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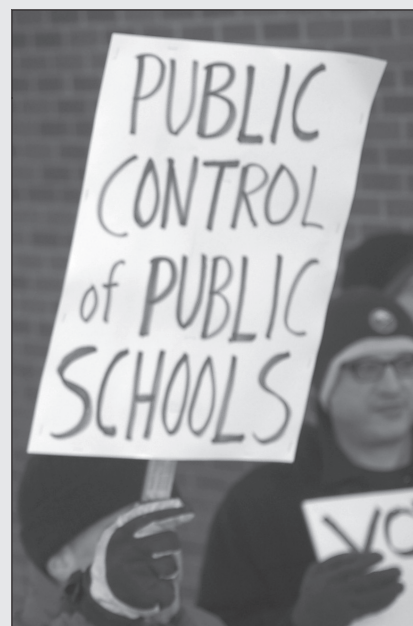
February 6, 2015

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Our Schools, Our Rights, We Decide!



Battles for Public Control of Public Schools — Buffalo, Chicago, Philadelphia, Newark p.3-16

ICC Preliminary Probe on Palestine Still a Long Way from War Crimes Trials

Ali Abunimah, Electronic Intifada

The Palestinian Authority recently called on the International Criminal Court to investigate Israeli war crimes against the Palestinians, particularly those from last summer. The Palestinian Authority is a recognized UN member that has signed the Rome Statute, which created

the International Criminal Court, and thus can legally call for the investigation. Both the U.S. and Israel denounced this action by the Palestinians and demanded that the ICC not investigate. They claim no war crimes were committed, despite the

ICC Probe on Palestine • 21

STATE OF THE UNION

Reject the Old American Nightmare and Fight for a New Direction for the Economy and Political Affairs

In his State of the Union, President Obama made several things very clear. One was that the U.S. would continue to act unilaterally worldwide, using aggressive wars and force: “We reserve the right to act unilaterally, as we have done

relentlessly since I took office, to take out terrorists who pose a direct threat to us and our allies.” The Obama doctrine of drone warfare, pre-emptive aggressive strikes by Special Forces, assassinations, civilian

New Direction • 17

February edition of ***Voice of Revolution***

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ADVANCE INDEPENDENT ORGANIZING

Our Schools, Our Rights, We Decide!

Students, parents, teachers, staff, principals, alumni and superintendents in many states across the country are joining various battles to defend the right to education and keep public schools open and public. They are standing against efforts to eliminate elected school boards and any public say in education. They are opposing the Common Core testing and assessment regime, with increasing numbers of students and parents in many states refusing the tests. At demonstrations, speak outs, board meetings, conferences, and by using other means such as surveys, the public is informing itself as a united force and increasingly demanding *Public Control of Public Schools! Full Funding Now! Equal Rights for All!*

The various actions are involving the public. Conscience participation and experience in defending rights has brought forward a common consciousness about the need to block efforts to remove the public from any voice in educational matters. One such effort to remove the public role in education is through the use of federal and state mandated testing regimes, which brand schools as failures and then closures. State and local officials are acting to hand over public school buildings to private interests, such as charter schools, often for free. Governments are generally facilitating the private control of public schools.

Counter to this, teachers, students, staff and parents are organizing to block school closures and develop redesign plans for their public schools that include having the schools open at night and serving as community organizing centers — for classes, sports, family activities, day care and social justice issues. These represent an effort to innovate and improve the quality of education, an effort that necessarily involves students, teachers, staff, parents, alumni — all concerned — in decision making.

It is the determined and unifying spirit of all these actions in various states that serves the public interest and advances the fight for rights. It is a spirit and stand that says, “*Our Schools, Our Rights, We Decide!*” And it is one that recognizes that however a given school board or state education department may vote the fight to defend the right to education is not over. These are *Our Schools and We Decide!*

It is critical to strengthen the independent organizing by continuing meetings, demonstrations and other actions aimed at blocking



efforts to remove the public from governance and wreck the public school system. Now is the time to step up the fight, further build working relationships and involve more students in organizing for a quality education that meets the needs of the youth and society. Whatever officials at the local and state level say, it is up to us altogether to continue to defend our rights, decide the fate of our schools and develop our own alternatives that meet the needs of all.

It is also notable that often, state and local education officials do not attend the public meetings and actions concerning the schools and do not make themselves available for questions from the public — even though it is public schools and many thousands of students and their families that are being impacted. Even at school board meetings, such officials sit silent and refuse to even respond to interventions by teachers and students at the meetings. This is an indication of the increasingly undemocratic quality of such elected bodies, which serve more as instruments of dictate rather than as

a space for the public to have their say.

