

# Class Struggle

## Education Workers Newsletter

“Educate – Agitate – Organize”

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## **We Need a Workers Party Not Obama/Romney’s “Only Game in Town”**

*An out of town gambler gets into a taxi and asks the driver where he can get some action.*

*The driver says, “I’ll take you to the game at Joe’s Garage.”*

*The gambler says, “But I’ve heard that game is crooked.”*

*“Yeah,” says the driver, “it’s rigged, but it’s the only game in town.”*

When Barack Obama was elected in 2008, millions of decent people wept for joy. In this deeply racist country, Americans voted for a black president – a cultural near miracle if not a political one. He talked about the “audacity of hope” and promised “change we can believe in.” The CSEW was not among the believers, and we forthrightly said so. It soon became painfully clear that although the 2008 election signified an important cultural shift in the optics of race in the U.S., Obama was the champion of change that only Wall Street could believe in.

Obama took time out from his 2008 campaign to support the huge Wall Street giveaway/bailout. As Alexander Cockburn pointed out, usually Wall Street waits for presidents to get into office before it demands that they demonstrate their fealty. But in Obama’s case, they wanted it before he swore the oath. Many of the players in the Clinton and Bush regimes – Timothy Geithner, Lawrence Summers, and others from Goldman Sachs – immediately took the financial reins. And Wall Street has been calling the shots in



CSEW at New York City protest against the racist murder of Trayvon Martin, April 10.

the Obama administration ever since. To direct educational policy, Obama rejected the liberal educator Linda Darling Hammond in favor of Arne Duncan, self-styled “CEO” of the Chicago Public Schools whose corporate education “reforms” were solidly supported by the city’s business elite.

Soon after the election, Obama supporters became confused and anguished by the actions and policies of the White House. Instead of the hoped-for change, Obama maintained essential continuity with Bush policies, from war and occupation in the Middle East to attacks on living standards at home. The political connective tissue joining the Obama White House to the policies of the Bush administration was

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## **Resolution Against PSC Affiliation to the Working Families Party**

*The following resolution was presented by a CSEW activist to the October 2011 meeting of the Professional Staff Congress Delegate Assembly, in opposition to the union leadership's proposal to affiliate the PSC to the "Working Families Party." The back-page article in this issue discusses the ensuing debate and eventual outcome.*

WHEREAS, the Working Families Party (WFP) endorsed Andrew Cuomo and, as stated by its executive director at the September PSC Delegate Assembly, tailored its policies to his campaign; and

WHEREAS, since his election as governor, Cuomo has followed through on his campaign pledge to attack public employees' unions, while pushing brutal budget cuts targeting public education, our students, our fellow workers and the most vulnerable sectors of society; and

WHEREAS, in 2006 the WFP was the first to endorse Elliot Spitzer, who as attorney general had imposed the Taylor Law against the transit strike the previous year, as well as David Paterson, who went on to target CUNY for major budget cuts; and

WHEREAS, the WFP exists above all to provide a ballot line for disaffected labor voters to support Democrats, and affiliation to the WFP would institutionalize our union's political subordination to the Democratic Party; and

WHEREAS, despite the rhetoric of "hope and change" under which labor backed Democratic candidate Barack Obama in 2008, his White House is leading attacks on public education, wages colonial wars abroad, and targets vital social programs at Wall Street's behest; and

WHEREAS, it is high time to fight for the political independence of labor, which is crucial to defending the union movement and making it a force capable of fighting for workers and all the oppressed; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the PSC Delegate Assembly reject the proposal to affiliate the union to the Working Families Party, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that instead, our union should advocate that labor break from the Democrats and build a workers party against the parties of capital.

\* \* \*

## **Resolution on NYPD Spying at CUNY**

*The resolution below was presented by a CSEW member and approved unanimously by the Executive Committee of the Hunter PSC in October 2011.*

The executive committee of the Hunter College chapter of the Professional Staff Congress condemns the widespread spying on Muslim students and campus

clubs by the New York Police Department that has been revealed in an on-going investigation by the Associated Press. The clandestine operation goes back at least to 2003, according to the reports.

Among the groups and campuses targeted were those at several colleges of the City University of New York, particularly Brooklyn College. At Hunter, as well as Queens College, City College and La Guardia, documents uncovered by AP reports say the police used "secondary" undercover agents, raising the possibility that other agencies or planted informants were used to infiltrate student associations.

The NYPD's spying, infiltration and racial, religious and anti-immigrant profiling target our students and violate the basic democratic rights of all of us who work and study at Hunter and throughout the City University of New York. They are a fundamental violation of academic freedom, the effect of which can only be to chill and intimidate inquiry and discussion.

Such fishing expeditions violate the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution protecting freedom of speech and association. The secret spying operation may also be in violation of a 1992 memorandum of understanding between the NYPD and the City University prohibiting city police from entering CUNY campuses in non-emergency situations without permission of university officials.

Despite CUNY officials' denials that they knew of the spying operation, in some cases NYPD detectives were reportedly given access to student records, which would place CUNY in violation of the 1974 federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act. According to that law, this could mean that all federal funding to the City University would be cut off, including research funds, Pell Grants and federal student loans.

The Hunter College chapter of the PSC joins with the Brooklyn Faculty Council in protesting this outrage, demanding that the police infiltration of City University stop, and calling on CUNY officials, including the Hunter administration and Public Safety Department, to detail their knowledge of or involvement in the spy operation, and to inform any groups or individuals targeted of the fact of the surveillance and the nature of the information gathered.

Furthermore, we urge appropriate individual plaintiffs to submit a Freedom of Information Act request requiring the City University, the NYPD and other agencies (including CIA and DHS) to turn over any documents concerning intelligence gathering at CUNY. Any employees or officials of the City University who participated in, cooperated with or knew of this illegal operation should have their employment terminated forthwith.

This must all stop now. The NYPD and all police/spy agencies must get off and stay off our campuses.

### Obama/Romney: You Choose, You Lose (cont. from p. 1)

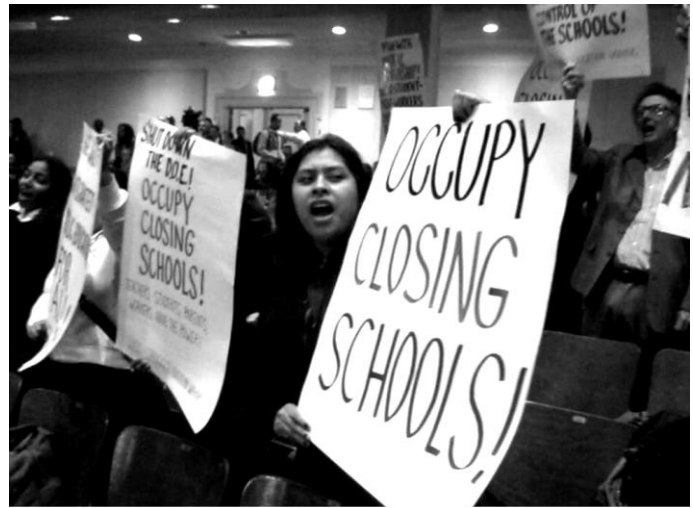
everywhere to be seen. There was a lot of disappointment in liberal and “progressive” circles. Michael Moore, for instance, tried to explain Obama’s personnel choices in an interview with Naomi Klein in the *Nation* magazine (12 October 2009). Faced with the reappointment of Bernanke and the hiring of Geithner, Summers and the rest of the Wall Street gang, Moore said that “in order to not sink into a deep, dark pit of despair, I said to myself...Who better to fix the mess than the people who created it? He’s bringing them in to clean up their own mess.” But Moore knows that such ideas belong in the land of Oz. “Just keep repeating it: ‘There’s no place like home. There’s no place like home.’” Right-wing gadfly Sarah Palin baited the growing number of disillusioned Obama supporters, with the question: “That hopey changey thing, How’s it workin’ out for ya?”

Of course, it’s not working out at all because when all the election hoopla is over, Obama is just another capitalist politician, another CEO of the capitalist enterprise. And capitalism is an economic and social system that has its own relentless logic and consequences: boom to bust economy, imperialist war, racism, ever-increasing inequality, oppression of women, environmental devastation, social dysfunction – a society arranged from top to bottom for the profit of a few.

The capitalists naturally like it better when the word *capitalism*, not to mention their system, is not too much on the public’s mind. Their entire ideological and cultural apparatus is devoted to the message that capitalism is not just another “ism.” They prefer that people believe that capitalism represents the end of history, a force of nature rather than a historically constructed arrangement of social relations that could be replaced by another “ism,” say socialism or communism. In the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher and her coterie of hard-right union-busters coined the slogan, “There Is No Alternative” to capitalism, or TINA for short. But the recent boom-bust crisis changed all that. Indeed, there are historical moments when the architecture of the whole system cannot be hidden. We are in such a moment now.

It’s pretty easy to document the disastrous effects of capitalism in these painful days of what has been dubbed the Great Recession, which most economists agree isn’t going away any time soon, at least as far as the effects on the working class are concerned. The wounds of social and economic inequalities lie exposed and raw. On the same day in October, 2011 that the stock market cracked 10,000 (it’s now over 13,000) and Goldman Sachs resumed handing out billions in bonuses at pre-crash levels, wages reached a 19-year low. Wall Street and the top of the wealth pyramid have already made back all the money they lost in the initial collapse.

While the mainstream TV networks interview policy wonks and stock analysts about the “green shoots of recovery,” working-class lives are devastated: families are chucked out of their foreclosed homes, wastelands replace once thriving industrial areas, increasingly children live in deep poverty, many suffering from hunger now called “food insecurity”; a healthcare system is devoted to the profits of insurance companies and Big Pharma where the



**From Obama to Bloomberg, capitalist drive against public ed means school closings and union-busting. We call to occupy (take over) schools targeted for closing.** (Internationalist photo)

companies’ virtual Death Panels condemn nearly 45,000 uninsured people to die every year (*American Journal of Public Health*, September 2009). Wall Street is popping champagne corks, but the child poverty rate is up to 22%, homelessness is rising, and 76% of Americans, in a recent ABC poll, said that they thought the country was still in recession.

Back in the fall of 2008, we in Class Struggle Education Workers were almost unique among educator activists in warning that in terms of education, on the war, the economy and much else, Democrat Obama was no better than his Republican rival McCain. In fact, in the presidential debates the candidates explicitly agreed that they had no differences on education. But still, both national teachers unions (AFT and NEA) endorsed Obama, and many teacher activists supported the Democratic candidate, whether openly or implicitly. We caught a lot of flack at the time from others who considered themselves leftists but said “now is not the time” to tell unpopular truths upfront, and there were even attempts to censor us for opposing Obama. Eventually, after three-plus years of unrelenting attacks on teachers, it was OK to criticize the administration in “progressive” circles.

But now it’s campaign season again, and with a nod to the “Occupy” movement Obama is talking about “fairness” and taxing millionaires, so liberals are praising him as finally returning to a “bold vision” of social and economic justice, and union bureaucrats are yet again funneling millions to the Democrats. Not everyone is buying it: at a recent hearing on closing schools in New York (at John Dewey HS in South Brooklyn), a man approached a supporter of Class Struggle Education Workers who was distributing a CSEW leaflet calling for mobilizing the power of labor to stop the closings, which are coming straight from the Obama White House. “I really agree with you about Obama,” he said. “Too many people are giving him a pass.” As for the union leadership, he added: “It drives me to despair. Here they are ‘triangulating’ away like Obama” – trying to position themselves so they stay inside the “conversation” about education “reform” –

“and meanwhile a freight train is barreling down the track at us.”

Not since Lyndon Johnson campaigned on the slogan of “no wider war in Asia” as he escalated the war in Vietnam has the country witnessed more hypocritical campaign rhetoric than that being churned out by the Democrats and the labor bureaucracy. Some self-identified “progressives” continue to be in a state of confusion, and many are deeply demoralized with the actions and policies of the Obama White House. Labor is reeling from significant direct hits by the Obama regime. But they are all lining up to support the Democrats again in 2012 as always. The question is, why?

### Lesser Evil... Not

Many people fed up with the policies of Obama and his administration nevertheless support the Democrats as the lesser evil. Talking with teachers and students about our political opposition to Obama and the Democrats (see “Top Ten Reasons...,” page 6), CSEW members are often told: “We agree with you about the Democrats, and we don’t even like capitalism all that much, but damn, have you seen the Republicans?”

The Republicans certainly make this appeal to “lesser evilism” attractive. As the entire political landscape of the country shifts ever-rightward in the absence of real political opposition, the Republican Party – since the early 20th century explicitly devoted to the buttoned-up business values of the Chamber of Commerce – now sounds like a raving Ted Nugent and appears to have become the political expression of the far right-wing lunatic fringe. They rail against contraception and want to subject women seeking abortions to invasive vaginal probes; they want to defund Planned Parenthood and dump Title X family planning programs, kill NPR; build moats and electric fences on the border; they reject evolution and much of environmental science; they call Obama a socialist who wants to destroy free-market capitalism (really?); and their candidate, Mitt Romney, wants to appoint doddering wing nut Robert Bork to the Supreme Court. Mainstream critics point out that Republican heroes Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon could not find a comfortable place in the Republican Party in its current mood.

It is not surprising that people support what they take to be a lesser political evil. As individuals we go through life choosing lesser evils in avoidance-avoidance selections. It is rational to choose the better of bad options: nuclear or coal, surgery now or later, 8 o’clock classes or late evenings, J train or Z train, Chris Matthews or Wolf Blitzer. As the *New York Times* (April 19) put it in a recent article about the election campaign in Ohio, “for many voters here choosing between President Obama and Mitt Romney is like trying to decide between liver and brussels sprouts – a selection they would rather not have to make.” We know brussels sprouts. Brussels sprouts are good for you. But President Obama is no brussels sprout – and the Democratic Party is no lesser evil.

In fact, in the field of education and many other respects, *things have gotten worse under the Democratic administration*. We say that not because we believe “the worse, the better.” Obama’s policies are overall a continuation of Bush’s: more war/occupation of Iraq, Afghanistan; Bush’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB, variously known as “no child left untested” and “no vendor left behind”) has been replaced by Obama’s almost identical “Race to the Top” (race to the bottom); bankers are still getting bailed out; teacher-bashing is still the name of the game. At least against Bush and the Republicans there was a pretense of resistance (though not much in reality). Obama has succeeded where the Republicans failed to impose corporate education “reforms” because the teachers unions and other educators have stifled any real opposition out of loyalty to the Democrats.

Of course, there are differences between the two capitalist parties, because historically they appeal to different constituencies and have somewhat different strategies to advance capitalism and imperialism. And on some specific issues, notably abortion and reproductive rights, the Democrats have positioned themselves to contrast with their rivals and win women’s votes. But even on such specific issues much ground has been lost in the overall rightward drift and shift of the political landscape. The actual state of class struggle, not campaign rhetoric, determines results on the ground. Real opportunities to exercise abortion rights, for instance (not to mention free abortion on demand), are increasingly restricted as abortion providers are forced to retreat. Crippled by loyalty to Democrats, independent labor action shrivels, the capacity for working-class struggle weakens, and the political center of gravity moves ever-rightward.

Support – particularly labor support – for the Democratic Party as the lesser evil follows a pattern of continuing defeats that has resulted in the miserable political state we find ourselves in today. From the perspective of historical outcomes and our current capacity to change society for the better, *the Democrats are no lesser evil* – not in some distant utopian future but on the ground today. It is mainly through the Democratic Party, not the Republicans, that working-class and black struggle is strangled. Working-class independence matters today, on the ground, in every arena where working people have a stake in the outcome. As long as working people are hamstrung by their support to the “lesser evil” Democrats, the pattern of defeat will continue. With their political strategy of “fight the right” and their support of Democratic “friends of labor,” U.S. unions have been significantly diminished in membership and effective power.

This particular American version of debilitating class collaboration has its historic origin in the making of the modern Democratic Party with Franklin D. Roosevelt’s coalition of labor, blacks, and openly racist Southern Dixiecrats. The Dixiecrats exited the Party in the latter 1960s as the Civil Rights Movement developed and the Democrats lost their hold on the racist “solid South.” When reformists and radicals talk about pressuring the Democrats, they invoke FDR and the New Deal. *The Nation* magazine publisher and TV talking head Katrina vanden Heuvel is fond of quoting a reluctant FDR as say-

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ing to the disappointed progressives of his day, “make me do it.” She and her magazine regularly call upon a mythical “mass movement” to pressure Barack Obama to the liberal left.

### New Deal or No Deal

FDR is the hero in customary liberal and reformist fairy tales. According to the story, Once Upon a Time when a Great Depression ravaged the Land and even white men rode the rails, a Great and kindly, wise patrician Ruler arose who cared so much about his people he gave them a New Deal. Thus he created prosperity out of economic devastation. The Great Leader slew the multi-headed banks, subdued the awful corporations, made possible union organizing, and re-shaped the government to serve working people and the poor. And so the People lived Happily Ever After until one dark day when the Usurper, Ronald Reagan, declared the End of the New Deal. The People are waiting for another Hero and the return of the New Deal. And so it goes...

