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Stop Privatization of Public Schools - Not Corporate Fake "Reform," We Need an Education Revolution!

## No to Teacher-Basher McCain and Education-for-War Obama

The Way It Ought to Be – Students Defend Teachers in 1950



Anthony Camerano/AP

Break with the Democrats – For a Class-Struggle Workers Party

An Internationalist Group Pamphlet

November 2008

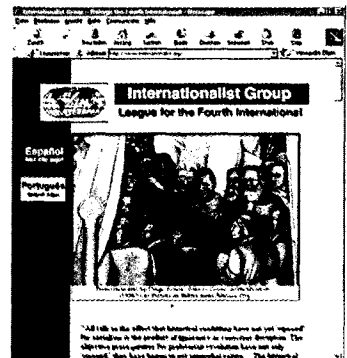


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## *The* Internationalist



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November 2008

Front page photo: Cheering high-school students during demonstrations around New York City Hall, 27 April 1950. They were trying to see Mayor O'Dwyer to support their teachers' demands for higher pay.

**Stop Privatization of Public Schools – Not Corporate Fake “Reform,” We Need an Education Revolution!**

## **No to Teacher-Basher McCain and Education-for-War Obama**



Damon Winter/New York Times

**Senators John McCain and Barack Obama after presidential candidates debate, October 15, where they agreed on key education issues. No vote for capitalist parties and politicians!**

### **Break with the Democrats – For a Class-Struggle Workers Party**

From the outset of the 2008 presidential election campaign more than a year and a half ago, teachers and teachers unions have been mobilized to the hilt for the Democratic Party. While the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) first backed Hillary Clinton in the Democratic primaries, it and the National Education Association (NEA) and most teachers are now overwhelmingly for Barack Obama running against John McCain for the Republicans. In the final countdown, in New York City the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) repre-

senting public elementary and secondary school educators and the Professional Staff Congress (PSC) representing City University faculty and staff have been sending busloads to canvass door-to-door for Obama in the nearest “swing state,” Pennsylvania. Across the country locals of the AFT, to which the UFT and PSC are affiliated, and the NEA have revved up their phone banks to get out the vote. *They’re going for the Democrats, but the Democrats are not going for them – nor are the Republicans, to be sure.*



**Bodies of some of 25-30 Afghan civilians killed in NATO air strike, October 16. Obama wants to escalate Afghanistan war.** (Photo: Abdul Khaleq/Associated Press)

The fact that for the first time ever a black man is the top candidate of one of the major parties and could likely be the next U.S. president, and that a woman was his chief opponent in the primary elections, marks a significant social shift in this country that will be widely seen as a breakthrough. Yet this does not change the fact that the Democrats and Republicans are both bourgeois parties who govern by and for the capitalist class *against* the interests of working people, of black, Latino and Asian racial/ethnic minorities, of immigrants and all the oppressed. Both candidates will continue the imperialist occupation of Iraq and both promise to *escalate* the war in Afghanistan. As the U.S. sinks in economic crisis, possibly leading to years of depression, both parties and both presidential contenders support the trillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street banks and do nothing as millions of families (particularly African Americans) lose their homes to the banks. We say that the imperialist war abroad is the same as the class war being waged against workers and the oppressed here “at home,” and we must *defeat* this war by working-class action.

Of course, the AFT and NEA went for Democrat Kerry in 2004 and for Democrat Gore in 2000, and for Bill Clinton in 1996 and '92. The teachers unions are one of the core constituencies of the Democratic Party. They are well represented in Democratic conventions (the AFT had 135 delegates in 2008, the NEA over 200). But there is a particular Democratic fervor this year, as teachers have been under the gun throughout the Bush administration. The 2001 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act mandated constant high-stakes testing in the name of “accountability,” as if fill-in-the-bubble math and reading exams measured knowledge. At a 2004 White House conference, Bush’s first education

secretary Rod Paige called the NEA a “terrorist organization” for obstructing the NCLB. Corporate education “reformers” now want to use these tests as the basis for teachers’ salaries, calling it “pay for performance.” Yet the co-author of NCLB was none other than liberal Massachusetts Democratic senator Ted Kennedy, and when a bill was drawn up for reauthorization last year, liberal California Democratic senator George Miller wanted to include test-based “merit pay.”

There isn’t the slightest doubt that McCain is bad news for teachers and students in every way. The issue is over Obama, and in particular the illusions he has awakened among many youth, blacks, liberals and in general those who are fed up with the Bush regime, including most educators. Unlike Neanderthal right-wingers for whom teacher-bashing is a staple of their red-meat diet, Obama says he will “support” and “work with teachers.” But what will he work with teachers on? Obama says he wants to *introduce merit pay*, and not just for whole schools but to individually “differentiate compensation.” He supports *increasing charter schools*, which are the Trojan Horse of those who are seeking to privatize the public schools. He calls for *removing teachers* who administrators decide are “doing a poor job,” which is a license for managerial arbitrariness and the end of teacher tenure. And these points just happen to be the three-pronged attack plan of the corporate interests for whom “educational reform” means union-busting.