The various struggles to keep public schools open and public and raise their quality is more generally bringing to the fore the undemocratic nature of the existing democracy. The voice of the public has little standing while individuals elected with a small percentage of the vote can make decisions significantly affecting the entire public education system.

While elected officials often blame voters for low turn out, they and the electoral system they are a part of, are also responsible for the fact that a large majority of voters do not participate. For a variety of reasons — endless false promises by politicians; repeated government attacks on rights when the public demands instead that rights be respected; the silencing of the public voice as is occurring now; the refusal of politicians to organize and engage the public through meetings and other means; the reality that money talks or really shouts — people are rejecting the existing setup.

Elections are not a valid expression of the public will. Indeed, as plans to close and privatize the public schools go forward, despite broad opposition from the people, we can conclude that currently the public will has no place. This needs to be changed. This disconnect between the public will and what is imposed — the legal will — has to be eliminated. Those with authority are acting contrary

to the conditions, which are demanding a modern democracy of people's empowerment.

Modern democracy requires that the role of the public be increased in all aspects — choosing candidates, organizing of elections, decision making on education and all matters of social concern, like poverty and police brutality. It is time for a democracy that empowers the people themselves to govern and decide.

The fight across the country for Public Control of Public Schools is an opportunity to move forward in development of a democracy of our own making. Already many schools, unions and other organized forces have acted to hold public meetings and mobilize among parents, teachers and students. Through demonstrations and meetings and organizing for them, working relations are being built. Public

opinion more broadly is being formed in favor of the calls for *Equal Rights for All! Our Schools, Our Rights, We Decide!*

For example, the redesign plans developed by teachers, students, staff, parents and community members in Buffalo, for schools scheduled to close, call for innovations in curriculum and the role of schools as centers for organizing. This is a threat to those with power, like New York's Governor Cuomo. His answer is to go backward, to a czar, a king, an education dictator. The stand of the new public emerging to affirm its rights is forward — to develop a modern democracy of our own making where we decide!

These are our public dollars, our public buildings, our schools. We urge all to *Join the Fight!*

Our Schools, Our Rights, We Decide!

Buffalo, New York

DEMAND PUBLIC CONTROL OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Militant Protests Reject Governor Cuomo's Attacks on Right to Education

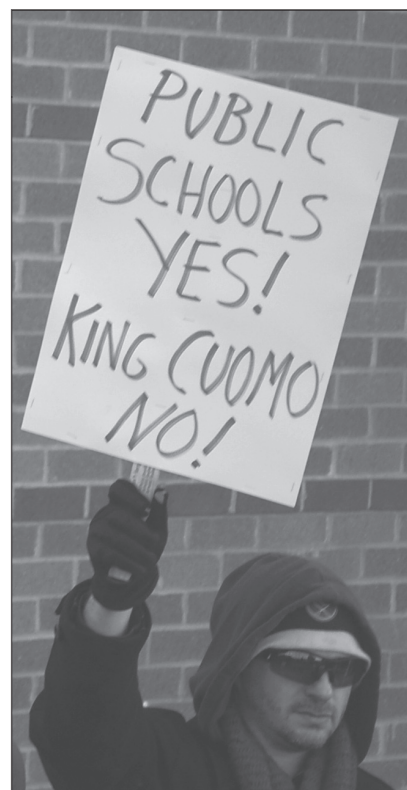
On January 1, more than 120 teachers, students, parents and community organizers in Buffalo came out to oppose New York Governor Cuomo's attacks on the right to education. They chanted and marched in the bitter cold, calling on Cuomo to stop his vicious attacks on teachers and students. In speeches and signs they demanded *Full Funding Now! Equal Rights for All!* The demonstrators targeted Cuomo, who came to Buffalo to give his inaugural speech. Cuomo is planning an "aggressive legislative package," designed to eliminate public governance of the schools and give the state the power to: remove school boards and replace them with a state-appointed "czar;" hire and fire teachers and eliminate teaching as a profession; hand public schools over to private "turn-around" vultures who can eliminate contracts and change curriculum; hand public school buildings over to private interests for free; and more. As demonstrators noted, the Governor's attacks are not about education — they are about the private takeover of public schools and handing over public education funds and teacher pensions to Wall Street.