This myth has little to offer the historically-inclined or those who like their history evidence-based. Roosevelt’s New Deal was instituted not to save working people, but to save capitalism. (Nor did it do away with mass unemployment – it took World War II to do that.) It largely excluded African American and Latino workers. Its policies were used mainly to divert and undermine a surge of labor organizing. Under the Wagner Act, for instance, the state legally codified its power to suppress labor struggle. The Wagner Act is the legal foundation for New York’s anti-labor Taylor Law and other such laws that sanction capitalist state intervention into labor struggle. Most important, the New Deal forged the coalition between labor and the Democratic Party that still shapes the constricted contours of U.S. political life for working people.

FDR and the politics of the New Deal are not a source for the solution of what ails the working class. The historical collaboration between the capitalist Democratic Party and the labor movement forged during the New Deal represents the centrality of the problem – a political collaboration and partial institutional integration of a major capitalist party and the union movement, established through the continuing class collaboration of the labor bureaucrats, that layer of class traitors pioneer U.S. socialist, Daniel De Leon, dubbed the “labor lieutenants of capital.” More than any other political reality, this historical collaboration between class antagonists answers the question: How did we get to this wretched political state we are in today? Failing to break with the Democrats means that it can only get worse.

### Beyond Tweedledee and Dumb

One might have thought that the current economic crisis of capitalism and the greatest income inequality



Above: August 2011. CSEW worked to bring CUNY and high-school students, adjuncts to Verizon strikers’ picket lines.

since the 1920s should have driven a widespread labor, left, and black militant uprising. Instead the U.S. got the “Tea Party.” The recent populist “Occupy” activities attracted many disaffected young people, but a movement based on the 99% vs. the 1% is a statistical reality but a political mirage, blurring the reality of class divisions. Without a coherent, explicit class-struggle political program and leadership to oppose the capitalist system, oppositional activities are not sustainable. There can be no effective political opposition in the U.S. so long as workers, blacks, and the oppressed find their political expression in the Democratic Party, or the Working Families Party, or the Greens, or the Republicans or other capitalist political parties.

From the point of view of capitalist rule, the genius of the U.S. two-party system is that it restricts choice and constrains political discourse. In school, children are taught that this system accounts for the remarkable stability of U.S. constitutional government. You may choose this or that business party. Popular ideology works full time to marginalize other possibilities and seeks to contract the circumference of political action. Politics is defined narrowly as electoral politics and elections are defined as democracy. As played in the U.S., presidential elections are a TV reality show, a political version of *American Idol* where the audience gets worked up and then let down, and the outcome for continued capitalist rule is assured in advance.

But the rigged game set up by the two capitalist parties is not the only game in town. Unlike the election game, there is plenty of real political action to be had. Instead of wasting energy and resources in Democratic Party election campaigns, unions could rebuild with campaigns to organize the unorganized, mobilize for struggle, and defend labor rights and the oppressed. For education

activists, particularly in NYC, there are compelling struggles to defend closing schools (which we cover in this issue) and public education generally, and to oppose the semi-privatization of CUNY. But the single most important thing to do politically is to break the pattern of defeat that results from clinging to the Democrats. Put our energy instead into building a class-struggle working-class party that could give political expression to the revolutionary potential of the working class as it fights for a workers government. That is the mission of the CSEW.

In this endeavor, we claim the mantle of political realism against those who support the Democrats as a “less-er evil.” For those seeking a meaningful way forward amidst an all-sided social crisis, it is not realistic to support the Democratic Party. One popular definition of crazy is to keep doing the same thing and expecting a different result. It is also less than a scientific disposition. And as Marx liked to point out, to be radical means getting to the root of the matter. Capitalism is at the root of each aspect of the increasingly critical situation we find ourselves in; it has to be overturned, with the working class itself taking power.

In the first issue of *Class Struggle* (November-December, 2008) amidst a virtual tidal wave of liberal

Obamamania on college campuses, the CSEW expressed its opposition to the popular Democratic candidate and pointed the way forward to the possibility of a more realistic future:

“The fight for the *political independence of the working class* is the touchstone for revitalizing the workers movement – and each one of the urgent tasks of defending labor and the oppressed today. This demands an active fight for a class-struggle *workers* party committed to the fight for a workers government. This understanding distinguishes the Class Struggle Education Workers from all those who seek to ‘pressure’ Obama into ‘changing the priorities’ of U.S. imperialism....

“Only from this standpoint is it possible...to unchain the power of labor against attacks on living standards, jobs, and basic democratic liberties; to mobilize workers’ strikes against imperialist wars; to wage an uncompromising struggle for black freedom and the rights of immigrants, women, gays and lesbians, and all the oppressed, and to stand in genuine solidarity with working people throughout the world.”

– by Charlie Brover

## Top Ten Reasons Why Education Unions Should Not Be Endorsing Barack Obama

*“The PSC objects to the AFT’s endorsement of President Obama for the 2012 election, notably given his administration’s policies on public education.”*

– Motion presented by CSEW member at PSC Delegate Assembly

*On February 7, the American Federation of Teachers announced its endorsement of Barack Obama for reelection in the 2012 elections. The Professional Staff Congress-CUNY (PSC) – representing 22,000 faculty and staff at the City University of New York – is affiliated to the AFT, as is the New York City schoolteachers’ union (UFT). At the February PSC Delegate Assembly (DA), a motion objecting to this endorsement was presented by CSEW member Sándor John of Hunter College, coming to a vote two months later. Amidst heated debates, the motion received considerable support. (Details at the end of this article.)*

As political activists committed to class struggle, the CSEW opposes, on principle, support for all capitalist parties – Democrats, Republicans, Greens, Working Families, etc. As educators we were particularly repelled by this labor endorsement of a White House that has done so much direct harm to teachers and students, and promises to do more. We have assembled a list of reasons for our opposition to the AFT’s endorsement. The list is presented here in no particular order and is by no means exhaustive. We invite readers of *Class Struggle* to add to the list. Just complete the sentence: I/We oppose the unions’ endorsement of Barack Obama because. . .

**1. We support labor struggle and a strong labor movement.** Labor struggle is necessarily political. The eco-

nomic, social, and political interests of union members cannot be advanced by support to a political party that represents the interests of capital. Not even basic economic requirements can be met so long as the union is trapped within the confines of the Democratic Party. This class collaboration, arranged and promoted by bureaucratic leadership, is a recipe for labor defeat.

**2. We defend public education against Obama’s privatizing campaign.** If you liked Bush’s educational policy, you’ll love Obama’s. The Democrats try to outdo Republicans in the bipartisan drive to undermine public education. The White House has expanded and intensified the reactionary education program that Bush launched as “No Child Left Behind.” Obama’s Race to the Top piles on in the effort to dismantle and privatize public education. To “dash for the cash,” states are required to increase the number of privately managed schools although there is no evidence that they outperform public schools. The White House facilitates the states’ efforts to gut the public sector including higher education, laying off teachers and other public employees, and imposing brutal budget cuts that directly affect CUNY and the most vulnerable sectors of society.

**3. We oppose Obama’s imperialist wars and escalations.** Obama continues Bush’s militarist drive and the endless bipartisan “war on terrorism.” Obama’s White House and Pentagon have “surged” U.S. imperialist wars in Afghanistan and into Pakistan. Breaking his election promise, Obama failed to close the torture chambers of Guantánamo; initiated an imperial “right” to assassinate U.S. citizens at will; and imposes starvation sanctions against Iran. On the “home front,” endless imperialist wars mean attacks on the

basic rights of unions, immigrants, Muslims, African Americans, and all the oppressed.

**4. We defend immigrants against Obama's racist dragnet.** The Obama administration has dramatically extended the search-and-deport operation against immigrant workers, setting new records for increased deportation and harassment. Under Obama, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency has set an official "goal" of *400,000 deportations per year*.

**5. We oppose Obama's corporate model of education.** Our students are not widgets. Seeking to impose a "free-market model" of education, Obama and his Education secretary Arne Duncan push a regimen of charters, merit pay, mass firings and school closings, and a juggernaut of phony tests in the name of "school reform." The corporate school deformers and privatizers claim subjecting education to capitalist market principles will "fix" the schools, with nonstop testing and more punishment of employees (teachers) who make a product that students consume. No wonder they're funded by billionaire equity investors and hedge fund managers. Education is about intellectual development, not production for consumers.

**6. We oppose teacher-bashing and Obama's attacks on public sector workers.** Teacher-bashing has become a political blood sport. To receive federal aid, Obama and Duncan require that states evaluate teachers by test scores of their students. There is no basis in educational research to settle on 40% for test scores (or any other number) as a basis for legitimate teacher evaluation. State legislators do not decide how other professionals are evaluated. Support to "merit pay" helps them target teacher tenure and seniority, increasing the number of non-union charter schools and eliminating job protections. Contrary to their misleading "kids first" slogan, they harm kids' education, while making it easier to smear educators as "bad teachers" and set them up for firing, mainly by bashing teachers' unions.

**7. We oppose Obama's bailouts of Wall Street.** Obama took care of Wall Street speculators and bankers with "bailouts" at the expense of the working class. Wall Street financiers have now recouped their losses while working-class people across the country languish in continued unemployment and reduced standards of living. A recent ABC poll shows that 76% of Americans believe they are still in a recession.

**8. We defend the poor and most vulnerable against Obama's attacks and malign neglect.** Barack Obama has intensified the Clinton/Bush punitive policies directed at the poor. As predicted by its early critics, Clintonian "welfare reform" has devastated poor people, all the more so in capitalism's economic crisis. Child poverty is now more than 20% and rising fast along with homelessness. Obama doesn't even talk about poverty, preferring to invoke the "plight of the middle class." School "reformers" like Obama and Duncan refuse to acknowledge poverty as a cause of education problems as they blame teachers and try to make it easier to fire them.

**9. We deny the fantasy of Obama's "Post-Racial America."** The poison of racism is alive and metastasizing. By almost every economic and social measure, life in

Obama's America is worse for African Americans. While the "achievement gap" has increased, mass incarceration rates for African Americans persist. Schools are closed in black and Latino neighborhoods to make way for charters and privatization. Charter schools are more racially isolated and segregated than traditional schools (UCLA's Civil Rights Project), and as noted by researcher Gary Orfield, they are not "held to the same civil rights standard." Unlike the expensive private school that Obama's own children attend, heavily segregated schools are compelled to subject students to more high-stakes standardized tests and test prep as they strip enrichment activities and broader educational topics from the curriculum.

**10. We oppose Obama's Race to the Top and the bipartisan testing regime.** No child left untested continues and increases under Obama. As educational researcher Diane Ravitch has pointed out, "The NCLB-induced obsession with testing and test-prep activities will intensify under Race to the Top because teachers will know that their future, their reputation, and their livelihood depend on getting the scores higher, by any means necessary." This means even more narrow curricula and fewer enrichment activities, particularly in urban schools. It was surely the audacity of hypocrisy for Obama, in his State of the Union speech, to directly address teachers, demanding; "Stop teaching to the test."

C.B.

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**What happened with our motion:** As had also been the case with our resolution against the PSC affiliating to the Working Families Party (see page 2), our motion objecting to the AFT's endorsement of Obama led to heated debates, gaining support from a sizable minority of delegates representing a wide range of viewpoints.

Originally presented at the February DA, it was postponed to the March meeting, where speaker after speaker underscored how the Democratic White House is attacking public education, deporting immigrants in record numbers, carrying out imperialist mass murder, war and occupation while ripping up basic civil liberties in line with ever-increasing "national security state" measures. In response, defenders of the labor tops' Democratic loyalism accused opponents of everything from "utopian radicalism" to "back-handed support to the most reactionary forces of the present day" – and even being like those who let Hitler take power in Germany!<sup>1</sup> One leading member of the PSC offic-

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<sup>1</sup>This particular bait was beyond unhinged, given the historical facts. In the 1932 German elections the Social Democrats supported the bourgeois "lesser evil" candidate Paul von Hindenburg – who won, and then appointed Hitler chancellor the following year. As for the German Stalinists, they vehemently opposed the call, raised by Trotsky's International Left Opposition, for united workers action in the streets to stop the fascists, fearing – despite their leftist phraseology – that this would open the way to workers revolution. The real historical lesson is that chaining labor to capitalist politicians is a proven recipe for devastating defeat.



ers' New Caucus said "yes, the Democrats and Republicans are both capitalist parties" – *but* a "realistic" outlook means we have to support the former; another noted "that's where the power is and the money is." For good measure, a third reminded those present that the union "is not a left-wing socialist party." When attendance fell below the specified quorum, our motion was postponed again. At the April DA, a majority voted to have no more debate on the issue. Our motion was then voted down, with about a quarter of those present voting in favor.

Not for nothing did friend and foe observe that these

were the most interesting Delegate Assembly meetings in recent memory. We were struck by the number of unionists who expressed appreciation for the simple fact that our motion led to an actual *debate* on labor's unending support to the Democrats. Despite the catastrophic results of this support, such debate is missing from most unions today.

It's high time for that to change. That the political subjugation of labor is one of the eternal unprinciples of its "leaders" is Reason Number One for building a class-struggle opposition. ■

## Daycare Workers Stand Up to Union-Bashing

Last fall, I was hired as a teacher's aide by a large daycare provider whose workers are represented by District Council 1707 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). In early November, management called a meeting of three of the "non-profit" company's five centers to discuss a number of measures it planned to introduce. Attending were teachers, teacher's assistants, aides and custodial workers, as well as center directors. The ethnic and social composition was standard for this job sector: of the 50 people present, one was white (the main director of the program), all but four were women; 42 were African American and the rest of us Latino, predominantly Puerto Rican.

The meeting began with the "exciting" news that "we" were expanding into new spaces, but the program director added that "we" were not approved for the same budget funding as last year and would face cuts. After dropping this bombshell he then advised everyone to "think of ways we could save money," claiming that the directors were on our side, and that at every budget meeting he personally fought for us and "our centers." It was here that he began to bash the union, telling the workers that the union's representatives "aren't fighting for you."

Throughout the presentation, the workers' response was one of quiet gloom, save the occasional murmur of distrust coupled with a raised eyebrow. A few others spoke, including a center director who said the union was never around, hadn't fought for a new contract since 2005, etc. Seeing the forlorn faces of the workers in response to the cuts and confusion about the union (which indeed had not been active in fighting for the workers' rights), I felt a need to respond. Even though I was on probation, I felt a little overwhelmed with anger at the anti-union propaganda being shoved down our throats.

When I got up, I addressed the question of the union and the union leadership. I said: "It's true that that a lot of times the union leadership has not been active and has not represented our interests the way they should. But we have to remember that the union leadership is not the union. We can't throw the baby out with the bath water. Without a union we'd all be *much* worse off, getting paid minimum wage, with *no* benefits and even more cuts."

As I spoke, workers responded with energetic nodding and a growing chorus of supportive *mm-hmm*'s. Then I said, "it's not the *union* that pays our checks and that hasn't given us a new contract in over six years, which means that we're getting paid less every year due to inflation." At this point, the room burst into yells of "that's right!" To my surprise, a group of women from my center (which at the time had no shop steward) started shouting, "We want him to be our shop steward!" Some women from other centers said "he should represent us."

After I spoke up against the boss, the room lit up: one after another, the workers got up to speak. At first it was the teacher's aides and teacher's assistants, the lowest-paid workers. One said, "I've been working here for years and nothing has changed"; others spoke about how we "can't live on what we make." Then a few teachers stood up to speak as well. After the many passionate interventions in the room, the directors called for a "recess," with one who played "good cop" saying we should "continue this discussion."

When I told my fellow CSEW members about what happened, they said the episode was an example of how workers often "get brave" when someone finally challenges management's lies. They were also concerned about what might happen, since after all I was still on probation. After the center workers unanimously proposed my candidacy, I was supposed to be formally voted in as shop steward. On the very Friday when this was due to occur, I was fired. Management made a show of claiming I hadn't met their "standards" during the probation period which ended that week – even though the director had been all smiles (and was scheduling me for various workshops) until the meeting where I spoke up in defense of the union. The workers knew I was fired as a message to them. Clearly we need a fighting leadership.

– by A.L.



## CLASS STRUGGLE EDUCATION WORKERS

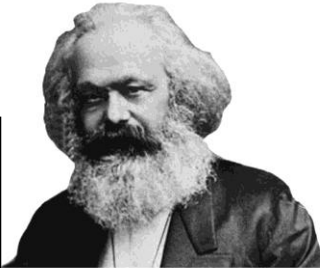
### Workshop

#### Beyond “Neo-Liberalism”

### What’s Marx Got to Do With It?

#### Capitalism, Racism and Public Education

“What’s Marx Got to Do With It?” was the title of a well-attended workshop we presented at the March 24 conference of the New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCoRE).



The conference drew teachers and ed school students from the New York–New Jersey–Connecticut area.