The election can’t be considered outside of the broader context of economic crisis, racism and war. On the *financial crisis*, both presidential candidates have supported the bailout of the Wall Street banks (now estimated at \$2.25 trillion), while Obama calls for spending a mere \$29 billion on

his education agenda and McCain says he isn't planning to spend a dime more of federal money on schools. On *racism*, Obama presents himself a "post-racial" candidate, and has turned his back on every recent protest against racial abuse. Yet there is no getting around racism in this country founded on chattel slavery, as shown by shouts to "kill Obama" at McCain/Palin rallies, the Nazi-skinhead plot to do just that (after first murdering 18 black school children), or the justified concerns of black voters in Florida that their votes will simply be thrown out, as they were in the 2000 elections. As for *war*, Obama now says he will leave a "residual force" of *thousands* of U.S. troops in Iraq *indefinitely* while expanding the armed forces and sending more troops to Afghanistan. He poses his education program as a way to *enhance U.S. competitiveness, national security and military strength* – in short, education for war.

As usual, the union bureaucracies, particularly of the AFT under Randi Weingarten and her predecessors, are looking for the best deal they can get from the Democrats – so they go for Obama. They know what his education policies are, but figure they will beat back any threat by supporting the softest version of attacks on teachers and hoping to water them down. What this has meant is steadily chopping away union gains. In the UFT that has included agreeing to charter schools, giving up seniority transfers and a series of teacher rights, exchanging a longer workday and year for a raise, and letting principals do the hiring. Then came "school-wide" merit pay, and now using students' test scores to "evaluate" (but supposedly not, yet, to pay or decide on tenure for) teachers. With their "lesser-evil" bourgeois politics, Weingarten & Co. have chalked up a remarkable record of failure, from backing a string of losing candidates (Mark Green, Elliott Spitzer, Hillary Clinton), or giving back-door support to others who then turn on teachers (John Dewey award to Republican governor Pataki, supporting mayoral control of the schools under Republicrat Bloomberg).

Those who think Barack Obama, any Democrat or any other capitalist politician will be teacher- and student-friendly are in for a rude awakening. For one thing, Obama himself was educated in an elite private school in Hawaii and went on to the elite private institutions of Columbia University and Harvard Law School. He has no real experience of the public schools except from the outside, when he was active in community work and educational "reforms" in Chicago. Yes, Obama does want to spend (some) more money on education, but it comes at a price. And that puts the future of teachers unions in jeopardy.

#### **McCain/Palin: The New Orleans "Model"**

The right-wing self-proclaimed "mavericks" John McCain and Alaska governor Sarah Palin certainly have nothing to offer teachers. In the October 2 vice presidential debate, the ultrarightist creationist Alaska governor who poses as a hokey "hockey mom" with a Nieman Marcus wardrobe Palin remarked about the wife of her rival, Delaware senator Joe Biden, who has been a teacher for 30 years, "God bless her. Her reward is in heaven, right?" As for earthly rewards, that is another matter, while the Republicans want to make life hellish for teachers and students by foisting their reactionary "values" on the schools. The Re-

publican 2008 platform on education calls for enforcing phonics literacy instruction (a conservative hobby horse), "ending social promotion" (i.e., holding children back rather than helping them learn), "merit pay for good teachers" (i.e., trying to foster competition among educators), "strong leadership by principals" (to break teacher unions) and promoting "public-private partnerships," as well as "charter schools, vouchers or tax credits for attending faith-based or other non-public schools, or the option of home schooling."

Reflecting the right-wing evangelical Christian hold on the Republican Party, the platform also calls for "access to school facilities for religious purposes," programs that teach "abstinence until marriage," and of course, no contraceptives, referrals or counseling for abortion. It also supports sexual segregation in "girls only" and "boys only" schools. And "English first," which is code for anti-immigrant "English only" immersion programs and opposition to bilingual education. They don't bother to oppose school busing to desegregate schools, because the Supreme Court has outlawed it. In short, they are on the warpath to undermine and ultimately destroy free, secular, integrated public education for all. Of course, conservatives have been trying to do this for more than four decades, but with limited success. So far they have managed to make the schools a key battleground for their "culture wars." Where they have succeeded, it has been because they have had *liberal support* for their "accountability" "metrics," which are about as accurate as the Pentagon's vile "body counts" in the Vietnam War.