Teachers and students from various Buffalo schools, including Lafayette and MLK, both threatened with closure, School 45, Riverside and Hutch Tech, as well as schools from surrounding areas, like Kenmore and KenTon, East Aurora, Hamburg, Iroquois, Lancaster, Springville, West Seneca, Wilson, and others spoke out. They opposed the cuts to education that have been taking place and the Common Core testing and teacher evaluation regime. Many are organizing to refuse the New York State tests in the spring and urged parents to join the organizing efforts. People stood up for *Public Control of Public Schools* and also spoke to the need to change the content of education, so that it serves the interests of the youth and society. As signs put it, *Teachers Say: Educate to Change the World!* and *Let Teachers Teach and Youth*

Will Lead the Way. It is clear that while Cuomo seems to think he can defeat resistance in Buffalo, teachers, students and parents together are saying *NO!* Our schools and children are not for sale!

This action was followed by more demonstrations and speak outs outside and inside of school board meetings. These occurred January 12, 14, 22 and 28. Repeatedly teachers, students, parents and community organizers stood together in saying, "*Whose Schools? Our Schools! Who Decides? We Decide!*" Despite efforts by state and local officials to divide teachers and parents and ignore students there is a growing and determined stand by the public to unite say *NO!* No to privatization, no to school closures, no to eliminating public governance, no to divide and conquer. And they are saying *YES!* to decision making by the people themselves as the solution to problems in education.

Public Control of Public Schools!



PUBLIC CONTROL OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS: BUFFALO, NEW YORK



A New Public for a New Public Education is Emerging

Mark Garrison, markgarrison.net

On January 28, Buffalo students, teachers, parents and community activists — moved by their collective conscience and as agents in a historically significant battle for democracy — will converge at Performing Arts High School to demand public schools remain public. Students, teachers, parents and community activists are demanding that the four substantial redesign plans developed by each school with significant public input be approved by the Buffalo Board of Education (Bennett, East, Lafayette High Schools and MLK Elementary). These forces are opposing the closure of these schools and the transferring of these public assets to private charter operators, who will receive them at no cost and who will be subject to no real public oversight.

It is clear that education deformers seek the transfer of public assets to the private domain, for private benefit in both political and economic terms. It is clear that education deformers want a private monopoly over public affairs. They want control over the public, and no longer even seek its consent. They want private, corporate control over what is inherently public, social and belonging to all.

Despite the incessant propaganda to the contrary, parents, students, teachers and community members have maintained that there is a direct link between public control of public schools and the quality of education provided. Through their redesign proposals and community work, they are directly countering the essence of the disinformation campaign of education deformers, who for more than three decades have promoted the view, long before King Cuomo, that the problem with public education is that it is public.

These students, parents, teachers and community members have emerged as the educating and informing public. This public has become an authoritative source of information, a safeguard for collective wisdom, and a spring of new energy and hope. It, and not the so-called reformers and “high performers,” can be trusted.

This emerging public authority arises from the necessity of the broad interests it serves and the relationships and organizations that comprise it, have fought for it, and work to sustain it. This representative public is emerging as a result of concrete work to defend public interests and oppose insane policies masquerading as accountability, and it has historical significance beyond the January 28 action. This new public stands as an important basis for advancing the general interests in the future; it is a powerful means for transforming people’s hope and energy into lasting change.

Thus, these forces are emerging as a representative public capable of governing in service of the general interest. Similar forces have and are emerging across the country in cities like

Philadelphia, New York, Detroit, New Orleans, Chicago, and elsewhere. We are in and part of this historical moment. This new public stands against the wrecking and irrationalism of those who wield power on the medieval basis of wealth-status. They demand all social institutions serve the narrowest, most self-serving interests. They trivialize the advent of public schools as a common good and obvious social necessity that cannot be privatized, nor subject to the logic of speculation.

Let us be clear: the corporate agenda for education — high stakes testing, Common Core, charter schools, etc. — all this portends rigor mortis for the body politic. Their “reforms” demand the emasculation of public interest and the removal of even the appearance of democratic governance. The education and active engagement of members of the body politic in matters that affect their lives cannot be tolerated under the new regime that is now being imposed, in education and in fact all social spheres. There is no role for the educated citizen because there is to be no citizen in the modern sense of the word. With a King such as Cuomo, there can only be the serf, which must be socialized (at public expense) to be “career ready,” a mere toiler for the master’s private benefit.