Workshop participants included NYC public school teachers and future teachers from NYU’s School of Education as well as Teachers College at Columbia. Presenting for the CSEW were Marjorie Stamberg and Sándor John.

Our title was seemingly “out there,” so we thought we would attract a handful of attendees. But the room was packed! This has to mean there are a lot of people out there looking for real answers to the crisis of public education, and the failure of any reformist solutions. In the Q&A and comment time, teachers’ questions ranged from queries on the massive student protests in Chile to “What alternative is there to supporting Obama?” and “What’s the difference between Marxism and anarcho-syndicalism?” It was a very lively discussion.

In her presentation, Marjorie outlined some key historical struggles in the fight for universal free public education. Although this is a simple democratic right, it is the product of profound social revolutions. The French Revolution of 1789-94 proclaimed compulsory primary education. But then there was period of reaction and it remained a dead letter. In the *Communist Manifesto*, written in February 1848, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels called for “Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of factory labor by children in its present form.”

This fight was taken up in the United States, where under slavery it was a crime to teach slaves to read and right. But after almost 200,000 slaves joined in fighting for their emancipation in the Civil War (the “Second American Revolution”), newly freed blacks were for the first time able to get education. The brief period of Radical Reconstruction saw an explosion for democratic rights. But these were trampled on when Jim Crow segregation was introduced.

Significant gains were once again made as a by-product of the Civil Rights Movement. But now many of those gains are being reversed. Jonathan Kozol documented this reversal in his 2005 article, “Still Separate, Still Unequal: America’s Educational Apartheid.” He notes that fifty years after

the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling recognizing that separate is not equal, American schools are more segregated than ever.

Today, much of our struggle has been focused on the nationwide drive to privatize and corporatize public education. This is seen in an extreme form in New York City, where Bloomberg runs a mayoral dictatorship through his puppet Panel for Educational Policy. Hundreds of schools have been closed, while charter schools are invading public-school space in what we have called “educational colonialism.” But it is not just Bloomberg: this policy goes up to the top, to President Obama and Education Secretary Arne Duncan. This is why we need a class-struggle program and a political fight led by an independent workers party to defend and extend public education.

In her presentation, Marjorie cited other relevant Marxist works. In the *German Ideology*, Marx and Engels made the point that “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas” of society. That is, the class which controls and owns the means of production also controls “mental production.” This is why teachers’ struggle for relevant and radical curriculum in the classroom can only go so far. She pointed out that public education is where race and class intersect – that is why so many battles are focused on the public schools. An interesting new book, *Police in the Hallways* by Kathleen Nolan, is a study of the racial profiling, surveillance and escalating police brutality in the high schools of the South Bronx.

Finally, Marjorie spoke about the privatizers’ attempts to drive out experienced unionized teachers and create what would basically be a temp labor force, which would function like an internal Peace Corps. Part of this campaign is being seen in the battle over the insane new “value added” teacher evaluations.

Discussing the intersection of education and revolution, Sándor noted that fear of the Haitian Revolution led Southern U.S. slave owners to escalate deadly punishments against slaves learning to read and write. Jefferson warned about “black crews...& missionaries” from Haiti going “into the southern states,” and on how the successful slave uprising there led to a “great disposition to insurgency,” which “in the state of Virginia, broke out into actual insurrection” (*Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804* [2006]).

Noting that CUNY Urban Ed professor Jean Anyon’s recently published *Marx and Education* has gotten a lot of interest in leftist circles, he questioned why radicals would go for the “neo-Marxism” it espouses when the ideas of Marx himself are so clearly pertinent. Being radical meant getting to the root of the matter, for Marx, who insisted on saying *what is* instead of our soft-left’s m.o. of trying to gauge what people are “ready for,” then repeating it back at them. We saw this in 2008 over Obama’s election; and again now with the attempt to build a catch-all caucus in the UFT. Sándor ended by saying no “liberatory curriculum” will bring liberation: when Marx wrote that “‘liberation’ is an historical, not a mental act,” it was a call on us to tackle the task of actually *making a revolution*. With many participants new to Marxist ideas, some great discussion ensued. ■

## On Joining the Class Struggle Education Workers

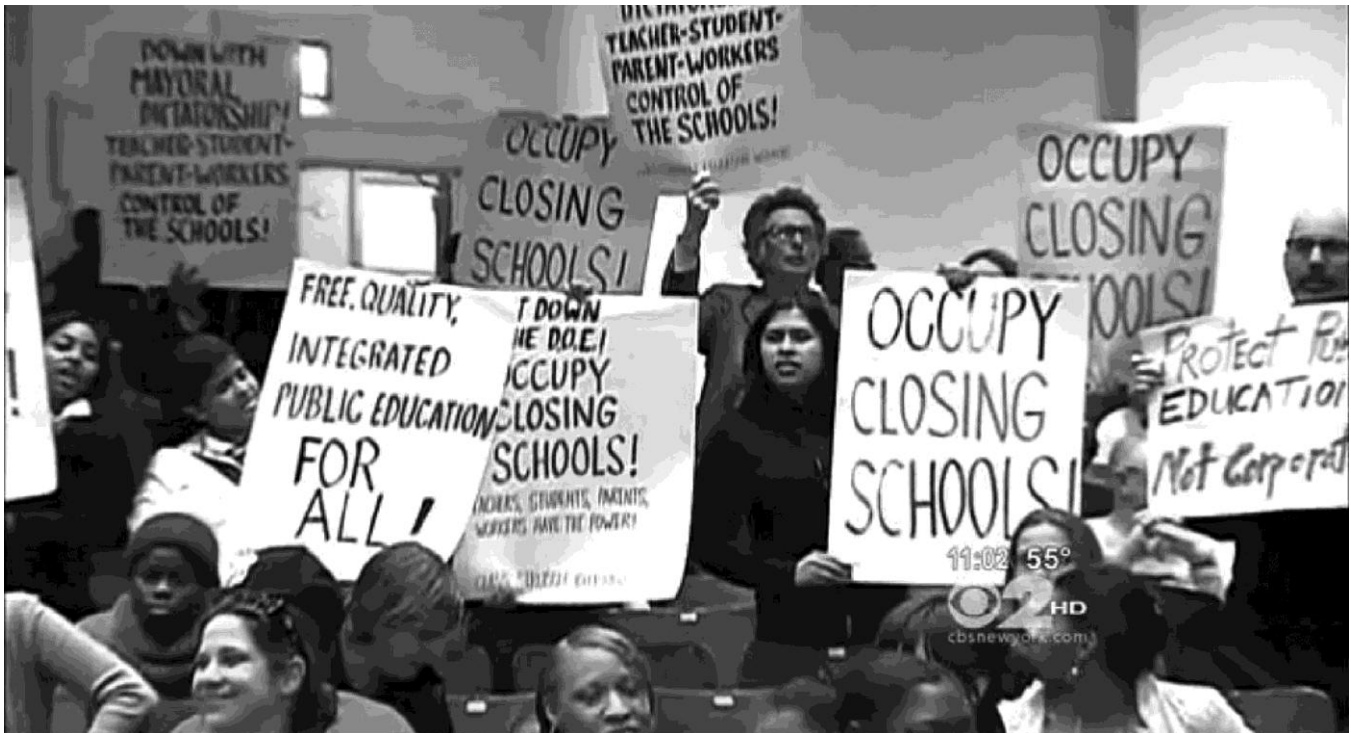
Months before hearing about the Class Struggle Education Workers, a friend and I toyed with the idea of forming a “radical activist collective” at CUNY. Our conception was for this to be a non-institutional support and action network for CUNY students and workers, through which we would set up a system of free textbook libraries, childcare, and meals; take part in radical study groups; organize for protests; and, according to our notes, “create a clear and loud voice for students and under-represented faculty and staff,” and “facilitate conversations [!] with Deans’ offices and administrative figures.”

Obviously, even *we* did not take what we were saying seriously, as this idea never came to fruition. And yet, what if it had, and we had been able to “facilitate conversations” of CUNY’s very own ruling elite and the students, faculty and staff they rule over? These “conversations” probably would have looked a lot like other bureaucratic meetings at CUNY, which pretend to consult with students on which particular flavor of administrative dictatorship they would like best (of course, they do not even pretend to consult with staff and adjunct faculty). We could have talked with and pressured CUNY’s administration until the cows came home, and they would have loved to give us the illusion that this was an accomplishment.

It was after disabusing myself of such ideas that I began to realize that it was necessary to adopt a Marxist perspective in my work as a teacher. Initially, this led to me reflect on my own situation as a student and education worker at CUNY, and to consider how I might participate in labor struggles. After joining the Professional Staff Congress at CUNY, I became involved in CUNY Contingents Unite, and was happy to learn of the Class Struggle Education Workers soon afterward. It became clear to me that no form of collaboration with the capitalist administrators would bring about student, teacher, and worker control of the university. This could only be possible through a class-struggle program that mobilizes workers’ power to abolish the Board of Trustees, the Chancellor, and other henchmen of the ruling class.

I see the CSEW’s work within the UFT and the PSC as crucial to this struggle, and inextricably connected to the struggle against racial oppression, sexual oppression, and U.S. imperialism. It is not through “facilitating conversations” between the oppressor and the oppressed that a revolutionary struggle is going to emerge. The deceit of this bourgeois ideology can only be counteracted by the organization of a politically independent class-struggle workers party, which, having no patience for “conversations” with capitalists, militantly fights for the liberation of the working class and oppressed sectors of society. These are some of the reasons why – after studying the CSEW’s program and participating in a number of activities – I joined the Class Struggle Education Workers.

– by P.S.



April 26: CSEW and Internationalist activists and friends, at PEP meeting that voted 24 more school closings. (Photo: CBS News.)

# A Radical Teacher Remembers Picket Lines, Trotsky, and a “Confrontation” over Vietnam



Photos courtesy of Lillian Pollak

On October 28, 2011, CSEW members interviewed **Lillian Pollak**, a former New York City schoolteacher who has been a radical activist for over seven decades and has been a member of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) since its foundation in 1960.

In 2008, Lillian published *The Sweetest Dream: Love, Lies, & Assassination* (A Novel of the Thirties), based on her experiences as a young revolutionary who joined the Young Communist League during the Great Depression. Repelled by the way Stalin and his followers were trampling communist ideals, she soon quit the YCL and joined the youth wing of the Trotskyist movement, organized at that time in the Communist League of America. Her novel's subtitle refers to her experiences in Mexico: her friend Sylvia Ageloff was the young activist whom Stalin's agent Ramón Mercader courted in order to gain access to the Trotsky household in Coyoacán, where Mercader assassinated the exiled Bolshevik leader in August 1940.

At a labor event last year where she performed as part of the “Raging Grannies” singing group, Lillian picked up one of our newsletters and approached us to talk politics. Discovering that our group is active in the UFT, she related a vivid anecdote about her fights over the Vietnam War with Yetta Barsh, assistant to the UFT's founding president, Albert Shanker. Hired by Shanker in fall of 1965, Barsh was married to Max Shachtman, by then a leading exponent of “State Department socialism.” (A former adherent of Trotsky's Fourth International, Shachtman broke from it in 1940 because he opposed Trotsky's position for “unconditional military defense of the USSR” against any capitalist country, beginning an odyssey to the right that led to outspoken support for the Democratic Party, the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Vietnam War.)

Intrigued by our brief conversation, we arranged the following interview. Ranging over many topics – including

*some that might otherwise not find their way into the CSEW newsletter – the interview is a vivid slice of radical history in the education milieu. Carried out at her Upper West Side apartment by Marjorie Stamberg and Sándor John, it has been shortened and edited for publication.*<sup>1</sup>

## “I Didn't Want to Picket Alone”

**SJ:** Let's start with when and where you were born.

**LP:** I was born in 1915 in New York City, in Hell's Kitchen. I've lived in New York almost all my life, in Manhattan, the Bronx, and Queens.

**SJ:** You were a member of the UFT, is that correct?

**LP:** I'm still a member, as a retired teacher. At one point, when the UFT first started, I was on the Executive Board, with Al Shanker and all the rest, right at the very beginning. During the first strike, I was the only one in my own school that went out.

**MS:** So that was 1960.

**LP:** They sent me a bouquet of flowers because I was the only one in my school – which was a big school – who went out and was picketing. I didn't want to picket alone; they sent me to another school, and they sent other pickets to my school, because it's too hard on you to do this by yourself. It was a strike for union recognition – just the formation of the union.

**SJ:** When did you start teaching?

**LP:** In the '50s; I was a sub for one year. It took me ten years to get my Bachelor's, four years for my Master's, then another Master's. I had to go mostly at night, because I worked and had children. In 1940, my son was born, and then I had another child, who became ill and died. My husband went by Eddie Pollak, or Eddie Beecher. He and his friend Johnny Poulos, who stayed in [the Socialist Workers Party] until the 1980s, they used to go down to West Street and put out *The Militant* and stuff.<sup>2</sup> Eddie remained in the SWP till the day he died. I often argued with Eddie but I've always remained interested and read, and subscribed to every damned political journal under the sun.

**MS:** You started as a substitute teacher?

**LP:** For one term. Originally there was an age limit, you couldn't be over something like 24 or 25, and then when the war [WWII] sprang up, they raised it. I was saying, “They just raised it to 75!” [Laughs] My principal finally hired me when I was about 34. When I retired in 1979, I had twenty-five years. I taught for 10 to 15 years in an 8B school in Astoria, where I lived nearby, and then I taught at Francis Lewis High School for ten years. I also did some adjunct work in the English Department at Queens College.

<sup>1</sup> Notes by *Class Struggle* newsletter. Views expressed are those of the participants, not necessarily of the CSEW.

<sup>2</sup> For many years the SWP had a print shop and offices on West Street in lower Manhattan.

**MS:** I'm reading a history of the UFT, which says that the chapter at Francis Lewis High School was very active in the first union-organizing strikes.

**LP:** I wasn't in the high school at that point. I was in an old fashioned "8B" school, P.S. 122. We called it an 8B school, because it went from kindergarten to 8B. That was before they made middle schools, and it really was wonderful. I did these big shows, with some children who at that time were [categorized as] "mentally retarded" – we don't use those words anymore.

**MS:** Right, Special Ed.

**LP:** At Francis Lewis I ran a "mini-school" with my co-worker Frieda. We had about 100 students.

The high school had a number of kids who had behavioral problems, dropped out and so on. Some were very bright. I was going to the hospital almost every day because some of them got involved in brawls and things. Anyway, they took these 100 kids, and my co-worker and the kids would report to us up on the third floor. Frieda and I taught English, I taught a little elementary Spanish, and Social Studies. And you had Math and Science teachers come up and do those subjects with the kids. We'd try to cover most of the curriculum, and try to have a personal relationship with the kids, and it was a successful school. Many kids wrote later and said, "Thanks for staying with me, and not letting me fail." We had some very, very talented black kids. Some of the students did a fashion show every year; it was phenomenal. Some of them went on into the fashion industry. But our principal, who was notorious, he did away with the home economics department, the music and the art department – he wanted to make a big name for himself. I retired in February of '79.

**SJ:** Can you tell us more about how you got involved with the union?

**LP:** One reason was this Trotskyist friend of mine – Johnny Malloy, I think that was his name in the party – whose sister-in-law was Alice Marsh, the [first] legislative representative for the UFT; she was always going up to Albany. She suggested my name for the Executive Board, on the Unity Caucus slate. Then after maybe two years, at most, I had a little gathering at my house and they got an earful of the fact that I was a Trotskyist, so I was kind of eased off the board.

**SJ:** So at that point you were working directly with Shanker. When you said that they figured out that you were a Trotskyist, was Shanker known widely at that time to be closely connected to Max Shachtman?

**LP:** Some of that came later. One time I got up when we were talking about having parents involved, and I said, "What we have to work for is [school] boards that consist of parents, teachers, and children." They thought I was crazy. "Children? What do you mean? And parents? They're our enemy – they're the bosses, the parents!" And my feeling was I loved to meet the parents. So this was totally against their thinking. I remember I was howled down at the meeting.

**MS:** Even that early, they were against the parents?

**LP:** When we expected the parents to come, they were nervous and full of antagonism, instead of being anxious to meet the parents.... For a year, I was supposed to be trans-

ferred to the high schools, but something happened down at Livingston Street [Board of Ed headquarters], which was always a mess: my records got mislaid, so I went to another elementary school for one more year.

Now, I'm telling you this for a reason. Yetta Barsh became Shanker's secretary, that's how it all happened. And then Shanker, he became close to Shachtman, and Shachtman influenced Shanker. And at the beginning of the Vietnam War, I was in charge of taking buses down to big demonstrations in Washington against the war. I was in charge of, like, ten buses. And meanwhile the [UFT] Delegate Assembly very "smartly" voted about five different contradictory resolutions to get themselves out of supporting any opposition to the Vietnam War.

**MS:** It was a scandal. And you know [Shanker's lieutenant] Abe Levine, he's still there.

**LP:** I just saw Abe the other day, at a retired teachers' meeting. I belong to the Raging Grannies, and we sang for their monthly meeting.