In an October 21 debate between the candidates' education advisors at Columbia University Teachers College, McCain's mouthpiece Lisa Graham Keegan, who presided over Arizona's abysmal schools (43rd out of 50 states for elementary schools in national test scores, 41st for middle schools) confirmed that the Republican candidate planned to "hold education spending where it is." Ludicrously, she claimed that there is "not one single credible study now that says what we really need to do in the United States is spend more money." What is true is that Republicans and Democrats as well as most educational "experts" have accepted the framework going back to the 1983 report on *A National at Risk* commissioned by the Reagan administration, that any "reform" should *lower* the overall U.S. expenditure on education. This is a standard conservative ploy: first starve inner city schools of funding, then discover that they are failing. How could they succeed with overcrowded classrooms, no science labs and now curtailing or eliminating arts, social studies and after-school programs?

The reality is that beginning with the economic crisis at the end of the Vietnam War, U.S. capitalists have demanded a sharp cutback in government "social overhead" expenditures such as education, in order to reduce business taxes and raise the falling profit rate. This was behind the bank-engineered mid-'70s fiscal crisis in New York City. Right-wingers claim that the U.S. spends more per capita on education than any other country. But this includes the enormous private expenditures on higher education (for private universities and tuition for public universities). In fact, while public expenditures on education have increased somewhat lately, they are today are about *25 percent lower*

than in 1975 as a percentage of gross national product and 28 percent lower as a percentage of government spending, as shown in the following table:

Year	% of GNP	% of Gov't Expenditure
1968	5.8	N.A.
1970	6.6	19.4
1975	7.4	21.3
1985	6.7	21.0
1990	5.3	12.3
1995	5.0	N.A.
2001	5.7	17.1
2004	5.9	15.3

\* Sources: United Nations Statistical Yearbook, OECD.Stat, UNdata. N.A.: Not available

Simply in order to restore the 1975 level of spending on education would require some \$200 billion additional per year, almost *seven times* greater than Obama is proposing. And 1975 was in the middle of an economic crisis.

Not only do the masters of American capitalism want to drive down public expenditures on education in order to drive up their profits, they also want to break the power of the unions. They have already gutted numerous unions in the private sector, and the teachers unions are some of the biggest and strongest in the public sector. The Republican education platform demands that “principals must have the authority to select and assign teachers without regard to collective bargaining agreements” and wants to create “an adjunct teacher corps of experts from higher education, business, and the military to fill in when needed” – e.g., as scabs during a teachers strike. But the model of what they want to do with public education is New Orleans, where the Republican Bush administration and Louisiana Democratic governor Kathleen Blanco (along with the Democratic state legislature) joined in *destroying the public school system* by “reorganization” in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. McCain education advisor Graham Keegan hails the fact that New Orleans “suspended all of their old collective bargaining agreements.”

The post-Katrina devastation of New Orleans was entirely man-made, and a deliberate effort by the bourgeoisie to take advantage of the crisis to ram through its wish list to “remake” the city. After 100,000 overwhelmingly black and poor people were left to die in the flood, the ruling class then carried out a massive “ethnic cleansing” of the population. By refusing to rebuild or aid homeowners in poor areas like Gentilly and the Lower Ninth Ward and tearing down public housing, they have reduced the black population from 300,000 to a little over 100,000 (from two-thirds to barely over one half of the total, now estimated at 239,000 by the

Census Bureau). The public school population has been cut from 67,000 to 33,000 and of those, 60 percent were enrolled in charter schools, the highest percentage in the nation, who have received tens of millions of dollars in federal grants. Only five schools out of 82 are run by the Orleans Parish School Board, while the rest were dumped into a state-run Recovery School District where they have been starved of funds. In December 2005, virtually all teachers and other employees of New Orleans Public Schools were fired – more than 7,000 in all. Some were then selectively rehired, but with no seniority, no tenure and no union contract.

This is the future that the Republican Party foresees for American education. In spite of their “accountability” hoopla and lavish funds, the New Orleans charter schools did no better overall on test scores than the remaining public schools. But that’s not the point: the aim was to get rid of the unions and any constraints on school managers’ authority, and here they have succeeded, with the aid of the Democrats.

### Obama: “McCain and I Agree”

When Barack Obama spoke via satellite to the National Education Association convention this past July, he specifically noted his support for charter schools, and went on to underline his call for “merit pay,” saying that “in some areas we have already seen it is possible to find new ways to increase teacher pay” when teachers “excel in the classroom.” This was roundly booed by numbers of NEA delegates, and rightly so. Obama went on to say that this could be done “with teachers, not imposed on teachers.” What he wants is to *get the teachers unions themselves to agree* to individual



Bill Haber/AP

**Democrat Obama and Republican McCain agree on support to charter schools, including in New Orleans where they have been used to destroy the public school system. Here Obama speaks with class at Capdau Charter School in New Orleans, May 2007.**

pay differentials that would set one educator against another, or pit one group of teachers against another group, to instill the “spirit of competition” that the big business “reformers” want and thereby undermine the collegial spirit of collective effort which is the foundation for any program to raise educational levels for the most “disadvantaged” (i.e., oppressed). Wherever such “merit pay” or “pay for performance” systems have been introduced, they have opened the floodgates for management abuse, have weakened unions and have done nothing to aid students’ education – or even test scores.