Thus it is important to see the emerging representative public as a dignified and hopeful counter to the abject failure of current political institutions and the degradation of politics at the hands of those now usurping power at the local, state and federal level, the decaying and corrupt old public authorities. These wrecking forces do not bring order, but instead function to disrupt the formation of a new public interest through the imposition of chaos, fear, and social division. These are brutal forces, threatened by facts, logic or claims to the inherent value and dignity of human beings [...]

The new public is a direct challenge to the legitimacy of those who refuse reasoned debate or the public’s right to govern in the open, not behind closed doors. The new public sees no sense in waging campaigns on the basis of asking illegitimate powers to yield to its ideas, evaluations and proposals. It is putting something else at the center. The new public is emerging by appealing to those it objectively serves. It is emerging as an authority on the basis that it has and can continue to provide real solutions, including solutions to the problem of creating the means for all — everyone, every individual and collective — to have a real say, as a right. It is this orientation that provides more space for the new public to grow as a powerful, legitimate and capable actor, animated by these convictions and the conscience of what is right and just. This provides hope and serves the aim of building a democratic education for and in service of all.

Visit our website: usmlo.org

The Link Between Cuomo's Attacks and Police Escorting a Union Member Out of a Public Meeting

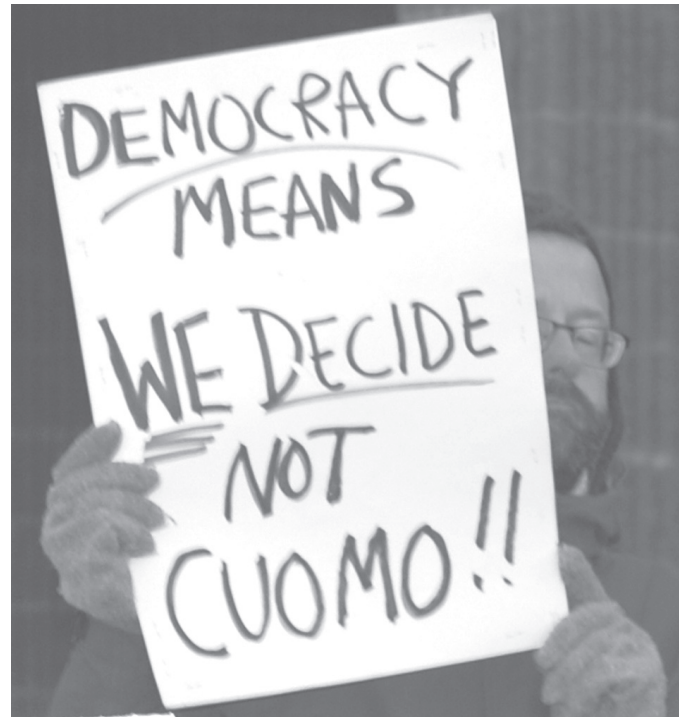
At a recent meeting of the Buffalo School Board, police escorted a union member, attempting to speak, out of the room. It was a "working session" of the board so there was not the usual public comment section of the meeting. However the board can accept comments from the public and had allowed a few people to speak. But when a Buffalo teacher came to the microphone, he was ignored. Then, finally when recognized and he began to speak, a single board member interrupted and asked him to identify himself, which he did. Then the board member asked if the teacher was a member of the Buffalo Teachers Federation (BTF) and he said yes, a secretary. At that point the board member waved over the police and had the teacher removed from the mic and escorted out of the room. No explanation was given other than he was a BTF member.

This action occurred in the context of broad public opposition to local and state plans to close and privatize Buffalo schools and wreck the system of public education and the union (see p.8). Numerous actions, including those inside the school board meetings have seen students, teachers and parents together in their demand to *Keep the Public Schools Open, Public and Raise Their Quality*.

Increasingly the public as a united force is demanding *Public Control of Public Schools!* This is directly contrary to plans put forward by Governor — or as many are now calling him King Cuomo. In his State of the State speech and budget that accompanies it, Cuomo made clear that a main feature of the attacks on the right to education and the public system of education is to eliminate the public from governance. It is also to say that members of collectives, such as union members, are not to be considered part of the body politic and therefore do not have rights. Hence the readiness with which a union member was blocked from speaking *because* he was a union member.