**SJ:** So you were in charge of a bunch of buses going down to Washington.

**LP:** Well, we had oodles of buses going down to Washington.

**SJ:** When you say "we," you mean anti-war groups, not the union?

**LP:** The whole union! There were no caucuses or factions [in the union] at that point, and people were just going down. So [the Shanker leadership] had these resolutions which got them out of opposing the war, because each resolution contradicted the other.

### "Confrontation" Over Vietnam

**SJ:** When we first met, you mentioned a big argument with Yetta Barsh about Vietnam.

**LP:** I didn't have an argument, I had a *confrontation*. Because it was on the street. That was the year when I was transferred to another school because of the snafu, and this was during Vietnam. There were several young men who were avoiding the draft because they were teaching. So I got a group of them and we all went down to UFT headquarters on Park Avenue South, and we were marching around and shouting against the war.

**SJ:** So you were marching at the UFT headquarters to protest their position on the war?

**LP:** That's right. We were marching around in a circle there. So she [Yetta Barsh] came out and stood there, glaring at me, and I'm marching around, I'm pretending not to notice her, because I had nothing to say to her. Then she came over and confronted me, and said, "What are you doing, how can you be picketing the union?" The huge sacrosanct – so then I really got mad and I started yelling and I said, "I remember you when! I remember when you were a socialist, and you had a position against war – capitalist war!" I yelled at her. So she went upstairs, and eventually we stopped. Then years ago, I met her near the Metropolitan Museum of Art, when she had retired. Max had long died, Max Shachtman. And she had embraced me as if she had forgotten the whole thing. I never did. That was Yetta Barsh.

**SJ:** How did she answer you?

**LP:** She didn't – she went away.

**MS:** Later it was exposed that through the AFT and through Irving Brown [key operative of the CIA-backed American Institute for Free Labor Development], they were very involved in sending money to anti-communist union groups in Chile, Ecuador and elsewhere to try to overturn [Allende's] government and combat leftist movements.

**SJ:** Their position on Vietnam was consistent with a pattern of working with the State Department.

**LP:** Just one other thing is that Hilda Mason got a job in the UFT but then she was eased out of her job, because of her Trotskyist position. And Hilda Mason was the sister of Sylvia Ageloff.

Hilda was disappointed that she lost her job. But it was inevitable because Shanker was busy getting rid of all the radicals.

**MS:** Because he was fighting anybody that wanted to fight against the Vietnam War or any left-wing current in the union at that time.

*Lillian asked us to describe the CSEW newsletter.*

**SJ:** The *Class Struggle* newsletter talks about education struggles. Recently a lot of it has been about opposing the racist policies of the charter schools –

**LP:** I know all about the charter schools. I follow it very carefully. You know, if you look at the pattern of history: when I had my children – my son was born in 1940 – I went to a doctor and I spent about \$100 and I had my son in a hospital, and I had a private room, and they kept me for a week, and I was treated royally. And it was me and the doctor, and that was it. But then your insurance companies eased in on the field. Now the same thing is happening with the education field. They're having a little more trouble, because there is more public interest, people are more politically aware, parents are more involved. But they're doing their best to win over the field, and it would be another goldmine.

**MS:** That's right.

**SJ:** We also write about the very old Trotskyist idea – not just Trotskyist, but a basic Marxist idea – of the workers movement being independent politically. Just last night we had a big fight in my union delegate assembly over the Democratic Party, and our union leadership was pushing to affiliate with the Working Families Party – you know what that is, just a front group for the Democratic Party.

**LP:** Yeah, I know what that is. I was involved for a while in trying to form a labor party.

**SJ:** I'm sure you know better than we do, that the history is so important for people's consciousness. We are working with some young teachers and adjuncts who want to learn about this history, but they don't get that from the union leadership, and obviously not from the bourgeois press.

**LP:** I know the conditions of the adjuncts. It's disgusting.... You have to have a certain amount of hours for health insurance, right? How does the number of adjuncts stack up against the number of regular faculty?

**SJ:** We are 13,000 [contingent faculty] out of 22,000.

**LP:** My son was an assistant professor of science at Queensborough Community College....

*There was some further discussion about conditions at CUNY.*

**LP:** Eddie and I met Malcolm X once, and we talked with him a while, up at the Hotel Theresa, in the lobby.

**SJ:** What was your impression of Malcolm X?

**LP:** He was very friendly and warm. He was delightful. He said, "I know your heart's in the right place," those are exact words of his. "But," he said, "I think you're on the wrong track," as far as school integration is concerned.

**MS:** I met Malcolm once. I was a college student at that time in Ann Arbor, so there were a lot of black students. He came to give a presentation to our student group.... I wanted to ask: What was your situation during the 1968 teachers' strike?

**LP:** I didn't work as closely with the union as I worked with the SWP at that point. I was with my husband.<sup>3</sup>

**SJ:** We've been pointing out that right now, because of the struggles against these terrible school closings, there's a real opportunity to unite unionized teachers with black parents and students, and in some ways to overcome the divisions that occurred in the 1968 teachers' strike.

**MS:** Because then there was a divide between the black community and the teachers union, which was such a tragedy. But now we see the parents that want to keep the schools public, and the teachers that want to see the schools public, and we've been going to mass meetings against the school closings, where I see much more unity. Also, because of the civil rights movement, a lot more black teachers and Puerto Rican teachers came in. But now Bloomberg has been pushing the "teaching fellow" programs, it's like a Peace Corps; they're almost entirely white, they come and teach for two years, get a heavily-subsidized Master's degree, and then they're gone. And so again, if you're a black teacher and you came through Hunter College, it's very hard for you to get a job now.

**LP:** The [teaching fellows] are kind of flooding the area.

**MS:** Yes. A wonderful young woman we worked with, who is originally from the Dominican Republic, she tried to get into the teaching fellows program and they said, "Oh, she doesn't meet our standards." I said, "What are your standards, her skin is not white? She just graduated Hunter College with honors, and she doesn't meet your standards." Finally they [relented] and brought her in. Under Bloomberg, the teaching force has gotten a lot more white.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The 1968 UFT strike began after the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district removed 13 teachers active in the union, as well as several administrators, in the name of "community control of the schools." While Shanker went out of his way to antagonize black New Yorkers with racist tirades against "mob rule," the UFT had clearly been targeted for a union-busting gambit promoted by liberal Republican mayor John Lindsay as well as the Ford Foundation. Nonetheless, much of the left crossed picket lines and actively worked against the strike.

<sup>4</sup> The hiring of black and Latino educators has declined steadily from 41% of those hired in 2002 to 25.8 in 2008. (See "Are Black and Latina/o Educators being 'Disappeared' from New York City Schools?" from <http://blackeducator.blogspot.com>, blog of Samuel Anderson, former Education Director at Medgar Evers College's Center for Law and Social Justice.)

## Striking Despite the Taylor Law

**SJ:** I wanted to ask a very general question. As somebody who has had a history as a revolutionary and a teacher, do you have any advice for young radical teachers? I don't mean technical or pedagogical advice but more political or philosophical advice.

**LP:** I think I would say if you were to conduct your revolutionary activity, trying to get things to change, simply on the school level, that may not work. People are anxious for jobs, they get a job in the school system and they won't want to do anything to jeopardize the job. And I must say to you, this is not a new phenomenon. When I was a union delegate, way back during the formation of the union, when it was really growing and thriving, and they used to send us delegates up to the Harriman conference center [near Bear Mountain] for a wonderful weekend.

**MS:** They still do that.

**LP:** But when there was a tremendous furor and vote, you know what it was about? Death benefits, the pension, and so on. That was the primary concern – it was economic. [It can be hard] getting people out on the street, or if they're even thinking in terms of a strike – of course I was fined, I went out on strike once and lost a week's pay. And that was not pleasant.

**MS:** Because of the Taylor Law?

**LP:** Yes; in the '70s, we had a strike and we were fined.

**SJ:** So what do you think is a way to connect the activity as unionists to the broader social struggles?

**LP:** You know there hasn't been a school system in this country that you can hold as an example to what education should be like. And all that unions are concerned with these days is the economic issue. When we tried to get them connected with the labor movement, and for a labor party, we ran all kinds of meetings, and showed films by John Sayles, like *Matewan*, things like that.

**MS:** [Laughs] We're still doing that!

**LP:** It was very hard to get people down. You look at history and you think, "People have to reach rock bottom." There are different ways to appeal to different people; sometimes it's through the arts, sometimes through music, sometimes it has to be indirect.... Lenin used to talk about microscopic infiltration, and by that he meant that maybe a word, or a phrase, or a chord, that you hear once, and then just put aside, years later will resound, and maybe something will

click. Marching is good, so people see you with signs, but many don't see you because they're sitting at home with their computers. Something that's caused more trouble in my life has been working an iMac, and I'm used to an L.C. Smith typewriter. And Blankie [her cat] then takes a walk on it, and presses the delete, and you've lost three pages!

## Joining the Revolutionary Movement in the Thirties

**SJ:** Back in the '30s, how did you become involved in the radical movement?

**LP:** I was pretty much a lone child, because my father died when I was three, from the Spanish flu. He was a strong man, an ironworker, he had a good business, and he went in three days. People died miserable, quickly – it was terrible – twenty million people died all over the world.<sup>5</sup> My mother was left with three little girls, so I was pretty much a neglected kid. My older sister left the house, and my middle sister was killed in an automobile accident when she was nineteen. I was pretty much alone and shunted around. I made up my mind about a lot of things; because all I had was the library, I did a lot of reading.

In 1927, I was twelve years old, there was Sacco and Vanzetti. In my book I talk about this, in the paper there was this picture of them sitting in the electric chair, and I decided that any society that does this is wrong. And then the Scottsboro boys.<sup>6</sup> I graduated from George Washington High School in '32. It was a beautiful, brand new school, with a swimming pool and so on. We had a group there, the Young Communist League. Our principal was a drunk. Oh, and our Social Studies teacher, he was always drunk, and he had the filthiest fingernails I ever saw – but he did talk socialism. That just reinforced me.

Anyway I was in the Young Communist League, after a friend who was in the YCL introduced me. I was about sixteen when I joined. I was in the YCL for a couple of years, but then we were invited to go to the trial of a Trotskyist [in the YCL], to see him exposed. So we went to his trial, and he happened to be the man whom I married. I went up to him and I said, "You know, what you said made sense."

**SJ:** Wait, was he the Trotskyist? And you're talking about Eddie?

**LP:** Yes. And I said "What you said made sense to me." The adulation of Stalin was something that nauseated me, and I felt there was something very wrong about it...

**SJ:** So did you quit the YCL then?



Scottsboro case epitomized lynch law racism in the USA.

<sup>5</sup> It is estimated that between 20 million and 40 million people died from the international "flu pandemic" of 1918.

<sup>6</sup> After one of the most notorious frame-up trials of the 20th century, Italian anarchist workers Sacco and Vanzetti were sent to the electric chair in 1927, in Massachusetts. The campaign to save their lives and free them was organized by the Communist-led International Labor Defense (ILD). The ILD was headed by James P. Cannon, who went on to found the American Trotskyist movement after the Communist Party (CP) expelled him in 1928 for defending Trotsky's Left Opposition. The "Scottsboro Boys" were nine black youth framed up on a rape charge in Alabama in 1931. Defended by the ILD, their case became an international symbol of lynch-law justice in the U.S.





Lillian, Trotsky, Natalia and "Bunny," Coyoacán 1939.

**LP:** I quit because the young girl that had introduced me, I had a big fight with her. I remember fighting with her on the street and saying, "You just don't see, you don't understand what's going on." Then I was with the Trotskyists. I belonged to the Bronx branch. They had a lot of [characters] there; I remember [one we called] "Ben the Ape," who was very fresh....

Then I worked on the WPA for a while.<sup>7</sup> [Laughs] I was supposed to be a senior stenographer. And after six months my mother sent me to learn Pittman [shorthand]; I had taken a commercial course, I could type. I'd make these squiggles but I could never read them. So then I had to go on welfare and relief.... [At one party meeting] I got up and talked against the "French turn" [in disagreement with Jim Cannon].<sup>8</sup>

**MS:** What, you were an Oehlerite?

**LP:** No, I wasn't an Oehlerite, there were the Oehlerites and the Stammites, and all of these groups, and McKinney. Now, Hilda Mason – Sylvia [Ageloff]'s sister – had a love affair with Ernest McKinney.

<sup>7</sup> The Works Progress Administration was a New Deal program to provide jobs for the unemployed.

<sup>8</sup> After Hitler came to power in 1933 with no real resistance from Germany's mass Communist and Social Democratic parties, sizeable groups of workers and youth moved to the left within socialist parties in several parts of the world. Trotsky advocated that his French co-thinkers undertake a short-term "entry" into the Socialist Party in order to win the best of these leftward-moving "centrists" to the task of building a genuinely revolutionary party and a new, Fourth International. In the U.S. – where the Trotskyists' Communist League of America had fused with A.J. Muste's American Workers Party to found the Workers Party/U.S. – the "French turn" led to a brief entry into the Socialist Party in which the Trotskyists succeeded in winning many new adherents. Expelled from the SP, the Fourth Internationalists formed the SWP in 1938.

<sup>9</sup> A group around Hugo Oehler and Tom Stamm opposed the French turn, left the Fourth Internationalist movement, and formed a group of their own, which later divided between "Oehlerites" and "Stammmites." Ernest R. McKinney was a prominent black leftist and labor organizer who joined Shachtman's 1940 split from the SWP and was for some years a leading member of the "Shachtmanite" movement.

**SJ:** Before or after the split of 1940?

**LP:** After....

### Visiting Trotsky in Mexico

**SJ:** When did you go to Mexico, and visit Trotsky?

**LP:** It's interesting how I ended up going to Mexico. Actually I had wanted to go to France – I had worked on this art committee, and I had a couple of hundred dollars, and the WPA had to close down, so I had no job; you know, Roosevelt had to close it.<sup>10</sup> So, I went to the Party and suggested that I go to France. But there was a lot of turmoil there. They said, "We're discouraging comrades from going to France. You want to take a trip? Go to Mexico and see the Old Man [Trotsky]." So I said, "All right, then I'll go to Mexico...." My strongest feeling was when I went on a picnic, and I'm sitting between Natalia [Sedova, Trotsky's companion] and him, and there's not a bush in sight, there's not a tree in sight – we're sitting ducks. I never felt that fear other than that time... I was there about three weeks. I had a little flirtation with one of the guards, named Melquíades. You know, I was very young.

*Lillian briefly described a conversation in which Trotsky expressed some disappointment.*

**MS:** Why?

**LP:** Because I had not been that active. I was young and, listen, there were a lot of things – I was a kind of a daredevil in a way. I worked for a doctor and made \$35 a month, but I worked three hours in the morning and three hours at night, so in the middle – this is the height of the Depression – I would go out, and on 86<sup>th</sup> Street there was a chain of diners called Foltis-Fischer, and they were on strike, so I put on a "strike" sign. Then I go back, and the doctor says, "You were just on the picket line!" That kind of thing. Of course, I immediately started going out with one of the strikers. [Laughs]. So Trotsky, he wanted to know about the fights in New York.

**SJ:** In the Party?

**LP:** Yeah. I was a member and I did all the things. We rented a headquarters, but the prostitutes in the next room were making noise.

**MS:** So you weren't giving him the information that he –

**LP:** Trotsky was asking me all these questions, and I couldn't answer them, so he kind of sighed...

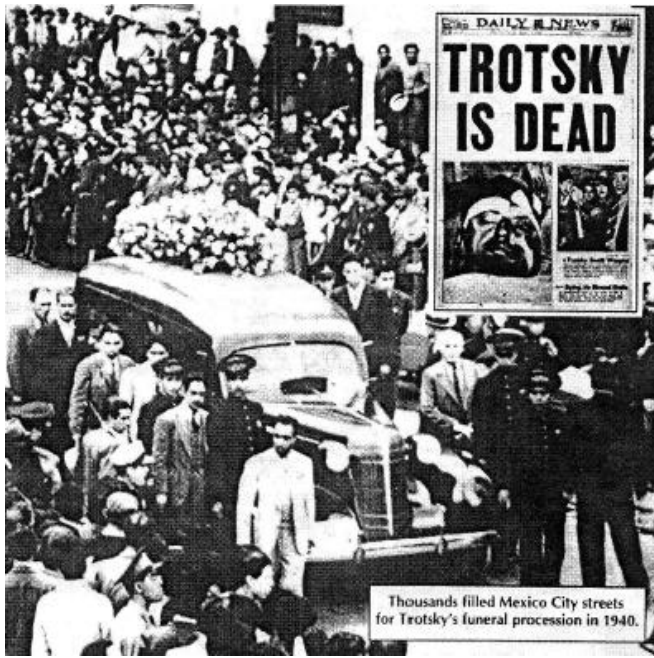
**SJ:** You were friends with Sylvia Ageloff, right?