In fact, basing teachers pay on student test scores is *guaranteed* to harm students in the impoverished ghettos and barrios. Schools in inner city areas are older, many very run-down, without adequate science facilities and technological equipment, making it virtually impossible to sustain regular improvement without a massive infusion of funding. Even in the unlikely event that new schools would be built with state-of-the-art facilities such as the palatial school campuses in the (white upper-middle class) suburbs, there are still huge obstacles posed by a social environment marked by massive unemployment, pervasive poverty and widespread homelessness. This will only get worse in the current economic crisis that could become a new Depression lasting years. So teachers who are influenced by the higher pay will very quickly learn to flee the inner city schools, as they already do by leaving New York City schools en masse after three-to-five years and heading to the suburbs where salaries are far higher and conditions more conducive to learning.

The fact is that real school reform will take a *socialist revolution*, and anything short of that will be applying band-aids or highlighting a few showcases.

Many teachers argue that Obama is, after all, just a politician and he has to say these things in order to get elected. But every indication is that he is determined to push through the three-pronged program of charter schools, “merit” pay and eliminating teacher tenure in order to fire “bad teachers.” In the final presidential candidates debate, he remarked:

“Senator McCain and I actually agree on two things that he just mentioned. Charter schools, I doubled the number of charter schools in Illinois despite some reservations from teachers unions. I think it's important to foster competition inside the public schools. And we also agree on the need for making sure that if we have bad teachers that they are swiftly ... if they can't hack it, then we need to move on because our kids have to have their best future.”

This is the right-wing *lie* that “bad” or “incompetent” teachers – or, as racists like George Bush like to say, “the soft bigotry of low expectations” – are responsible for poor performance of students on tests and the general sorry state of U.S. education. There is not one shred of evidence to back up this crap. This is a pure invention that was dreamed up in order to justify an attack on public education by the privatizers who are targeting teachers unions. In fact, there are reams of evidence that charter schools, for-profit schools, religious schools or other private schools (except for the



**Barack Obama at “Economic Competitiveness Summit” he called in Pittsburgh, June 26. To his right, GM president Rick Wagoner. Below: real estate billionaire and corporate education “reformer” Eli Broad. In order to “regain our competitive position in the world,” Broad called for “financial incentives” and “differential pay” for teachers, mayoral control of schools, and vocational education for many children after ninth grade. (Photo: from video by Carnegie-Mellon University)**

elite bourgeois academies) do no better and often worse than public schools. And veteran teachers in inner city schools are often the most dedicated and talented of all.

The bottom line is that on the key questions of education policy, Democrat Obama *agrees with Republican McCain*, just like he says, and he is peddling the lies that feed them. Moreover, because he can count on the kind of public support and the backing of teachers unions that Bush never had, Obama is if anything *more* likely to ram through this reactionary program. The AFT and NEA support for the Democratic candidate in this election is setting the stage for a major defeat that could rip up what is left of job security for education workers. When Obama talks of “working with” teachers, that’s if they go along with his program. In the third presidential candidates debate, he referred to the “wonderful new superintendent” of the Washington, D.C.

schools, Michelle Rhee. Obama and McCain engaged in a virtual sparring match over who could claim her favor. But Rhee is a vicious anti-union, anti-teacher boss who last month announced she was bypassing labor negotiations to unilaterally impose a “Plan B” to fire within 90 days any teacher that a principal considers “poorly performing.”

According to the *Washington Post* (3 October), “At a meeting last week, school officials asked principals to produce lists of underperforming teachers who could be placed on the 90-day plan immediately.” The “blueprint” for her plan, “includes a new teacher evaluation system based primarily on student test scores and other achievement benchmarks,” according to the *Post*. Rhee is also the founder of the New Teachers Project (NTP) that runs the Teaching Fellows program in the New York City schools, which in 2003 issued a report, *Missed Opportunities*, calling to eliminate “union transfer requirements,” which was then accomplished in the 2005 UFT contract with the New York Department of Education. That same year, the NTP published a second report, *Unintended Consequences*, calling for principals to have a veto power over all transfers and to eliminate the seniority right to a placement; and this year issued a third report, *Mutual Benefits*, marshalling bogus statistics slandering teachers who had been “excessed” due to school reorganizations and calling for those in the “Absent Teacher Reserve” (ATR) to be “terminated” if they are not given a position after one year.