This teacher, speaking as an individual at a public meeting in a public building was denied his rights because he is a member of a collective. His union membership is being used not only to deny his individual right to speak, but also to say his collective has no rights. More than this, his collective is supposedly against the public interest and the public good, while King Cuomo and board members backing his attacks are serving the public. Collective rights, like those of teachers and students are to be trampled on, while monopoly right, like that of Microsoft and Walmart and others behind the current attacks on public education are to have sole place. Their representatives, like Cuomo, are to be given free reign to attack collectives and the public more broadly.

This is backward and reactionary. It is not simply police state actions. It is police in service of private monopolies to



crush collective forms, which include the public. These are modern times, 2015, not the Dark Ages. Affirmation of collective rights, including public right, is the condition for the affirmation of individual rights. What is needed is affirming collective rights, including enhancing and expanding public right while restricting monopoly right. Cuomo's plans call for the opposite.

He makes this clear in the following statement: "When a school fails for three years, a not-for-profit, another school district or a turn-around expert must take over the school and they must create a plan to dramatically overhaul and improve the entire school...The takeover entity will overhaul the curriculum, override agreements, will terminate under-performing staff, provide salary incentives..."

Whole districts, like Buffalo, can be smashed in this manner, as can union contracts — and rapidly so. Private "turn-around" vultures are given a free hand to take over public buildings and put whatever and whoever they decide in place. It is a means to eliminate even the concept that the government has the social responsibility to provide the equal right to education for all and replace it with "takeover entities" doing whatever best serves private interests. It is a means to deny collective rights and in so doing, deny individual rights, as occurred at the board meeting. This is the undemocratic and anti-public, anti-education direction now being taken — and broadly resisted by this teacher and many others!

STATE OF STATE ADDRESS

New York Governor Cuomo to Launch Major Attack on Right to Education



In his State of the State address January 21, Governor Andrew Cuomo confirmed that he is launching another major attack on the right to education this year. While he did not, as before, mention a possible education “czar,” (dictator) he did indicate he will head in that direction and may yet impose one. His plans to concentrate power in fewer, often private hands includes increasing use of mayoral control of schools and greatly expanding the take-

over of public institutions by private interests. This includes at the university and community college level and through private charter schools for Pre K-12.

Cuomo continued his brutal attack on teachers and dismissed the broad demand for *Full Funding Now! Equal Rights for All!* In claiming funding for education is not a problem, Cuomo referred this time to an “education industry.” He has previously referred to unionized teachers as a “public monopoly” and targeted what he calls the “education bureaucracy.” This time he said, “The education industry’s cry that more money will solve the problem is false. Money without reform only grows the bureaucracy.”

It is notable here that Cuomo is not referring to what Rupert Murdoch, the Waltons and Bill Gates — owners of real monopolies — call the \$500 billion education “market.” They and their “reforms,” like Common Core and its testing and teacher assessment regime, are mechanisms to hand over billions in public funds to these and similar private monopolies. That is one reason Gates has pumped \$1 billion into imposing the Common Core “reforms” — really *deforms* of education — nationwide. Another reason, also echoed by Cuomo, is to remove the public from governance.

Effort to Eliminate Public Governance

School boards, teachers’ unions, parent groups and what Cuomo

calls “ancillary organizations,” are all means of public involvement in education. They are now seen as obstacles to private control of public institutions. To eliminate them Cuomo wants the state to control teacher hiring, firing, tenure and pay. “We propose tenure only be granted when a teacher achieves five consecutive years of effective ratings.” But it is some appointed executive that will decide whether a teacher is or is not effective, as Cuomo also insists that a teacher “must” pass both the state scored portion and that done in-class by peers.

He also wants to impose merit pay, offering \$20,000 to teachers the *state* decides — not fellow teachers, parents and students but rather a state appointed official — are “highly effective.” And he wants to remove a teacher after two “ineffective” ratings. All are means to take issues of hiring, firing and tenure out of the hands of those actually involved in teaching and education and put them into the hands of a state executive of some kind. All are arbitrary means to foster divisions, favoritism and repress dissent. They are proposals that show it is Cuomo that considers education a business, where competition is put in first place and bribery, blackmail and fear used to achieve submission.

Teachers and schools across the state already have experience with how arbitrary, unjust and unfair the testing schemes imposed are. They are harmful to the students, to education more broadly and a false means to label teachers, schools and whole districts as “failing.” They serve this undemocratic direction of having appointed officials decide vital matters, while excluding those who are the education experts — teachers, students, parents and staff. Cuomo again named Buffalo, saying it has been a “failing district for many years,” meaning the entire district is up for takeover.