**LP:** She was one of my closest friends. About ten years ago she died. She lived very close to here, in a beautiful apartment. Her family had money, and we used to laugh at [her sisters] in the party, because they went to Europe and then complained that they had to iron their own handkerchiefs there. She was a plain and very formal young woman, and everybody said that she had this glamorous guy with money [Ramón Mercader].

Incidents that I describe in the book actually happened. He came to visit her, and the day he arrived, a friend of mine and I walked up to where they [were staying], and he was sitting outside alone. I said to my friend, "Let's walk

<sup>10</sup> The WPA was not formally abolished until 1943, but it underwent a major overhaul in 1940.





by..." When we got past him, I said, "He had such a black look on his face, it frightened me." This is the guy who just came from Europe to see his girlfriend? I started to sing this song from Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, it was very popular – "A strange romance, my friend, this is/A strange romance, with no kisses."

*Lillian also discussed Robert Sheldon Harte, a young American guard who was killed by the perpetrators of a first, failed assassination attempt against Trotsky led by painter David Alfaro Siqueiros; as well as her friend "Bunny," who married Trotsky's secretary Jean van Heijenoort.*

### A Long-term View

*Part of the discussion involved the process by which Lillian wrote her book and got it published, as well as her plans to write another about what she sees as changes in Jewish culture resulting from the formation of Israel.*

**LP:** I was about 90 when I started my book, and when you're this old, you're just, "Am I gonna live that long?" You don't know. So I said "I'm gonna get it published." And the same thing is true of the next one...

**SJ:** You're involved with solidarity with Palestinian rights.

**LP:** Well, I went on one of the boats from the [Gaza aid] flotilla when they were docked here on the East River.

**SJ:** Was that the same boat that was attacked by the Israelis [the *Mavi Marmara*]?

**LP:** No, I think it was the second boat.

**SJ:** We meet a lot of young teachers, young adjuncts, and many of them are questioning society. But not many of them are not revolutionaries yet. What would you say to them?

**LP:** I would take it step-by-step. Establish personal relationships. I connect to you, and maybe you will connect to someone else, and you will connect to someone else.

**SJ:** One of the problems that we face in organizing is the idea that the basic thing is sending stuff over the Internet.

**LP:** They don't take the next step. You have to show that you're a live human being who's warm and caring for someone else in a comradely way... Now that sounds awfully sophomoric, doesn't it?

**MS:** No.

**SJ:** OK, so now it's 2011. Are you still a socialist?

**LP:** Yes, I'm still a socialist. I say that in the book in the end. There's no other way – if the world is going to exist, some form of socialism has to take place, otherwise we'll destroy each other, that's just about it. It's leading to a point where at least most of it would be destroyed with atomic bombs or some other kind of Hitler, or even worse. Everything's awry right now, things are bad, but it could get worse.

You can't predict history. But if you want to predict a good future for this world, it would be a socialist world... "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs," is certainly a rule to go by. And if you look at history over the last few thousand years, there's been some progress. You just have to take a very long-term view. ■

**Photo at right shows contingent at April 10 protest against racist murder of Trayvon Martin.**

Speaking at a Bronx high school two weeks earlier, CSEW members linked the vigilante killing of Trayvon Martin for "walking while black" to the NYPD's murders of black youth Sean Bell and Ramarley Graham, and its "stop-and-frisk" program of racial profiling that affects over 600,000 youth per year, including innumerable high-school and CUNY students.

The CSEW program demands: "Police and military recruiters out of the schools. No cops, prison or security guards in the unions."

(CSEW photo)



## Massive, Militant Student Strike in Québec



Montréal, April 20: barricade near the Palais des Congrès. (Photo: libcom.org)

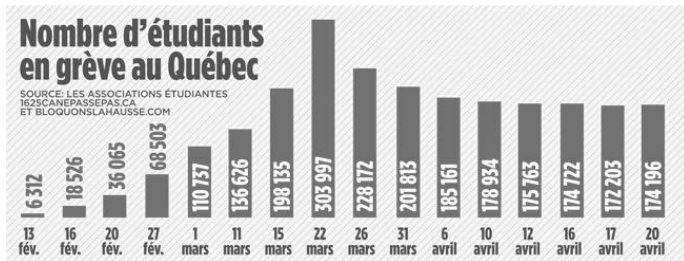
In the streets of Montréal on April 20, thousands of students behind makeshift barricades are besieged by echelons of cops. The forces of order seek to create maximum mayhem, pepper-spraying, firing teargas and plastic bullets, swinging clubs – but occasionally having to retreat before determined countercharges of thousands of protestors. The previous Sunday, at the Université du Québec at Gatineau near Ottawa, hundreds of students barricade themselves inside campus buildings while outside hundreds more face waves of arrests for two days. Simultaneous demonstrations separately disrupt appearances in Montréal by Québec premier Jean Charest and Canada's hated immigration minister Jason Kenney (hounded everywhere by the "No One Is Illegal" group for his murderous collaboration with the U.S. border police).

The Québec authorities slap the students with court injunctions – a \$50,000 fine or 1 year in prison for anyone deemed to be preventing access to a class at UQAM, l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Similar heavy penalties are imposed on striking students and sympathetic professors at the other great francophone universities, l'Université de Montréal (UDeM) and Laval in Québec city; neither are smaller schools spared from the repressive measures. From the *Toronto Globe & Mail*, quasi-official voice of English finance capital, come monotonous denunciations of student "violence," which are faithfully echoed by *La Presse* in Montréal. On 19 April, an attempt is made to reopen the Collège de Valleyfield near Montréal. It is repulsed by mass student picketing: despite the police violence and the threats of more of the same, despite 700 arrests province-wide in the last week alone, despite the endless denunciations by

government mouthpieces and the establishment media, the strike is solid. *La lutte continue.*

As police violence rose, the government called for a truce. It was a trick. The Québec education minister, Line Beauchamp, pretended to open negotiations with the students. The ruse was to divide the student organizations. The most active and militant organization, CLASSÉ – la Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (Broad Coalition of the Association for Student Union Solidarity) – was not invited. The reason: the CLASSÉ militants have not played the government's game of denouncing student "violence." Instead, CLASSÉ has carefully documented and publicized state violence against the students. The leaders of the other two groups, the FECQ (representing the *collège* [secondary-school] students) and the FEUQ (university students) bring CLASSÉ reps to the talks anyway; the government refuses them entry. In solidarity with CLASSÉ, FECQ and FEUQ walk out of the government charade on April 25. *La lutte continue.*

The Québec student strike has been one of the largest protest movements ever to take place in Canada. It has been solid for over two months now. At its height in March it involved over 300,000 students at all levels. Nearly 200,000 university, *collège* (CÉGEP) and high-school students continue to participate across the province. The strike's immediate cause is the planned 75% tuition increase by Charest's Liberal Party provincial government. The deeper cause is that the youth of Québec are fed up with the sinking capitalist order – which is increasingly incapable of meeting basic human needs even in economically advanced countries – and with their nation's second-class status within Canada.



Number of striking students by date.

Reflecting the views of both the English-speaking capitalist class in Québec and their French-speaking junior partners, Charest, the provincial governor, came to power in 2003 promising a general offensive against organized labor. Québec's working class is the most organized in North America, with over 40% union membership. Now, in the context of a globally failing system, capitalists everywhere are pillaging the social assets of earlier times, hungry for extra loot to recover their margins. They are privatizing schools and hospitals in Québec, and are especially aiming at the gains that labor has won in decades of hard struggle – gains which benefit the whole of Québec society, such as unions, pensions, daycare, and health care.

Not counting the fake “truce” of Beauchamp, the government has categorically refused to talk to the students, even as they organized larger and larger demonstrations. No talks, just police actions, arrests, court injunctions. Undeterred, the students organized and carried through the largest protest in the history of Québec: upwards of 200,000 marched through the streets of Montréal on March 22. Youth of all ages, feeling their futures threatened – just as their parents' union contracts are being undermined – chanted “*entendez-nous!*” (listen to us!), but the government was not listening. At the April 20 action, some students managed to enter the Palais de congrès in Montréal, where Charest was entertaining a group of capitalists with details on his “Plan du Nord.” This mining and minerals giveaway to international corporations of public lands – some of which are supposedly set aside for “First Nations” (indigenous) communities – is advancing under a cloak of “environmental protection.” As the cops set upon the demonstrators inside the hall and in the streets, Charest paused to quip with his moneybagged friends: perhaps they could offer the protesters jobs in Québec's frozen far north.

In this *printemps québécois* (Québec spring), as many are calling it, the power of a purely student movement has reached a maximum level. The government has not budged so far because the social weight of students and their teachers is limited. But Charest cracks jokes about creating a new Siberia for student militants at his own risk. His tuition “reform” is a small part of his total program for dismantling the gains of the Québec working class. And the potential social weight of the working class, which in Québec has a long history of militancy, does *not* face such limits. The key for advancing the student strike now lies in forging links with the power of the workers.

Right now, for example, aluminum workers at the Rio Tinto Alcan aluminum plant in Alma in northeastern Québec

are locked out and in a desperate struggle to save their union and their wages against ruthless bosses – and all the Parti Québécois (PQ) and the right-wing social democrats of the New Democratic Party can do is call upon Charest (!) to intervene. Charest and the aluminum bosses are “as close as lips and teeth” (to use a Chinese expression that Gilles Duceppe, a PQ leader, might recognize from his days as a Maoist long ago). Engaging in solidarity work with the besieged aluminum workers would be one good way to forge student-worker ties.

In Québec, the struggle of the students and workers also intersects the national question (and the question of nationalism). The union tops are close to the Parti Québécois, the party that says it stands for an independent *capitalist* Québec. A class-struggle workers party would fight against the national oppression of Québec – which this writer believes should be independent, with a workers government as part of a North American federation of workers republics. This internationalist perspective points towards a socialist future. In contrast, the nature of *nationalism* is that it ties together classes of an oppressed nation that would otherwise directly confront each other in struggle. The workers are impeded from a direct struggle for power against their own bourgeoisie by the rule of the English-speaking capitalist class over the whole of Canada.

Québec was forcibly incorporated into the British Commonwealth by “la Conquête” (the conquest) of 1763 and the crushing of the “Patriotes” uprising of 1837-38. Resistance, long thereafter submerged, surfaced in the early 1960s in “la Révolution Tranquille” and the more militant actions of the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ). In 1970, Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau ordered the army of Canada to occupy Montréal and Québec City. The tanks rolled in and under martial law hundreds of Québec labor leaders and cultural figures were seized from their homes.

After a period of heavy repression in which the rule of Ottawa was reasserted, the workers flexed their muscles. In 1972 a militant general strike exploded across Québec, involving factory occupations and even workers control of entire towns. With heavy support for independence among the French-speaking workers – among the most militant and class-conscious in the hemisphere – as well as students, much worker militancy was channeled into the PQ in the 1970s, and its founding leader, René Lévesque, began his long tenure as premier of the province in 1976. But the general strike nevertheless became the foundation for many subsequent struggles, in which the gains were won that Charest and the Liberals are now targeting.

The need for students to link up with the working class is connected to the need for the working class to unchain its power by breaking free of all the capitalist parties. This is key to winning the struggle undertaken by the courageous student strikers of Québec, and such demands as free tuition (already called for by CLASSE today) and a sliding scale of wages and hours to end unemployment. Workers power is really the key here.

# Mulgrew, Casey Drink the Teacher Eval Kool-Aid

## “Value-Added” Deal a Betrayal

**UFT/NYSUT Tops Sign on to Teacher Evaluation Scheme That Would Lead to Firing of Hundreds, If Not Thousands of Teachers**

**By Class Struggle  
Education Workers/UFT**

MARCH 7 – In a nutshell, the bogus “teacher evaluation” deal with New York governor Andrew Cuomo agreed to by Michael Mulgrew of the United Federation of Teachers (along with Richard Iannuzzi of New York State United Teachers) is a mortal threat to the union and to the jobs of thousands of teachers. The UFT and NYSUT tops have accepted the principle that teachers can be fired based on student scores on standardized tests, a centerpiece of the corporate/capitalist war on public education.

This is even worse than the 2005 contract the UFT agreed to that gave up seniority transfers, giving principals the right to hire teachers and hugely expanding the Absent Teacher Reserve (ATR) pool. The side agreement with NYC mayor Michael Bloomberg for a minimal appeal procedure won’t alter the fact that this scheme is designed to result in firing hundreds and possibly thousands of dedicated educators. This is the central *purpose* of all these teacher eval schemes.

This was never about improving education or “putting children first” as the bourgeois pols demagogically claim. In fact, it will grievously hurt students by forcing teachers to “teach to the test” out of fear of losing their jobs, and by penalizing those educators who deal with English language learners, special education and at risk students in poor neighborhoods. In addition to those fired, by holding new teachers hostage to the numbers crunchers and delaying or denying tenure, it will drive far more of them out of NYC schools, and in many cases out of teaching.

Coming barely a week after the monstrous teacher evaluation pact, the publication by all three major New York daily papers of more than 12,000 NYC teachers’ individual rankings based on student test scores has teachers – and even many administrators up in arms. Much of the ire will focus on Bloom-



**Gov. Cuomo announces teacher evaluation deal, Feb. 16, with Richard Iannuzzi (NYSUT), Michael Mulgrew (UFT) and state education commissioner John King.**

berg and his schools chancellor Dennis Wolcott.

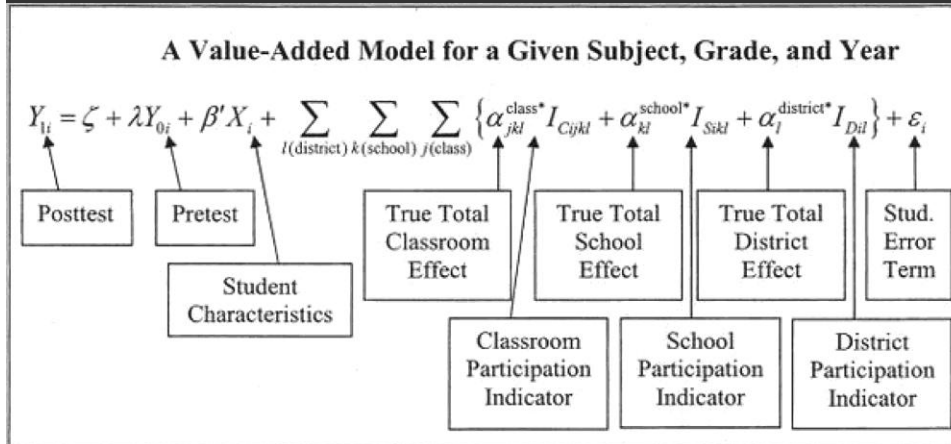
But this is more than about a Republican billionaire mayor and his hatchet man at the head of the NYC Department of Education, and the teacher bashers in right-wing media. The *New York Times* as well as the *New York Post* and *Daily News* tabloids joined in witch-hunting teachers by publishing the DOE’s phony stats. It is a *capitalist class war on teachers unions*. And it comes right from the top, from liberal Democratic president Barack Obama in the White House and his education “czar,” Arne Duncan, as well as from Democrat Cuomo in the Albany state house.

By now, the 110,000-plus UFT educators are aware of how rigged the teacher evaluation scam is. They know that the published Teacher Data Reports were chock full of errors; that they were based on state tests which were phonied up to artificially show progress when the National Assessment of Educational Progress showed none; that the 2009 results were so inflated that they had to be tossed out (“recalibrated”).

Many have read articles by Diane Ravitch, a former supporter of student test-based teacher “accountability,” noting that “the current frenzy of blaming teachers for low

## The Future of the Union Is at Stake

## Student Test-Based Teacher Evals: Garbage In, Garbage Out



### Bizarre but dangerous: Algorithms like this could cost you your job.

scores smacks of a witch-hunt, the search for a scapegoat, someone to blame for a faltering economy, for the growing levels of poverty, for widening income inequality” (“No Student Left Untested,” *New York Review of Books*, 21 February). With an average margin of error for English teachers of 53%, and up to 85% in some cases, Ravitch quipped that flipping a coin would be more accurate.

UFT members are aware that more than 1,400 principals – a third of those in New York – signed a petition opposing the state’s test-based teacher evaluations. An initiator of the letter, Carol Burris, named NYS Educator of the Year in 2010, called AFT president Randi Weingarten’s endorsement of the agreement with Cuomo “beyond comprehension.” And many UFTers have been outraged as they read UFT vice president Leo Casey’s defense of the treacherous deal with the governor, accusing Burris of “alarmist alchemy” (“Setting the Record Straight on Teacher Evaluations,” *Edwise*, 22 February).

Casey claims that “the role of standardized testing in the evaluation will be minimized” under the evaluation scheme. Nonsense. The press release announcing it stated plainly: “Teachers rated ineffective on student performance based on objective assessments must be rated ineffective overall.” So the 40% for student assessment trumps the other 60%. But only 20% is state tests, says Casey. Would he have us believe that the DOE will agree to local assessment that isn’t test-based, when it is paying big bucks developing its own tests?