Rhee is a union-busting hit woman, an instrument for the corporate bosses who are hell-bent on destroying the labor movement in the United States; an attack dog for the racist capitalists who want to consign African American and Latino students to scripted rote learning to pass bubble tests. Teachers in New York City are mobilizing to defend their ATRed colleagues against the NYC Department of Education (DOE) and the smear campaign launched by its NTP handmaidens. If Rhee carries through her threats to dismiss D.C. teachers, the Washington Teachers Union should go on strike and the UFT should send hundreds of New York teachers to Washington to fight this mortal threat to teachers unions. In doing so, we must be aware that we will be fighting not only Michelle Rhee and her partner in crime Joel Klein but also against Barack Obama and John McCain. For together they represent a bipartisan consensus of the capitalist ruling class against quality education for working people.

Obama’s argument that he differs with McCain because he doesn’t support vouchers for private schools is eyewash. Voucher programs have been unsuccessful in Milwaukee and elsewhere, many for-profit schools have been a bust, and many church-run schools are shutting down. Moreover, Obama, too, says he is for “school choice” – another right-



Richard Drew/AP

**Bill Clinton for corporate education “reform.” At March 1996 Education Summit before 90 business leaders and state governors in March 1996. Clinton spoke of the “education enterprise” and called for “merit pay” for teachers. To his left, IBM chief Lou Gerstner, to his right, Republican governor Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin, champion of vouchers for private schools.**

wing shibboleth. In suburban districts with excellent school systems there is no choice of schools, but comprehensive elementary and secondary schools which do quite well on test scores (and are well financed). Both Democrats and Republicans want to greatly expand the number of charter schools in order to break union contracts. Obama says he will double federal aid to charter schools to \$400 million. There is quite a range of charters: in New York, as Diane Ravitch pointed out in a recent talk, it’s become the latest fad for the filthy rich – instead of a horse stable in the Hamptons, buy yourself a charter school. Others are set up by for-profit companies or community groups that want on the gravy train, and some are the projects of well-meaning educators. Teacher unionists and defenders of public education should fight to shut down the really bad charters and launch a major drive to unionize the rest where they can, as in NYC.

There will also be a fight over the No Child Left Behind law, up for reauthorization next year. Obama says he supports the “goals” of the law, but that it should be “fully funded”: “Unfortunately, they left the money behind for No Child Left Behind,” as he said in the October 15 debate with McCain. This is a standard liberal Democratic refrain, from Teddy Kennedy on down. The fact is that the lack of funding for NCLB was no accident, but the very purpose of the law, which is to drive *down* expenditure on education while attacking teachers unions. Instead of “fixing the broken promises of No Child Left Behind,” as Obama calls for, teacher unionists should *oppose* reauthorization of NCLB. This law has created chaos and led to a massacre of quality



educational programs in favor of rote memorization. Marxists are not opposed to testing or even national tests, but as an aid to instruction, not as a substitute. With schools across the country now uniformly “teaching to the test,” all the talk about “standards-based” education and “accountability” only mask a systematic gutting of public education.

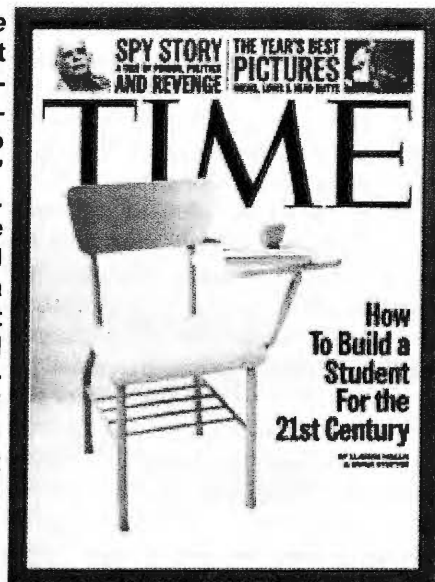
### **Break with the Democrats – For a Class-Struggle Workers Party!**

Barack Obama bills himself as “pragmatist,” accusing John McCain of “marching with the ideologues” in the Republican Party. Obama’s refrain is that “we have to be willing to move beyond the old arguments of left and right,” that “both sides have good ideas that we’ll need to implement” (in his September 9 speech on education). In fact, he plans to implement the key points of the Republican platform, and he is not alone. The idea that the teachers unions have the Democratic Party in their pocket is a right-wing myth. Ever since the 1983 report on *A Nation at Risk*, the Reaganized Democrats have signed on to its program for a public education system driven by the dictates of the capitalist market and “national security.” This report included the recommendation that “salaries for the teaching profession should be increased and should be professionally competitive, market-sensitive, and performance-based.”