Education requires a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect and participation by all concerned — teachers, parents, students, staff, principals, and volunteers. The redesign plans by Buffalo’s schools that involve all concerned at the schools and the public more generally in producing and organizing support for the plans is an example of such a spirit. They also show that those fighting for public education are also fighting to raise its quality and develop content that meets the needs of students, their communities and society. It is exactly this spirit and the quality of education it embraces that Cuomo and Gates and Murdoch want to kill. The organizing work represents seeds of the new coming forward from among the people themselves and these forces of the old want to crush the new at all costs.

Private Control of Public Institutions

Cuomo also proposes that the cap on charter schools be raised from 460 to 560 and to “eliminate any artificial limits on where charter schools can open.” This basically means eliminating local caps. The large majority of charters have been shown to

perform the same or worse than public schools. This is true even though they have far fewer impoverished students, English language learners or those with disabilities.

While Cuomo claims he is against segregation of the schools and his “reforms” will address this, private charters have been shown to increase segregation. Years of research by the UCLA Civil Rights Project concluded, “The charter school movement has been a major political success, but it has been a civil rights failure. As the country continues moving steadily toward greater segregation and inequality of education for students of color in schools with lower achievement and graduation rates, the rapid growth of charter schools has been expanding a sector that is even more segregated than the public schools.”

To ensure charter expansion and that public buildings are made available to the private charters, Cuomo wants to use the unproven and unreliable testing and scoring by the federal government that renders schools failing: “When a school fails for three years, a not-for-profit, another school district or a turn-around expert must take over the school and they must create a plan to dramatically overhaul and improve the entire school... The takeover entity will overhaul the curriculum, override agreements, will terminate underperforming staff, provide salary incentives...”

Whole districts, like Buffalo, can be smashed in this manner, as can union contracts — and rapidly so. Private “turn-around experts” are given a free hand to take over public buildings and put whatever and whoever they decide in place. It is a means to

eliminate even the concept that the government has the social responsibility to provide the equal right to education for all and replace it with “takeover entities” doing whatever best serves private interests.

This is further evident in the plans for community colleges. They are not to be developed as modern centers for enlightenment and organizing of youth and students in solving society’s problems — which is what is required today. Instead they are to be even more narrowed and turned into “a training program, or almost an apprentice program for a specific industry.” That is, the monopolies get trained individuals for free while society gets youth who have not been broadly educated and enlightened to fully participate in and help change society. Similarly the State University (SUNY) system is to be even more directly tied to and controlled by private interests. As Cuomo put it, “We are in the process of taking our SUNY and CUNY (City University) systems and turning them into commercialization and job generators.” No longer even a hint that public universities are to serve the public and its interests for enlightenment and highly educated and engaged students looking to make a bright future for all.

Modern society demands modern education, which means enlightenment, broad-mindedness, investigation, inquiry, conscious participation in finding out — essentially education to change the world. This is the new coming forward in the struggle in Buffalo and elsewhere, a new that has no choice but to reject Cuomo and stand up for public right!

Cuomo to Teachers: Get Out

Curmudgucation blog

I will give Governor Andrew Cuomo this — when he makes threats to come after someone, they are not just empty political promises. He said he would try to break the public schools, and he appears to be determined to make it happen. Cuomo’s assault has started with a lesson in how data can serve as a mirror to reflect the biases of whoever is gazing into it.

Mangling data

Cuomo’s talking points and reformy agenda have started with a simple set of data. The proficiency rate for New York’s 3rd-8th graders is [said to be] 35.8% for math and 31.4% for reading. Over 90 percent of New York teachers received effective ratings. There are three possible explanations for why these numbers do not fit together.

- 1) The teacher effectiveness ratings are wrong.
- 2) The student proficiency numbers are wrong.
- 3) There is no connection between student test results and teacher effectiveness.

#3 is by far the most likely. At the very least, there is not a shred of documentation, study or much of anything else to support the notion that test results have anything to do with teacher effectiveness. Let us also remember that we are talking about math and reading scores for 3rd through 8th graders — exactly

what should they tell us about, say, 11th grade history teachers?

#3 is also affected by #2 — if the student scores do not actually mean anything, they can hardly be connected to teacher scores. And since student cut scores were not set by any particular supportable academic standard, it is highly unlikely that they are not really telling us anything about how many students are “proficient” (a term that does not have any actual meaning in this context). [Cut scores are the arbitrary cut off number the state gives for the levels of “proficiency,” which the state keeps changing and which they admit were designed to have the majority of students fail — VOR Ed. Note] [...]