In a second installment, Casey argues that with provisions for a “teacher improvement plan” and “independent validators,” plus an appeals process (but only for 13% of “ineffective” ratings), “the educational integrity and fairness of the teacher evaluation process are secure.” That is about as much “security” as Joel Klein’s letter saying the DOE would oppose any attempt to publish the Teacher Data Reports. Tweed then turned around and encouraged the papers to request the TDRs.

At the end of this piece Casey comments: “But it may well require a new mayor and new leadership at the DOE, prepared to negotiate in good faith, for that teacher evaluation

system to be established.” The UFT tops’ real position is to “negotiate” with an administration that won’t negotiate, and wait for a new mayor. But a Democrat will be no better.

The bottom line is, this is a class assault on teachers unions and unions in general, and it can only be fought by hard class struggle. The AFT/UFT’s usual tactics of lobbying, slicing and dicing, giving in to part of management’s demands and claiming victory because it could have been worse, won’t work. There are no contradictions among the capitalist parties here. And this fundamental issue stymies the various

union opposition groups as well.

James Eterno, who has courageously fought the closing of Jamaica HS, wrote on the ICE-UFT blog (16 February) dissecting the disastrous teacher evaluation “deal.” He ended: “If there is anything positive to take from today’s events, it’s that President Mulgrew was there with the governor announcing the deal and maybe they are developing the kind of bond we can use to influence the state to pass legislation to end mayoral control.” Yet Mulgrew and Cuomo are both supporters of mayoral control of the schools!

During the 2008 election campaign Democrat Obama and Republican McCain ostentatiously agreed on their education programs, going after teacher tenure and demonizing “bad teachers.” Even so, the American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association endorsed Obama. Most teacher activist groups were right in there with the bureaucrats, either openly or tacitly backing Democrat Obama. Class Struggle Education Workers was almost alone in opposing the candidates of both capitalist parties.

In February 2010, when the corrupt rulers of Central Falls, Rhode Island fired the entire teaching force, Obama praised them. The Obama/Duncan “Race to the Top” education program mandates charter schools, closing “failing” schools, “merit pay” and teacher evals based on student test scores. Yet the AFT and NEA have already endorsed Obama for reelection! The UFT membership should repudiate the outrageous endorsement of teacher-basher Obama.

It will take mobilization of the UFT’s strength in militant class action, including mobilizing students, parents and the workers movement in defiance of the no-strike Taylor Law, to defeat the all-sided attacks, of which teacher evals are only a part. As we argued in a CSEW motion presented at the last delegate assembly, the racist school closings should be fought by occupying closing schools. We say: oust the bureaucrats, break with the Democrats, build a class-struggle workers party. ■

# No to Mayoral Dictatorship – For Teacher-Student-Parent-Workers Control Occupy Closing Schools!

## By Class Struggle Education Workers/UFT

FEBRUARY 9 – Tonight, parents, students, teachers and supporters will fill Brooklyn Tech HS, as they have repeatedly over the past three years, to express their opposition to the NYC Department of Education (DOE) policy of closing schools. The members of the Panel on Educational Policy (PEP), which is nothing but a rubber stamp for the DOE, sit there while hundreds explain how the kids are being harmed as public education is gutted. And then the puppet panel dutifully votes to close the schools anyway.

This charade has got to stop. We can talk forever at billionaire mayor Bloomberg's bought-and-paid-for flunkys and it won't make a bit of difference. It's up to working people to **shut down the PEP and get rid of mayoral dictatorship of the schools**. In order to defeat their assault on public education, we can start by mobilizing to stop them from closing more schools. The courts won't do it – the DOE just ignores a court order to spend billions to lower class sizes. Instead there are larger classes every year, as elective programs are cut in order to "teach to the test."

To stop the wrecking operation, we need to bring parents and working people together with teachers and students for **occupying closing schools**. Don't wait until the end of the school year when no one is around. Canvass the community to build "save the school" assemblies and teach-ins. Out of this and upcoming meetings, committees should be formed to fight for **teacher-student-parent-worker control of the schools**. We must fight to take them out of the hands of the corporate execs, lawyers, hedge fund managers and politicians who are out to destroy public education (and make a tidy profit in the process).

The DOE has published a list of 25 schools it intends to close this year, and another 33 where it plans to replace half the teachers. It has already shut down more than 100 schools since Bloomberg took over, replacing them with small schools and charter schools that are no better, and in many cases worse, than those that were shuttered. This is a *racist* policy, with most of the closed schools in African American, Latino and immigrant communities. The mayor's arbitrary rule is destroying students' education, putting their future at risk.

Last week over 200 students from schools slated for closing rallied in Union Square. At a hearing that evening at Legacy HS, dozens of speakers lambasted the DOE's shutdown plans, not one supported them. Students and teachers presented a detailed statistics report showing that the six-year graduation rate had sharply *increased*, no thanks to the DOE. Overwhelming rejection of the DOE at Samuel Gompers the week before as well. And at Evander Childs campus in the Bronx, schools

chancellor Dennis Walcott walked out after students complained of the DOE's failed education policies.

We're up against powerful opponents. The mayor thinks he owns the schools. He treats them as just another subsidiary of Bloomberg L.P. No surprise since he bought his reelection for a cool \$90 million. Like the 19<sup>th</sup> century robber baron Cornelius Vanderbilt, Bloomberg's attitude is "the public be damned!" And his policy of corporatizing and privatizing public education is shared by the entire ruling class, Democrats and Republicans alike, from Barack Obama on down.

The only language that capitalist politicians understand is money and power. Bloomberg may have the money, but we have the power of millions of working people who are fed up over the way the Wall Street money men are running the country. After months of demonizing teachers and teachers unions, a poll released yesterday shows that less than a quarter of the public thinks that mayoral control of the schools is a success, and by four-to-one (72% to 18%) they trust the teachers union more than the mayor to protect public schools!

Now we have to transform this support into active participation. Class Struggle Education Workers is putting forward a motion for the United Federation of Teachers to undertake preparations together with other labor and community groups for teachers, students, parents and workers to OCCUPY CLOSING SCHOOLS. We need to mobilize other unions as well, such as the powerful TWU Local 100. John Dewey HS, one of the schools slated for "transformation," is sandwiched between the MTA's huge Stillwell Ave./Coney Island complex and the Marlboro Houses complex. But to make this a reality, the initiative must also come from the affected communities themselves. Starting tonight. ■

### Motion for Feb. 15 UFT Delegate Assembly

In response to Mayor Bloomberg's latest moves in the all-sided war on public education – including closing 25 more schools and threatening to remove half the teaching staff at another 33 while increasing the number of charters – the UFT should undertake preparations together with other labor and community groups for teachers, students, parents and workers to OCCUPY CLOSING SCHOOLS.

For further information e-mail:  
**cs\_edworkers@hotmail.com**

Visit the CSEW web page:  
**<http://edworkersunite.blogspot.com>**

## Democrats, Republicans – Enemies of Teachers and Public Education We Need a Class-Struggle Workers Party

### Oppose Endorsement of Teacher-Basher Obama

FEBRUARY 15 – Last week the executive council of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) endorsed Democratic president Barack Obama for re-election. The National Education Association (NEA), already came out for Obama at its national convention last July. No surprises here: the teachers union leaders are wedded to the Democratic Party, and in fact provide much of the apparatus for this partner party of American capitalism. Between them, the AFT and NEA had 335 delegates at the 2008 Democratic convention. Without teacher-union volunteers for phone-banking and door-to-door stumping, few Democrats could win an election. Yet the Democrats no less than the Republicans are at the forefront of the current campaign of bashing teachers and teacher unions in the name of “educational reform.”

Even *Education Week* (7 February) noted, “let’s not forget that this is the same president who endorsed the Central Falls, R.I., firing of AFT teachers, conceived of the Race to the Top program, which is deeply unpopular among many AFT members” and opposes “seniority-based layoff policies.” Don’t stop there: Obama and his education czar Arne Duncan have been pushing for “merit pay” and teacher evaluations based on student scores and standardized high-stakes tests, for expedited firing of “bad teachers,” for massive closing of “failing schools,” for privatizing public education via “charter schools” and corporatizing what remains. The fact is, there is a bipartisan “consensus” on education which can only be defeated by fighting capitalism.

In the 2008 elections, there was no difference between the Republican and Democratic presidential candidates on education. They said so in the televised debates. Class Struggle Education Workers opposed both (see “No to Teacher-Basher McCain and Education-for-War Obama,” a special supplement to *The Internationalist* (November 2008). Yet not only the AFT and NEA tops but also most of the opposition and activist groups inside the teachers unions supported Democrat Obama, either openly or implicitly. When CSEW members attacked Obama, we were roundly condemned and even excluded from education panels by “progressives” who said that people weren’t ready for that. But anyone who waits to tell the truth until people are “ready” to hear it will never lead anywhere.

Today, the situation of teachers and public education is even worse under Obama than it was under Bush. At least when the Republican White House was pushing its “no vendor left behind” education policies, teachers unions resisted to a degree. In announcing the AFT endorsement, Randi Weingarten averred that “we have not agreed with every decision President Obama has made.” But in fact the teachers unions have gone along with his program, sacrificing one gain after another in order to have a “seat at the table”

and “join the conversation” about education reform. Yet the real “conversation” is about union-busting. The Democrats have declared war on teachers unions, and unless we respond in kind we’ll continue to suffer *one-sided class war*.

It was striking at a recent (February 4) “State of the Union Conference” called by opposition groups in the UFT how little was said about Obama and the Democrats. The talk was overwhelmingly of Mayor Bloomberg. To the extent that problems were posed in a broader context, they were primarily blamed on “neo-liberalism.” But there’s no going back to the 1960s and early ’70s. (Even then, the purpose of increased spending was not to provide better education for students but to bolster the U.S.’s anti-Communist Cold War and win the “space race” with the Soviet Union.) Keynesian deficit financing is gone, abandoned by the capitalists who faced a sharply falling rate of profit. Now the driving force behind education “reform” is to increase U.S. “competitiveness.”

The problem is not “neo-liberalism,” it’s capitalism. The Democrats are not “friends of labor” but enemies. The Working Families Party is just a way to vote Democratic while holding your nose. If the UFT leadership proposes that the Delegate Assembly endorse Obama, *vote no!* ■

#### Build a Class-Struggle Opposition!

At the Feb. 4 State of the Union conference in New York, the closing session was dedicated to preparing an all-embracing opposition caucus to fight the Unity Caucus of Mike Mulgrew and the rest of the UFT leadership. “Unity” is the bureaucratic juggernaut that has run the United Federation of Teachers with an iron hand since its inception. Even today it is a gang of Cold Warriors who work hand-in-glove with the U.S. government.

The beauty of an “inclusive” caucus, the presenter said, is that you don’t have to agree. But to fight the Unity bureaucrats it is necessary to put forward an answer to their sellout politics. Unity supports the Democratic Party. Will the new caucus oppose the Democrats? Unity says you can’t strike because of the Taylor Law. Will such a new caucus prepare the membership to defy the no-strike law? Would it oppose taking the unions to the bosses’ courts? To ask these questions is to answer them.

Class Struggle Education Workers is active in the UFT (and the Professional Staff Congress-CUNY) fighting to defend and transform public education in the interests of working people and the oppressed. Against mayoral dictatorship, we call for teacher-student-parent-worker control of the schools. We oppose the racist resegregation of public schools and are for full citizenship rights for all immigrants. The CSEW opposes union support to all capitalist politicians, and calls for a class-struggle workers party to fight for a workers government.



# What's Behind the Roads II Charter Invasion?

March 2012

**By Class Struggle Education Workers/UFT**

MARCH 21 – The public hearing on the “co-location” of the Roads II charter school in the South Bronx was another of those gut-wrenching experiences that we have been through repeatedly in recent years.

Students from the Schomberg Satellite Academy (whose space will be cut in half) get up and pour out their hearts, saying how they love their school, that it has given them their second chance, how they are growing and learning.

Teachers make PowerPoint presentations of how Satellite Academy has advanced on almost every front, with a phenomenal 85% of its male Latino and African American graduates going on to college (the citywide rate is 13%).

Community residents testify that putting yet another school in the building (in addition to Satellite, GED Plus, Bronx Regional HS and the LYFE program) with hundreds more students will produce chaos and bring in the cops.

At the March 12 hearing, a speaker from Class Struggle Education Workers asked an obvious question. How many were in favor of bringing in the charter, and how many opposed. By a rough count, the vote was about 175-5 against.

But, of course, the students, teachers, parents and working people don't get to vote on it. Under the present mayoral dictatorship over the schools, only one vote counts, that of billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg.

Tonight, the mayor's puppet Panel for Educational Policy will go ahead and rubber stamp the co-location of Roads II. The PEP has never yet turned down a Department of Education proposal.

The CSEW speaker pointed out that this is not an educational proposal, it's a real estate proposal. It's a proposal to create overcrowding and conflict, so they can bring in metal detectors, turn the school into a prison, and then close it down, which is the real program of the DOE.

“There is an elephant in the room,” she said, namely Centerbridge Partners, a Wall Street firm which is behind this:

“They and everyone in Washington, President Obama, the Republicans and Democrats, they all have a program to privatize [public education], just like they turned Robeson High School over to IBM, lock, stock and barrel.”

As speaker after speaker explained how bringing in the charter was a recipe for disaster, three people from Roads II payroll got up to motivate their space grab. Our ears perked up when one of them began listing their benefactors.

As soon as we heard Robin Hood Foundation and the Tiger Foundation, we knew that there was more to this story. So we did some quick checking.

Centerbridge Partners is a private equity investment fund which focuses on “leveraged buyouts” (LBOs) where financiers gobble up companies, milk their assets and then

frequently shut them down, like in the movie *Wall Street*.

Roads II benefactor Robin Hood Foundation is a Wall Street “charity” set up by hedge fund king Paul Tudor Jones II which has funneled over \$150 million to charter schools, mainly in New York City.

The Tiger Foundation is run by hedge fund billionaire Julian Robertson, which funds several dozen charters in NYC. His son, Spencer, founded the PAVE Academy in Red Hook, Brooklyn, and his daughter-in-law Sarah Robertson runs the Girls Preparatory charter on the Lower East Side.

So why are these hedge fund heavies so interested all of a sudden in setting up charter schools? Aside from the tax write-offs, they and other capitalist pushers of education “reform” want to destroy teachers unions and privatize public education.

But when one sector of capital is funneling tens of millions of dollars into a supposedly “non-profit” enterprise, something else has to be going on. So follow the money.

An article on “Scholarly Investments” in the *New York Times* (6 December 2009) spilled the beans. It quoted Ravenel Boykin Curry IV of Eagle Capital saying the schools are “exactly the kind of investment people in our industry spend our days trying to stumble on, with incredible cash flow, even if in this case we don't ourselves get any of it.”

Another hedge fund tycoon, Whitney Tilson, who sits on the board of the KIPP charter school chain, said that “with the state providing so much of the money, outside contributions are insanely well leveraged.” So by investing a few million in charters they can rake in much more from the government.

But why would that matter to these vultures if they don't get their hands on the cash? Answer: in addition to the juicy “management fees” they charge, they don't plan on the charters being “non-profit” forever. For them, this is seed money that they hope will pay off hugely later.

Recall that hedge funds helped trigger the 2008 financial crisis when their hedges collapsed because the cash stopped flowing. *So now they want to use our kids to fatten their profits and guarantee their cash flow in case of another crash.*

So we are up against powerful forces. They may have all the money, but we have the potential power of the working class whose labor produces their wealth. At the March 12 hearing, the CSEW speaker ended with the appeal:

“We have to occupy the closing schools. We have one million students in the New York City schools. We have 100,000 working teachers. We have the strongest labor movement in the United States. We have to build a revolutionary, class-struggle workers party to fight in the streets, in the schools to turn this around.”■

# Discussion article

## *on adjunct labor*

*The following article was presented for discussion in the CSEW during the spring of last year, under the title “Are University Adjuncts Part of the Proletariat?”*

I think it is legitimate to say that in some respects, university adjunct instructors lead a “semi-proletarianized” existence as impoverished members of the intelligentsia. However, I believe it is important – from a political as well as scientific standpoint – to reject the idea that adjuncts are *part of* the proletariat, i.e., the “working class” in the Marxist sense of that term.

The intelligentsia is, according to the whole of the Marxist tradition, part of the petty bourgeoisie.<sup>1</sup> This is not an insult, but a sociological characterization. After all, making a clear distinction between proletarians and peasants (including deathly poor ones) was a key aspect of the Marxists’ political struggle against the Narodniks,<sup>2</sup> their later incarnation as Guevarists and Maoists, etc. Yet this had nothing to do with revolutionaries “underestimating” or turning their backs on the peasantry, as Stalin would allege.

