of Starvation and Death.” Since October 2023, we in the CSEW have been calling for workers action to stop arms deliveries to Israel. In the last several months, port workers in Morocco, Fos sur Mer, France and Piraeus, Greece have laudably refused to handle ships bearing these death cargos.

The Palestinian people of Gaza are experience a cataclysm. The working people of the world are their only salvation. ***The workers movement must take action now to shut down all transport to Israel!***

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For International Workers Action to Stop Arms to Israel!

U.S. / Israel Genocide and “Scholasticide” in Gaza

From the beginning of the Israeli assault on Gaza in October 2023, it has been clear that it is a genocidal war, intended to drive out or wipe out the Palestinian people in the “world’s largest open-air prison.” It has also been clear from the outset that this war of extermination would not have been possible without the munitions and warplanes supplied by the United States. We called to defeat the U.S./Israel genocidal war and to defend the Palestinian population against this mass murder, and called on the workers movement to bring to bear its power to stop the slaughter.

By late 2023, the ongoing genocide had become so obvious that the South African government-initiated proceedings against Israel in the International Court of Justice. While the ICJ is a largely toothless institution, and international law is a myth, the charge

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Saher Alghorrah for The New York Times

Food distribution in Gaza, 2 August 2025. Famine is spreading and hundreds have died in desperate effort to feed their families.

**NEA Votes to Break with ADL Zionist Witch-Hunters,
But Union Tops Capitulate**

Teachers Unions Must Fight Neo-McCarthyite Censorship

In Portland, Oregon, on July 5 the Representative Assembly of the National Education Association (NEA) voted to cut ties with the vicious Zionist witch-hunters of the Anti-Defamation League, which is avidly fingering teachers and students while seeking to suppress criticism and protest of Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people. With almost 3 million members, the NEA is the largest union in the United States, representing public school teachers and staff, as well as faculty and staff at many colleges and universities. At its convention, New Business Item 39 stated:

“NEA will not use, endorse, or publicize any materials from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), such as its curricular materials or its statistics. NEA will not participate in ADL programs or publicize ADL professional development offerings.”

In response to the ADL’s attacks on teachers and students, and on academic freedom in general, many NEA teachers and caucuses had joined the “#droptheADL” campaign which seeks to break partnerships between the ADL and schools and

various social organizations. The NEA resolution stated that: “Despite its reputation as a civil rights organization, the ADL is not the social justice educational partner it claims to be.” In fact, while once supporting civil rights struggles, since the 1970s it has been acting as a hit squad to squelch protest against Israeli crimes, labeling anti-Zionism “the new antisemitism.”

Following the vote by the Representative Assembly, the ADL and the heads of the American Jewish Committee and the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations issued a statement denouncing the resolution. It ranted: “This resolution was not just an attack on the ADL, but a larger attack against Jewish educators, students, and families.” Right-wing Republicans in Congress introduced a proposal to revoke the federal charter of the NEA. (Unique among labor unions, the NEA is a federally chartered corporation to “advance the interests of the profession of teaching.”)

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