Cuomo proposes that fifty percent of a teacher’s evaluation be based on test scores. [...] Thirty-five percent of the teacher’s evaluation must come from an “independent observer” who can be either 1) a principal from within or without the district; 2) an observer from the state-approved list of “entities” that can do that sort of thing or; 3) a faculty member from an education program at a state university of New York (and I am imagining college ed professors across the state slapping their heads and saying, “Why, yes, thanks, that’s exactly what I want to spend half my year doing!”)

The remaining fifteen percent can come from a local

administrator.

And that is it. Screw the whole “multiple measures” idea, and nix to evaluations by people who know the territory, the teacher, the students, the local lay of the land.

But wait. There is more. Cuomo proposes that all cut-off scores be set at the state level. And if the teacher fails either portion of the evaluation, she fails the whole thing. In other words, if the live human says, “I watched her work and she is a great teacher” and the test scores come in low, the live human observer is over-ruled.

Can we make a teaching career less viable?

Tenure? Screw that, too. It was for 19th century college professors so they could resist political pressure, and of course there are no politics associated with teaching in New York public schools. I wonder how long it took the governor’s typist to stop giggling before he could finish this part.

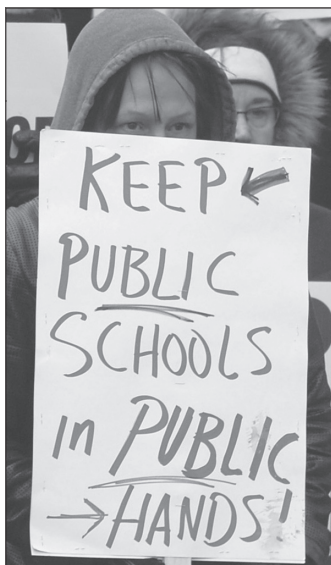
Now tenure requires five straight years of effective ratings. Until you hit those five straight years, you are probationary, and as long as you are probationary, you can be fired at any time for any reason.

Cuomo could not be more clear if he required every college education department to put a giant banner over its doors saying, in huge bold letters, “Get the hell out of New York.”

What sane person would try to start a teaching career under these conditions? You must have five straight years of good test scores, which means that taking a job in a high-poverty school would simply be the kiss of death. In fact, if the cut scores are going to be kept the same so that almost seventy percent of New York students are failing The Big Test — well, that means that most of the classrooms in New York will be the kiss of death to a teaching career. [...]

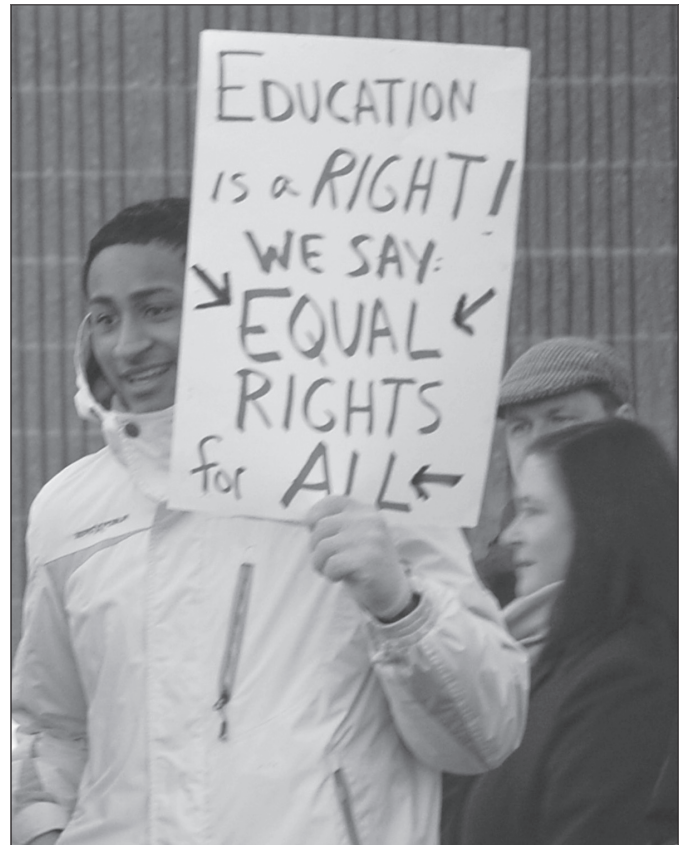
Best and brightest

This new system defines “best teacher” as “teacher who has class of good standardized test takers.” This idea fails twice — once by basing teacher evaluations on the results of bad invalid tests



and again by removing all other considerations of quality from teaching. Nothing matters in this system but test prep. Nothing.