### Why Does It Matter?

In approaching definitions of social class, a useful starting point is Lenin’s observation:

“Classes are large groups of people which differ from each other by the place they occupy in a historically definite system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in laws) to the means of production, by the dimensions and method of acquiring the share of social wealth that they obtain.”

– “A Great Beginning” (1919)

But perhaps the debate over the class status of adjuncts is an example of the intellectual onanism for which academics are supposedly renowned? No, the issue is intrinsically important for the revolutionary proletarian party, to which intellectuals have historically made important contributions

(and unfortunate subtractions) especially in its formative period.

Moreover, the debate about adjuncts’ class position has aroused passionate discussions and arguments.

Specifically in regard to our work at CUNY, I think what is at stake is the need for a clear conception of what we as revolutionaries are doing here, and what our tasks and consciousness about our own role ought to be in this milieu.

As communists at CUNY we are “*in but not of*” the world of bourgeois academia. In our political work we are *not* the best representatives of the interests of the intelligentsia but profoundly alien to its ingrained social values, procedures and world outlook. We are, or should be, representatives of a different class: the proletariat. We seek to win intellectuals not to be the most faithful representatives of the interests of their milieu but class traitors to that milieu, which is organically enslaved to the institutions that spew out bourgeois ideology and train the administrative, technical and managerial cadres for capitalist exploitation.

### Marxism on the Intelligentsia, and on Teachers Specifically

It was characteristic of the New Left (both in the U.S. and in Western Europe), as well as social-democratic theorists like André Gorz, to blur the distinctions between the proletariat, on one hand, and students, academics and other parts of the intelligentsia and petty bourgeoisie, on the other. They did this in order to justify an orientation away from the heavy battalions of labor, and toward petty-bourgeois nostrums of “the new working class,” “student power,” the “red university” and so forth.

More often than not, the proponents of those views explicitly counterposed them to the conceptions put forward by writers from the “classic” Marxist tradition. The latter took as self-evident, as Karl Kautsky noted in “the Intellectuals and the Workers” (1903),<sup>3</sup> that while “the intellectual does not stand in any economic antagonism to the proletariat,” his “status of life and his conditions of labour are not proletarian, and this gives rise to a certain antagonism in sentiments and ideas.” Kautsky, himself an intellectual of petty-bourgeois origin, made this observation not to stir up anti-intellectualism, but to help illuminate the tasks and difficulties that Marxist parties faced in the necessary work of winning over and fully assimilating the most revolutionary-minded elements from the intelligentsia.

A few years after Kautsky’s article appeared, the Austrian socialist Max Adler made a speech to Viennese students in which he argued that the intelligentsia as such, *en*

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, “Marxism and the Intellectuals” by George Novack (December 1935, on-line at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/novack/1935/12/x01.htm>). I highly recommend this analysis written by a prominent American Trotskyist during the depths of the Great Depression. As a matter of course, Novack refers to “middle-class groups” such as “teachers, writers, scientists, artists....” As he points out: “Because of their economic insecurity, social rootlessness, and mixed composition, intellectuals constitute one of the most unstable, mobile, and sensitive groups in modern society. The mercurial character of their social and intellectual movements make them excellent barometers of social pressures and revolutionary storms. Impending social changes are often anticipated by restlessness among the intelligentsia.”

<sup>2</sup> [Editorial note: The Narodniks were the radical populists in late 19th-century Russia.]

<sup>3</sup> On-line at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1903/xx/int-work.htm>

*masse*, could be won to socialism. Polemicalizing against Adler's claim, Trotsky laid stress on "the profound social difference between the conditions of brain work and manual work" in bourgeois society. He further emphasized that for the large majority of the intelligentsia, "the class struggle of the proletariat in its internal connection with socialism remains for them a book sealed with seven seals": for a member of this stratum, joining the Marxist movement meant "leaping across the abyss into a camp alien to him" (Trotsky, "The Intelligentsia and Socialism" [1910]).

These observations provide context for discussion on the intelligentsia, but what about teachers specifically?

In Marxist economic terms, teachers' work falls into the category of "unproductive" labor. What this means, of course, is not that their work is useless or unimportant, but that it does not directly produce surplus value. In and of itself, this would not necessarily place them outside the Marxist definition of the working class, some of whose members perform labor that is "unproductive" in this specific sense.

More directly to the point, the classic Marxist view of teachers' "class location" has been summarized as follows:

"They belong to that stratum of unproductive labour which is employed by the State to maintain the overall conditions of capitalist production; and thus, even though they share many characteristics with the working class, they do not belong to the working class.

"Economically, teachers are positioned between the capitalists and the working class.... They belong to a middle class, positioned between the global function of capital and the function of the collective laborer...."<sup>4</sup>

These classic Marxist conceptions are not just useful but, I would argue, essential for us today. When we decide to do organizing work amongst graduate students, adjuncts, junior faculty, etc., it is crucial that we have a clear and unmistakable conception of the social nature of this milieu, while emphasizing that its best elements must consciously break from their caste-like self-conceit, exclusiveness and elitism. These best elements, that is, must undertake a deliberate orientation to a very different milieu: that of the social



Cartoon from leftist *Teacher and Worker* newsletter, March 1935, CCNY archives. *Plus ça change...* ("the more things change, the more they remain the same").

power of the working class that makes every wheel of capitalist society turn, and can bring it all to a halt.

### What Is a Proletarian?

At the risk of sounding like Engels's 1847 "catechism," let's ask again, "What is a proletarian?" A real answer has to take into account what proletarians are *not*, as well as their condition as wage-earners. It also must account for the social relations in bourgeois society and what these mean concretely in everyday life.

The proletarian is not defined only negatively, by his or her lack of property in the means of production; nor even by the condition of living only through selling his or her labor power. If these were the only definitive proletarian attributes, then medical residents, social workers, CVS pharmacists and many other members of the intermediate strata would be proletarians just as much or even so than adjuncts.

But in reality, the "Adjunct Project" [at the CUNY Grad Center] is not, and can never be, a proletarian organization! In my view, this is not because its petty-bourgeois characteristics somehow negate the true inner essence of adjunctism. If anything, the contrary is true: these characteristics reflect an outlook emerging from adjuncts' position as part of the intermediate strata, for many of whom the idea of orienting to the labor movement is organically alien.

I believe that intense class struggle would *polarize* this kind of milieu, pushing towards us some of its elements while repelling others. In building CUNY Contingents Unite, Class Struggle Education Workers comrades have sought as much as possible to base it on the traditions and

<sup>4</sup> Kevin Harris, *Teachers and Classes: A Marxist Analysis* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 128. Since this summary description deals with teachers in general, it is worth noting that K-12 teachers tend to have more job stability but less individual decision-making power with regard to curriculum and class content, and experience more direct supervision, than is the case with CUNY adjuncts.

methods of the workers movement, but this, too, requires a constant and difficult struggle, as much of what we have to say cuts against the grain for this intermediate social stratum.

### The Truth Is Always Concrete

Let's be concrete. What does the work-life of an adjunct consist of? The work of an adjunct is a highly developed expression of the division between manual and intellectual labor in capitalist society.

However, when we approach the question concretely, the work-life of an adjunct is very different even from that of a highly educated clerk in an office.

Many adjuncts design their own courses, choose the readings, write the syllabi, make the assignments – and change these as they see fit.

Classroom work consists of sitting or standing in front of the students, talking, asking questions, guiding discussion, sometimes administering tests or quizzes (that the adjunct has often designed).

Then there is grading, as well as meeting with students.

Adjuncts are little supervised, if at all. Time-clocks are unknown, and would be considered an intolerable intrusion on “professional” dignity and autonomy. Adjuncts can go to the bathroom at will; wear what they choose; talk, read, crack jokes, drink soda, sing a song or recite a poem if that is their fancy on any given day.

There's more. Unlike the artisan or the small tradesman, the proletarian is part of a group whose work is characteristically *collective*. This is one of the sources of the proletariat's power and class-consciousness (real or potential).

What about adjuncts? To what degree is their work collective? To what degree, for that matter, does an adjunct's *work* depend on that of other adjuncts? In general, the answer to this question is: *not at all*.

The labor of adjunct professors is not, by its nature, collective labor.

Of course, to improve their situation, adjuncts must learn to act collectively. This is very hard for them, and the sense that it goes against their nature is not mere false consciousness. The individualistic outlook of many adjuncts has, in reality, a material basis in their real life.

Moreover, society – the authorities present in daily life, the press, students, manual workers, parents, etc. – treat “college professors” in general very differently from the way “workers” are treated. This is manifested in many ways that each of us can, I think, easily enumerate.

Another complication arises from the fact that most adjuncts live in hopes of ascending the next rung of academic life and getting on the tenure track. Do poorly paid junior faculty really constitute part of a separate *class* from adjuncts? Or are not both part of those sectors of the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia that makes their living by producing, not commodities, but “ideas,” with the privileges, contradictions and limitations that this entails?

While adjuncts live by selling their labor-power, they do have something else: intensive training as an intellectual, which – and this is the great hope that defines so much of their life – may eventually be parlayed into a nice income,

significant stability, and a comfortable middle-class existence.

While capitalist society cannot get along for even a week without electricity, phone service, subways and other transport, fuel, not to mention the whole range of commodities essential to its existence, the case is rather different with the labor of the adjunct professor. Even if all the adjuncts in the country went on strike for a month (extraordinarily unlikely given the fragmented nature of adjunct life), this would be little more than an inconvenience for the bourgeoisie. The social power of the proletariat at all strategic points of modern society, together with its collective labor which provides a material basis for an outlook of collective class consciousness, are key for Marxists.

In inverse proportion to their actual lack of material social power, even the impoverished strata of the intelligentsia learn to mark caste-like boundaries of prestige and exclusivity, with special codes of vocabulary, reference and comportment, denoting their status as members of “the academy” no matter how lowly. Thus profundity comes to be measured by how hard it is to understand them, even if they don't know their ass from a hole in the ground.

### Social Definitions Have Political Consequences

So where has our discussion led us? We have defined adjunct professors as members of the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia, and rejected as sociologically inaccurate and disorienting the idea that they are part of the proletariat. Squarely situating the intelligentsia in the petty-bourgeois stratum of society clarifies the political tasks of Marxists in relation to intellectuals. Definitively it does not mean becoming “workerists,” or “dumbing down” Marxism in a populist/paternalist way, let alone echoing the anti-intellectual strain in American life. Our most important task is to win the most thoughtful and militant people in our milieu over to the program of revolutionary class struggle.

In this fight we need all the educated intelligence, all the talent, knowledge and skill we can get our hands on. But to win the intellectuals who possess these skills we need to break them from the academicist outlook, which is drilled into academicians, even impoverished ones, in bourgeois society.

This includes breaking them from the idea that there is or could ever be any kind of academic Marxism; and helping them put their talents fully in the service of a force that exists mainly outside and beyond the university walls: a working class that most of them know only “in theory.” If we tell them that they themselves *are* proletarians, this task will be considerably harder, and we will be confusing rather than clarifying some underlying issues.

In his account of the great 1903 split in the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, Lenin referred to Marxism as the standpoint of “the ideology of the proletariat trained by capitalism,” which teaches “intellectuals to distinguish between the factory as a means of exploitation (discipline based on fear of starvation) and the factory as a means of organization (discipline based on collective work united by the conditions of a technically highly developed form of production),” noting that: “The discipline and organisation

which come so hard to the bourgeois intellectual are very easily acquired by the proletariat just because of this factory ‘schooling’” (Lenin, *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* [1904], Chapter Q, “The New *Iskra*”).<sup>15</sup>

In other words, the task of transforming intellectuals into revolutionaries has to take into account the difference between their life situation and that of the proletariat. Most

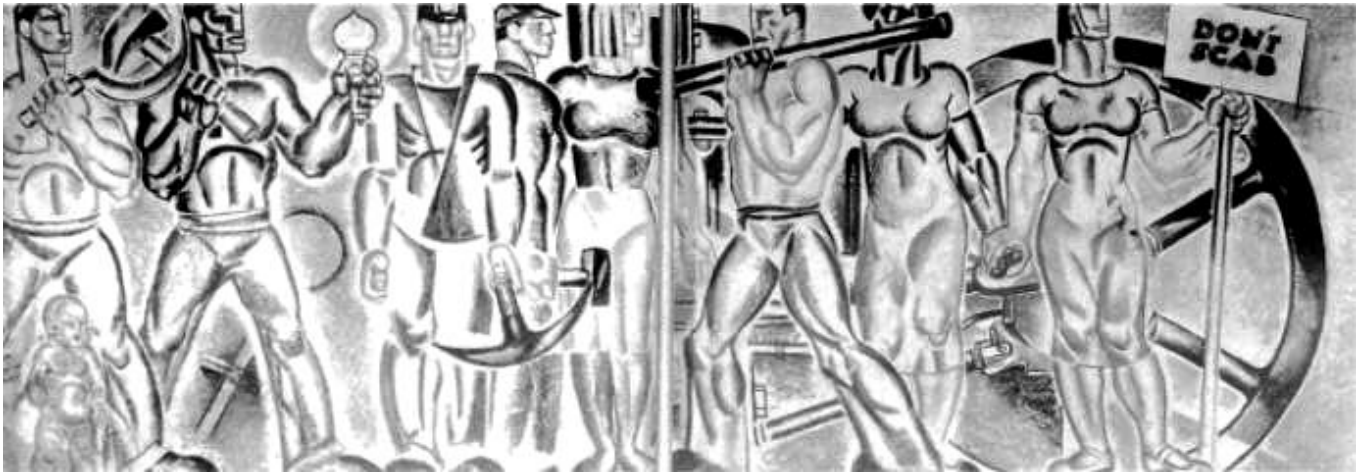
<sup>15</sup> Highly recommended in this context is James P. Cannon’s book on the 1939-40 split in the SWP, *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*, particularly Chapter 5, “The Intellectuals and the Workers.” In it he notes: “It is the workers who must make the revolution and it is workers who must compose the proletarian vanguard party. The function of the Marxist intellectual is to aid the workers in their struggle. He can do it constructively only by turning his back on the bourgeois world and joining the proletarian revolutionary camp, that is, by ceasing to be a petty bourgeois. On that basis the worker Bolsheviks and the Marxist intellectuals will get along very well together.”

workers are excluded from key aspects of the historically accumulated knowledge they need in order to become professional revolutionaries – and the revolutionary party becomes the “university of the working class.”

Professional intellectuals who would join the cause of the working class and its revolutionary party must undertake the difficult tasks of learning the habits of collective work and subordinating themselves to the cause of the working class – the only force that can bring socialism into being. This means, in significant part, that intellectuals who become communist revolutionaries are “declassed,” and very mindful of the need for a thorough and ruthless break from everything that binds them to the bourgeois order, in order to devote themselves unreservedly to the proletarian cause.

And Lenin never claimed to *be* a proletarian.

– by S.J., 1 April 2011



**Mural for the “Proletarian Cooperative Cafeteria,” NYC, 1928, by Hugo Gellert (1892-1985). Prominently associated with the radical left, Gellert also conceived and illustrated Karl Marx’s “Capital” in Lithographs.** (Graphic from Restaurant-

“[E]fforts at educational reform in the interests of the exploited and oppressed and the fight against capitalist reaction cannot succeed without sweeping away the imperialist system, whose increasing decay means the wholesale destruction of past democratic and social gains. Today as in the past, the fight for education must be part of the fight for international socialist revolution. Indeed, every epoch of social upheaval focuses public attention and political controversy on the schools, for deep-going changes in society are concentrated in the education of the coming generation. In the period leading up to the French Revolution of 1789-92, the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau prefigured the rise of bourgeois democracy and the educational system of the post-revolutionary regime.

“The institution of universal public education was an outgrowth of industrial capitalism, as the captains of industry needed literate workers. (At the same time, they sought to strictly control the content of the education provided to their ‘wage slaves.’) In the early 20th century, a movement for ‘progressive education’ sought to modernize antiquated practices. But radical change was restricted to isolated experiments. It was the Soviet workers republic, led by the Bolshevik Party..., that first undertook a genuine revolution in public education.” While these “initial groundbreaking achievements” were “largely rolled back by the Stalinist bureaucracy, and eventually undone by capitalist counterrevolution,” this experience continues to point towards our future tasks of creating “a revolutionary educational system on the road to a classless, socialist society.”

– From the introduction to the 2nd edition of *Marxism and the Battle Over Education* (Internationalist pamphlet, 2008, available for \$3). If you would like to get a copy of the pamphlet, or back issues of *Class Struggle*; find out about CSEW activities and Marxist reading/discussion groups; or talk with us about struggles you’re involved in, please contact us at [cs\\_edworkers@hotmail.com](mailto:cs_edworkers@hotmail.com)

## **CUNY Repression** *(continued from p.32)*

chants of “You are the 99%” while we and others counterposed “We are all Sean Bell, NYPD go to hell.” CSEW activists emphasized the need for a thorough-going political break with the Democrats and all bourgeois politicians, highlighting our call for a class-struggle workers party that fights for a workers government. Against the patriotic flag-waving that marked one OWS event after another, we spoke through the “people’s mic” to stress that the stars and stripes are the flag of U.S. imperialism, of the capitalist system founded on chattel slavery, that “it is not our flag – our flag is red.”