The Clinton “New Democrats” in particular, sought to carry out Reaganite policies in Democratic garb, defending their common capitalist interests: “ending welfare as we know it” by forcing millions of poor mothers onto “workfare” with poverty wages, no health care and no education; implementing immigration “reform” by denying immigrants services and subjecting them to arbitrary arrest; speeding up the death penalty by restricting habeas corpus appeals; introducing police-state measures in the guise of “fighting terrorism”; attacking poor black and Latino communities and militarily intervening in Latin America in the name of a “war on drugs,” etc. And Obama hails this. While earlier he praised Ronald Reagan as a “transformational” president, for getting rid of the “excesses of the ’60s and ’70s” and restoring a sense of “entrepreneurship,” in his October 29 midnight rally with Bill Clinton in Kissimmee, Florida, Obama said that “one of his greatest contributions was to reconfigure the Democratic Party.” For all the Republican flimflam about Obama the “socialist,” he’s a latter-day Clintonite.

Obama’s mantra is “I am a free market guy, I love the market.” His health care plan was to the right of all the other Democratic candidates and will provide a bonanza for the medical insurance companies. His overall economic policies closely mirror Bill Clinton’s because the same bankers are designing them, including Robert Rubin (Citibank), Larry Summers (World Bank) and even Paul Volcker (Chase Manhattan). He is supported by billionaire investors like Warren Buffett and hedge fund chiefs like Citadel Investment Group’s Kenneth Griffin. Obama has raised more money than any other presidential candidate ever, including more from giant corporations. His biggest campaign contributor, whose support was crucial in the early months be-

Cover of *Time* magazine report on NCEE program. Corporations want to “build a student” for 21st century. But students are not widgets and education is not a gizmo. Capitalist business model emphasizes top-down managerial control whereas education must be a collective effort.



fore he developed his Internet fundraising machine, was Wall Street investment bank Goldman Sachs (whose former CEO, Henry Paulson, is Bush’s Treasury Secretary). It’s top-flight capitalists like the Business Roundtable who are behind educational “reform” plans such as those promoted that of Marc Tucker’s National Center for Education and the Economy.

The NCEE’s “New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce” produced a 2006 report, *Tough Choices or Tough Times*, financed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, with a comprehensive program for the corporatization of public education. This includes to “change the shape of teacher compensation,” raising wages by gutting pension plans; end seniority and introduce merit pay based on student performance; eliminate the role of local school boards so “schools would be operated by independent contractors, many of them limited-liability corporations,” and so on. The NCEE also wants to end secondary education for many poor and minority students after the 10th grade. And this corporate “think tank” is well connected: one Hillary Rodham Clinton, back when she was a lawyer in Little Rock, Arkansas (as well as sitting on the board of Wal-Mart), was paid \$100,000 from New York state funds to lead the NCEE’s Commission on Workforce Skills. Its “New Standards” project was employed by the Texas Education Agency to shape its “standards-based” programs under then-governor Bush, and also contributed to NCLB.

But it isn’t just the Clinton “moderates,” Wall Street bankers and corporate moguls who are behind capitalist education “reform.” In the late 1990s, liberal Democratic senator John Kerry called to “end teacher tenure as we know it.” And at the August 2008 Democratic National Convention, there was an orgy of teacher union-bashing at events sponsored by Democrats for Education Reform, the Education Equality Project, the Rocky Mountain Roundtable and the Alliance for Choice in Education. The EEP is the most prominent of these outfits, co-chaired by NYC schools chancellor Joel Klein and Al Sharpton, bankrolled by NYC billionaire mayor Mike Bloomberg and billionaire “philan-

thropist” Eli Broad, and including black Democratic politicians like Sharpton, Newark mayor Cory Booker, Harold Ford Jr., big city school superintendents like Washington’s Michelle Rhee and Paul Vallas of New Orleans (formerly of Chicago and Philadelphia), Republican candidate John McCain and former Congressman Newt Gingrich.

Obama was too deft to sign up with this right-wing lash-up, but he is closely allied with Booker, Rhee and others in the EEP. A second “education reform” group, for a “Broader, Bolder Approach to Education,” calls for more investment in education and includes key Obama advisors such as Linda Darling-Hammond and Chicago Public Schools chief Arne Duncan. A third group, “Common Sense Educational Reforms” formed by parents groups in New York and Chicago, dubs the EEP’s accountability *über alles* approach “NCLB on steroids” and calls for smaller class sizes, more counselors. AFT/UFT president Randi Weingarten favors the “Broader, Bolder” approach, while various dissidents in and around the UFT support the “Common Sense” group. But the bottom line is that *all of them support Barack Obama*, as do most teacher union activists around the country. In backing the capitalist Democrat Obama, they are preparing the way for an onslaught against remaining union job protections and for continued corporate-driven school “reform” that is victimizing first and foremost minority, poor and working-class students.