On October 20, the CSEW and CUNY Internationalists co-sponsored a forum on labor and student struggles, featuring International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) militant Jack Heyman, who spoke on “Class War on the Waterfront.” Addressing the question, “How can workers prevail against international capital?”, Heyman focused on the battle against union-busting in the port of Longview, Washington, where hundreds of longshore workers and supporters blocked trains, dumped thousands of tons of grain, and faced off against massive police repression.

The forum also featured talks on “Public Education in the Crosshairs” and “A Marxist View of Occupy Wall Street,” leading to fruitfully contentious debate from the floor regarding what it means to fight for a workers party (including with an anarchist spokesman who denounced our focus on a class-struggle program), and whether we were being “too hard on OWS” by “pushing” our critiques of bourgeois populism, patriotism and the 99% slogan.

### **“Cops Off Campus”**

Following the OWS model, “general assemblies” were established at some CUNY campuses. At Hunter College, CSEW members worked together with activists of the CUNY Internationalist Clubs and others to bring the issue of NYPD spying on Muslim students to these gatherings, after Associated Press launched an exposé (which has now won a Pulitzer Prize) of this sinister operation at Brooklyn College, Hunter and many other campuses. We also waged an intense struggle for the Hunter GA to adopt the demand “All cops off campus” – explicitly including CUNY’s own security forces. While this faced stiff opposition from some, we succeeded in having the demand formally adopted, and its importance was promptly underscored on November 21, when CUNY security and the NYPD were unleashed on a student protest against tuition hikes at a Board of Trustees meeting held inside Baruch College.

With a follow-up BoT meeting scheduled for November 28 to rubber-stamp the tuition hike, the administration decided to shut Baruch down completely that afternoon – a move that aroused indignation even among conservative faculty members at this business-dominated campus. At “general assemblies” held at City College and the CUNY Graduate Center, we argued that an effective response to the crackdown required going beyond the campus framework to link up with the power of NYC’s multiracial, heavily immigrant working class, whose sons and daughters

are those most directly hit by the drive for a race and class purge of the university through ever-rising tuition, exclusionary policies and repression.

Debate came to a head at a GA where some activists argued insistently for symbolic (and purely student-based) tactics, counterposed to our proposal that those assembled formally call on the CUNY faculty/staff union (PSC–Professional Staff Congress) to mobilize its members and contact the city’s other major unions for a mass labor, student, and community demonstration at Baruch on November 28 “in defense of CUNY students; in defense of the right to protest, in defense of public education, against tuition hikes and police brutality.” Given the urgency of the matter, we called for an actual vote (instead of “consensing” through “twinkle-fingers”), and the proposal was carried. It then proved necessary to defend this democratically made decision against a late-night attempt to water it down beyond recognition and let the union leaderships off the hook. The appeal to the PSC was finally made, and the union agreed to call the proposed demonstration. Strikingly, however – and indicative of the different class orientations underlying these debates – the task of actually contacting and bringing out members of other city unions, immigrant rights groups, etc., was taken up only by CSEW members and activists from the CUNY Internationalist Clubs. When even the production of a simple flier to mobilize for November 28th dissolved into endless “consensing” with no outcome, we undertook this task as well.

A significant number of students and other protesters came out for a vocal and very lively protest on November 28. This included PSC members (although the union did not mobilize en masse), as well as representatives from the TWU (subway and bus workers), CWA (Verizon workers who had recently been on strike), DC37 hospital workers, UAW clerical workers, and others. Marchers spilled into streets surrounding Baruch, and the area in front of the now-barricaded, shut-down campus was filled with chants of “No tuition” and “Cops off campus,” together with speeches by student and faculty activists as well as several city workers, in which counterposed orientations – for class struggle vs. “the people united,” for “working with” Democratic pols vs. “labor and students, shut the city down” – once again came to the fore...

### **Building Teach-ins and Forums**

Against the concerted attempts to stifle and intimidate students and union activists, CSEW members also sparked the organizing of a series of “solidarity teach-ins” by the Hunter PSC chapter, spreading this to Baruch immediately after the administration’s outrageous shutdown of the campus. These activities featured a wide range of speakers on the history of student protest at CUNY, notably the 1969 City College building takeovers by black and Puerto Rican students that led to winning open admissions; on “public space” and police repression; the adjunct healthcare and “Pathways” crises, and other issues.

Highlights included talks by a Chilean grad student on the months-long strike for public education carried out by high-school and college students in Chile, who were supported by a 48-hour general strike called by the main union federation; by a participant in the recent University of Puer-

to Rico strikes; and by some of the students arrested at Baruch on November 21. Hunter *Envoy* editors spoke about their ongoing investigations of the repression at Baruch. When the *Envoy* disproved administration claims that NYPD officers were not inside the Baruch lobby during the arrests, CUNY officials then contended that city police did not participate in the actual arrests. A further *Envoy* exposé demolished that too, showing in detail that a large number of NYPD police were present and involved in the arrests. The student journalists' meticulous work backed up accounts by students arrested that day, who explained how CUNY security worked hand-in-glove with the NYPD not only in effecting the arrests but in transporting them to jail, fingerprinting and booking them. CSEW members gave presentations on police repression and on the connection between education and revolution in Latin America.

On December 8, the CSEW and CUNY Internationalists cosponsored another forum at the CUNY Graduate Center, titled "Current CUNY Protests, the 'Occupy' Movement, and Revolutionary Politics." Here again there was debate and discussion about the politics and outlook of Occupy, with CSEW members making the case for "saying what is" without fear or favor, a crucial task for those in the business of winning adjuncts, students, immigrant workers and union militants to a consistent, internationalist class program to actually *defeat* and expropriate the capitalist ruling class.

An important part of this forum consisted of presentations by two courageous young Hunter students arrested at Baruch on November 21: Anne Zhou, who showed a short film she made about the protests; and Tiffany Huan, who gave a powerful account of being singled out from the crowd – "four out of five of those arrested were minorities," she noted – and dragged and manhandled by the campus cops. When she spoke up against this mistreatment, a CUNY security officer said he could "touch [her] wherever I want" because she was under arrest. Student speakers emphasized the seamless cooperation between the NYPD and CUNY security, and a CUNY Internationalist speaker stressed the need to draw political conclusions from this, including the importance of demanding *all* cops off campus, while linking this to the racist "stop and frisk" program which affected over 600,000 youth – including many CUNY students – last year alone.

Police repression, surveillance and intimidation on campus were also highlighted in the aftermath of Hunter PSC teach-ins where groups of campus security officers gathered outside; a uniformed security officer ostentatiously stood *inside* the lecture hall during the November 17 teach-in; administration members came in and took notes during the March 1 teach-in, while Hunter Visitor Center personnel informed a PSC union staffer that they had been instructed not to allow people onto campus to attend the teach-in that day. Condemning this blatant interference with union affairs, the campus union chapter announced that it is filing a Freedom of Information Law request for all administration and security documents and correspondence related to this and other repressive actions against faculty, students and staff. This includes any cooperation with the NYPD's on-campus spy operations – as well as the most

recent scandal, in which a Hunter Undergraduate Student Government member was called into the Public Safety office, where he was met by FBI agents who interrogated him about his participation in "anti-fascist protests."

\* \* \*

This issue of the CSEW newsletter reprints a resolution, presented by one of our members and adopted by the Hunter PSC, on repression at CUNY. At PSC Delegate Assembly meetings we presented motions reflecting our fight for the political independence of the working class and the labor movement as a whole (see pages 2 and 6).

Our resolution against the PSC affiliating to the Working Families Party, and our motion objecting to the endorsement of President Obama's reelection campaign by the American Federation of Teachers (to which the PSC and UFT are both affiliated), led to stormy debates in what many considered some of the most interesting such meetings they could recall.

Delegates of otherwise divergent viewpoints were roused to support these motions. A series of speakers detailed the effects of the WFP's craven support to Democratic candidates even in the case of such a brazen union-basher as New York Governor Cuomo (who just rammed through the devastating "Tier VI" attack on pension rights). On the Obama endorsement issue, speaker after speaker reminded delegates of how the White House is leading attacks on public education, mass deportation of immigrants, "national security state" measures, together with imperialist mass murder, war and occupation abroad. The connection between Obama's policies and the wave of NYC school closings was also stressed. Supporters of the Obama endorsement used the well-worn "TINA" defense, i.e., that there is no alternative but to back the Democratic nominee.

A large minority of union delegates agreed with our opposition to affiliation with the WFP, but many did not agree with our positive call for a workers party. After that part of the motion was amended out (over our objections), the resolution received approximately a third of the votes. On what happened with our resolution for the PSC to object to the AFT's endorsement of Obama's reelection campaign, see pages 7-8 of this issue.

\* \* \*

As organizers and activists in CUNY Contingents Unite (CCU) – the "functional entity" within the PSC formed in September 2008 to give voice to contingent academic workers at CUNY – CSEW members have been heavily involved in the CCU's campaigns for full health coverage for *all* contingent employees; against the widespread practice whereby teaching assistants are not paid for significant parts of their required workweek; and to resist job cuts against adjuncts threatened by the CUNY administration's "Pathways" plan to revamp the general education curriculum. While claiming to respond to legitimate student concerns about how hard it is to transfer credits and get the courses needed for graduation, the Board of Trustees and administration are harming students' education by slashing foreign-language courses, pushing science classes without lab sections, and otherwise degrading education in line with their drive to privatize public ed.



In presenting a distinct standpoint on Pathways, CSEW members have emphasized the need to **abolish the Board of Trustees**. As stated in our program, “students, teachers and workers (together with parents at primary and secondary schools) should democratically control schools and universities.” As for transfer requirements, they would look a lot different after reinstatement of open admissions and no tuition, also key demands of our struggle.

These issues come together in the understanding that even a basic democratic right like public education is increasingly incompatible with the very existence of the capitalist system. To get to the root of the matter, then, it's capitalism we have to fight. ■

## Join the CSEW!



May 2011: The CSEW rushed over from a union protest against budget cuts to the opening night of the new play by Tony Kushner (at left in the photo above), “The Intelligent Homosexual’s Guide to Capitalism and Socialism with a Key to the Scriptures.” (Photo: Steven Thrasher/Village Voice). At the behest of witch-hunting trustee Jeffrey Wiesenfeld, CUNY’s Board of Trustees initially denied the Pulitzer-winning playwright an honorary degree. Dozens of theatergoers and passers-by greeted us, as did Kushner, who said he was “incredibly touched” by the support. The *Village Voice* (5 May) quoted a CSEW activist saying that the proposed degree reflected Kushner’s standing as “a great playwright and an important contributor to the cultural life of the city and of the world” and noting that Wiesenfeld has “a history of attacking academic freedom, and a history of attacking any views which are at all critical of Israel’s policies.” The trustees, he said, had made “a scandalous intrusion on the rights of the faculty, the rights of the students, and an attack on academic freedom and artistic freedom.” An outpouring of support from CUNY faculty, students and alumni wound up spiking the witch hunt.

Below: Protesting Board of Trustees meeting. There’s no way to fix or reform the undemocratic, unelected gaggle of real-estate speculators, bankers and crony capitalists who dictate over CUNY. Like Bloomberg’s DOE and PEP, the BoT must be abolished. CUNY should be run by those who work and study there. (Photo: The Internationalist)



# CSEW: Who we are and what we stand for...

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

## Class Struggle Education Workers Program

We have formed Class Struggle Education Workers (CSEW) as part of a broader fight for a revitalization and transformation of the labor movement into an instrument for the emancipation of the working class and the oppressed rather than, as it is at present, an instrument for the disciplining of labor in the interests of capital. The subservience of organized labor goes beyond the PSC, UFT and AFSCME, and we look forward to a class-struggle tendency encompassing militants in a number of unions. We support the basic positions expressed in the Internationalist pamphlets *Stop CUNY's Anti-Immigrant War Purge* and *Marxism and the Battle over Education*. We stand for:

- 1) Free public education from kindergarten through graduate school. Abolish corporate-dominated Boards of Trustees and mayoral control of the schools: students, teachers and workers (together with parents at primary and secondary schools) should democratically control schools and universities.
- 2) Stop education privatization and making the City University of New York into “Wal-Mart U”! For militant action against deepening inequality at CUNY and throughout the school system. Abolish the two-tier academic labor system that pays adjunct and other contingent education workers poverty wages. Job security, parity and full health coverage for adjuncts and all “part-timers,” including graduate students: equal pay for equal work. Unite against the drive to gut public higher education and turn it into a “platform” for making profits.
- 3) Defend and transform public education in the interests of working people and the oppressed. Oppose capitalist corporatization. Cancel all student debt. Living stipend and free housing for students. No to “charter schools” as an opening wedge to privatization. Down with “merit pay” in any form. In the UFT: Full-time positions for all teachers “excessed” or “reorganized” out of their jobs (ATRs). Defend tenure, restore seniority, abolish “rubber rooms” that penalize teachers subject to unjust accusations.
- 4) Oppose resegregation of schools: separate is not equal. Stop discrimination and racist attacks against black, Latino, Asian and immigrant students. Fight budget cuts, tuition hikes, exclusionary tests and all anti-working-class, anti-minority measures. Restore open admissions, no tuition. Down with the anti-education “No Child Left Behind” act. Stop anti-immigrant “war purges” (like the one CUNY launched in 2001) against undocumented students and workers. Full citizenship rights for all immigrants.
- 5) Mobilize the power of labor together with minorities, immigrants and students in an all-out fight to smash the Taylor Law. Keep bosses’ courts out of the unions. Police and military recruiters out of the schools. No cops, prison or security guards in the unions. For a single union of all university workers. Oust the sellout bureaucrats, for a class-struggle leadership.
- 6) Parental leave for all. Free childcare on campus, available around the clock for students and employees. Full reproductive rights, including free abortion on demand and full availability of contraceptives; no to reactionary campaigns against sex education.
- 7) Defend the rights of labor, minorities, immigrants, women, gays and lesbians. Make PSC defense of Mumia real – mobilize workers’ power for his freedom. Solidarity with teachers and all workers in Mexico, Puerto Rico and elsewhere.
- 8) End union support to capitalist politicians (Democrats, Republicans, Greens, et al.). For workers’ strikes against the war – Defeat U.S. imperialism. Oppose U.S. war threats against Iran, Cuba, China, North Korea. For a class-struggle workers party to fight for a workers government.

*Approved at the CSEW's founding meeting, 26 September 2008.*

# Class Struggle

## *Education Workers Newsletter*

“Educate – Agitate – Organize”

## Protesting Repression at CUNY



Baruch College: working closely with the NYPD, CUNY security confronts students protesting tuition hikes at 21 November 2011 Board of Trustees meeting.  
Photos: Ticker, above left; Hunter Envoy, above right.



### Class Struggle and OWS

The emergence of Occupy Wall Street early last fall drew worldwide attention and posed a series of questions for union militants and radical activists. Coming after the upsurge in Wisconsin (which the labor tops buried in the service of the Democratic Party), the Occupy movement raised hopes among many union members for a revitalization of labor. Drawing on widespread indignation against financial elites in the midst of the worst economic crisis in eight decades, OWS posed the issue in populist terms as one of a united “99%” of the people versus an oligarchic “1%” that had made money the king of American politics – purportedly a recent phenomenon rather than the heart and soul of capitalist “democracy.”

Participating – with thousands of NYC unionists – in early-morning mobilizations to defend the Zuccotti Park encampment against eviction, and helping build class-struggle contingents in protests throughout the fall, CSEW members did not follow most of the left in tailing after the populist outlook of OWS. We pointed out that the struggle is one of *class against class*, not a statistically-defined 99% vs. 1%; stressed that capitalism cannot be reformed or humanized through “tax the rich” or financial transaction-tax tinkering; and faced off against “shock-treatment” economist Jeffrey Sachs when he was invited to speak to OWS.

The issue of racist police terror was repeatedly posed when OWS “non-leader” leaders addressed the NYPD with

### ***Notes on recent CSEW activities at the City University***

The issue of police repression has come to the fore at the City University of New York as a scandal broke about NYPD spying against Muslim students and campus groups; police and CUNY security were unleashed against student protesters; and union activists denounced surveillance and attempted intimidation of union-sponsored teach-ins and other activities. Throughout this period, Class Struggle Education Workers members repeatedly played a leading role in organizing and mobilizing against repression on campus, linking this to broader social issues like the fight against the NYPD’s racist “stop-and-frisk” program and the continuing escalation of police-state measures by the Obama administration.

Among the most important points in the CSEW’s program (see page 31) are these: “Police and military recruiters out of the schools. No cops, prison or security guards in the unions.” Recent experience underscored the centrality of these demands. Education activists interested in the views and activities of the CSEW will want to know what we did during these tumultuous events, and what we had to say in the significant debates and controversies that arose.

*continued on page 28*