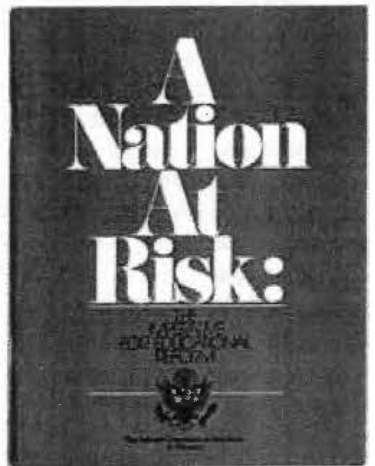
While nationally education writers talk of “mystery” over “where Obama stands in the education wars” (*New York Sun*, 22 August), in Chicago they already know. George Schmidt’s *Substance News*, an opposition voice in the Chicago Teachers Union, editorializes in its September issue, “Of course it’s Obama – but without illusions.” *Substance News* says straight-out that Obama was “stood shoulder to shoulder” with the Richard Daley Democratic machine in Chicago as it enacted a series of “reforms” that produced a “nightmare for poor and working people across Chicago,” including tearing down public housing, throwing thousands off welfare, and school reform that has involved closing more schools than any other city in the country, and wholesale firing of teachers “excessed” from these schools. This year alone, some 400 teachers have been fired from the Chicago public schools by CPS chief (and Obama pal) Duncan. So even though “this loyal member of the Daley organization will not bring many of our hopes for true reform in public education home,” they call to vote for him anyway!

For sellout union bureaucrats and would-be union militants alike, their support for the Democratic Party in particular and capitalist politics in general *guarantees* that they *cannot* defend education workers from the approaching storm. So long as George Bush was in the White House, they could count on sympathy from liberals and indeed most of the population. But against Obama they will be isolated, and stymied by their failure over the last quarter century to oppose outright and propose a real alternative to big business education policies, at most limiting themselves to minimizing the damage, and in the case of the AFT leaders bragging that their guru, the late Al Shanker, was among the originators in the mid-1980s of “standards-based” education “reforms,” charter schools and “merit pay.” It’s true. Of

**Anti-Communist Cold Warrior Al Shanker (top) supported Reagan education manifesto, *A Nation at Risk* (1983), which posed education as national security issue while setting “reform” agenda targeting teachers and teachers unions as main obstacle.**



course, in the same period, Shanker also declared that “our school system...more resembles the communist economy than our own market economy.” This is quoted opposite the title page of the book by teacher-basher in chief Rod Paige, *The War Against Hope* (2006).



This quote, and the longtime UFT and later AFT leader’s role in corporate education “reform,” is no quirk, for Shanker was above all a rabid anti-Communist Cold Warrior. He was a leading member of Social Democrats U.S.A. (SDUSA), made up of followers of the anti-Trotskyist renegade Max Shachtman. (Shachtman’s wife, Yetta Barsh, was Shanker’s administrative assistant for many years, and other UFT/AFT and AFL-CIO staffers were also members of SDUSA.) Shachtman broke from Trotskyism in 1939-40, refusing to defend the Soviet Union in the second imperialist world war. As he evolved to the right Shachtman became such a Stalinophobe that he wrote anti-Communist leaflets that were airdropped by U.S. planes over North Korea during the Korean War, as well as supporting the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Vietnam War. By the 1980s, the Shachtmanite SDUSA had gone so far to the right that it gave new meaning to the term “State Department socialism,” supplying a number of leading Reagan administration officials, including UN ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, National Endowment for Democracy chief Carl Gershman, Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams and others.

Shanker supported the corporate education “reformers” because he was an anti-Communist defender of U.S. imperialism (this included having the UFT play a key role in funneling CIA dollars to the anti-Soviet Solidarność “union” in Poland). He supported the Reagan administration’s education manifesto, *A Nation at Risk*, which began: “Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce,

industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world.... If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war." The 2008 Republican platform on education strikes the same theme, under the title "Education Means a More Competitive America," while calling to force universities to allow the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) back on campuses. Significantly, Barack Obama also poses his education program in terms of national security:

"The decisions our leaders make about education" will help determine "whether we, as a nation, will remain in the 21st century the kind of global economic leader that we were in the 20th century," Obama said in his September 9 speech on education. In the October 15 presidential candidates' debate, he led off his comments on education saying, "This probably has more to do with our economic future than anything and that means it also has a national security implication, because there's never been a nation on earth that saw its economy decline and continued to maintain its primacy as a military power." As for training officers for the Pentagon war machine, at a joint forum at Columbia University on September 11, Obama joined McCain in calling for ROTC back on campus, to the stunned silence of student supporters (see "ROTC Get Out, Stay Out!" in *Revolution* No. 5, September 2008, published by the Internationalist Clubs at the City University of New York).

Posing education as a matter of economic competitiveness and national security is nothing new. Republican president Eisenhower pushed for science education following the Soviet success in launching Sputnik, the first satellite into space. "Science for war" led to the increase in expenditures on education during the 1960s and early '70s ... and to Reagan's plans for an anti-ballistic missile (ABM) defense to facilitate a U.S. nuclear first strike against the Soviet Un-

ion. Some may argue that this is just an election ploy by Obama, as a way to get his education agenda passed. But it has consequences, not least on the struggles in schools around the country to keep the Pentagon from getting access to students' names as they troll for new recruits to serve as "cannon fodder." The Democratic candidate is deadly serious about war, calling to increase the size of the U.S. military, to escalate the war in Afghanistan, to bomb Pakistani border regions and possibly Iran. And a President Obama will soon be tested in "an international crisis, a generated crisis," said Democratic vice-presidential candidate Biden in a speech to supporters in Seattle on October 20. He added: "we're gonna need you to use your influence within the community to stand with him. Because it's not gonna be apparent initially that we're right."

For our part, we stand four-square against U.S. imperialism. But how will Obama's "critical" supporters respond? Many will want to "give war a chance," as erstwhile pacifists who supported Bill Clinton did over his two wars against Serbia (1995 and 1999), when he claimed to be defending human rights while his allies carried by far out the biggest "ethnic cleansing" operation of all in Yugoslavia, expelling a quarter million Serbs from Croatia. Those who still claim to stand for peace will have the responsibility of having voted for an imperialist warmonger.

The union bureaucrats and activists who want to be "relevant" by backing Obama and supporting some planks of the corporate education program say they have to, for otherwise it would hand the mantle of educational reform to the right wing. Nonsense. Genuine education reform in the interests of poor and working people, of racial minorities and immigrants, would have to start by taking the schools out of the hands of the capitalist politicians and the educational services companies who are feeding off the NCLB testing mania. Free, secular public education for all is a democratic right, but under capitalism the fight for education

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for the exploited and oppressed is a *class* question. *We say no to mayoral control and encrusted and entrenched education bureaucracies. New York City public school and City University teachers in the group Class Struggle Education Workers call for control of the schools by councils of teachers, students, workers and parents.*

Far from defending the status quo, we fight for a revolution in education. Instead of principals hiring teachers, we call for such quadripartite councils to control hiring, and to name school administrators responsible to the councils and recallable at any time. That would be a genuinely democratic organization of the schools, rather than the education capitalists and management control freaks with their business models, but not one that the ruling class will ever support. It would also lead to a flourishing of educational experimentation along with rigorous instruction by actual educators. We oppose tracking, that consigns poor and working-class kids to non-college tracks. And we fight for *open admissions* to colleges and universities, to *abolish tuition* and to provide stipends for the living expenses of post-secondary students. Make higher education accessible to all and there will be an immediate jump in graduation rates from college and high school. We call as well for expropriation of the handful of monopolies that control testing nationally and the formulation of methods of evaluation that provide some measures of knowledge and development of analytical capabilities, which the bubble tests do not at all.

“Charter schools” if they were run by collectives of teachers, students, workers and parents could play a very liberating role, but that is not what the actual charter schools are today. They are a wedge to crack open public education and set the stage for a drive to first corporatize and then privatize education, to the extent that it can be profitable. We call for conversion of private schools – from exclusive bourgeois academies to “white flight” segregated suburban

schools to those controlled by religious organizations – into free, secular public educational institutions open to all. At the same time, as Karl Marx argued in *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875) support for public education does not at all mean calling for the capitalist state to control schools. In fact, there could be a tremendous variety of small schools, large campuses, schools with particular themes (performing, musical or plastic arts, mechanical engineering, information technology, etc.), schools using different educational approaches, classes developing new subject matters, without the constriction of private ownership, state control or religious indoctrination. The fundamental principles of labor schools, common to pedagogical theorists from John Dewey to Mikhail Lunacharsky, that people learn through acting upon reality, could begin to be realized (see the Internationalist pamphlet, *Marxism and the Battle Over Education* [2d. edition, 2008]).

It remains a fact, as Marx noted in *The German Ideology* (1847), that “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.” What this means in concrete terms is that so long as the means of production and the state remain in the hands of the capitalist class, there will be definite limits on what can be taught, on how education is organized. For those who genuinely want to provide a world-class education for poor and working people, for immigrants, racial/ethnic minorities and all the oppressed, it is necessary to break sharply with the Democratic Party and all capitalist politicians, and undertake the struggle to build a workers party that fights for a workers government. That will make it possible for teachers and students to receive the rewards on earth and lay the basis for a new flourishing of culture for the benefit of all humankind. ■

## “Class Struggle Education Workers” Formed

*The Internationalist Group salutes the establishment of the recently formed Class Struggle Education Workers, which has issued the following introduction and program.*

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 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 round 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.

– Original version presented 24 August 2008; this updated version incorporates the changes made at the founding meeting of the CSEW, 26 September 2008.

**For more information, write to Class Struggle Education Workers at: [cs\\_edworkers@hotmail.com](mailto:cs_edworkers@hotmail.com)**

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