The Agenda goes on to say that we do not want to lose great teachers to other “more lucrative” professions. It does not say anything about losing future great teachers to other professions where they have greater work to do than spend all their days preparing children to take pointless standardized tests. Or losing future great teachers to other professions where they are treated like professionals. Or losing future great teachers to



other professions where job security is not based on a random roll of the dice. [...]

Hard to staff schools will become SUPER hard to staff once you implement a system under which teaching at high-poverty low-achievement schools is an excellent way to never get to start your teaching career. But just in case, Cuomo also wants to streamline the firing process, and since all non-tenured teachers can be fired at any time for any reason, I think he has got that covered. [...]

Cuomo also commits to the Bottom 5 percent model of school failure, guaranteeing that there are always failing schools. Lucky for them he has decided to scrap time-consuming turnaround plans and just implement receivership, a nifty technique for privatizing a school and handing it over to a specialist for carving up.

Carving up for whom? Well, the very next item is the abolition of caps on charter authorization, so that charters can bloom across the land like a thousand flowers...

Final touches? Let us expand the market for Pre-K providers by pumping more money into that, along with a rating system. The term “high-quality” will let you know that it is nothing but the best, spared no expense. It also will let you know that the state will require assessment so that presumably parents will know how well their four-year-olds are learning to take standardized tests. Oh, wait — did I say four-year-olds? Let us up the ante and extend this to three-year-olds. Opening up new markets is always good for entrepreneurs, and those three year olds have all been slacking anyway. [...]

Chicago, Illinois

Chicago Teachers Call for Refusing Common Core Tests

Chicago Teachers Union, January 14, 2015

Resolution Against the PARCC Assessment

WHEREAS, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment is pedagogically detrimental to student learning and emotional well-being and the teaching profession because it:

- a. Is an invalid and unreliable test that student learning time is lost to pilot
- b. Diverts billions of dollars towards private interests in a time that vital resources are being taken away from students' basic educational and emotional needs
- c. Runs counter to research and practiced principles of strong teaching and learning
- d. Is used for many destructive practices that label students, teachers, schools and communities as "failing"
- e. Has disparate negative impact on students of highest need along race, class and ableist lines; and

WHEREAS, the Chicago Teacher Union already unanimously voted during the 2013-2014 school year to oppose the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the aligned tests as a framework for teaching and learning; and

WHEREAS, the Chicago Public School CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett asked the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) in June/July 2014 to receive a waiver for this year's PARCC testing with one reason being that "our schools are simply not ready for full-scale implementation," which confirms our schools do not have the necessary technological resources to fully implement such testing; and

WHEREAS, in order for a standardized test to give meaningful information, it must first be administered to a nationally normed sample group and proven to have reliability and validity; and in 2014-2015 the PARCC is being piloted as a field test, which means reliability and validity of scores have not yet been established, and yet Illinois is planning to use the results as a baseline in their state accountability systems; and

WHEREAS, of the 23 states that originally adopted the Common Core State Standards and PARCC assessment, 20 more than half have withdrawn and only 12 states remain in the group that plans to administer the PARCC; and

WHEREAS, the American Statistical Association released a statement in April of 2014 stating that teachers account for about 1% to 14% of the variability in test scores, that the majority of opportunities for quality improvement are found in the system-level conditions and that ranking teachers by their Value Added Measure (VAM) scores can have unintended consequences that reduce [teacher] quality; and

WHEREAS, this norming process is laying the groundwork for the unscientific, unreliable and inequitable practice of using

PARCC as a basis for VAM evaluations of Illinois educators; and

WHEREAS, in previous pilot administrations, educators involved in the grading process have come forward to describe how PARCC was intentionally and arbitrarily

normed to fail most students due to the misguided belief that students perform better in school when motivated through fear of their own inadequacy; and in previous pilot administrations in New York, the vast majority of students have failed especially highest need students and students of color; and

WHEREAS, CPS has reinstituted the destructive practice of test based retention and has indicated that PARCC may be used in the future for such purpose; and such retention has been tried in the past and every comprehensive study of the results has shown that it has been damaging to students; and

WHEREAS, according to the Pioneer Institute for Public Research, Pearson will profit over \$15 billion over a 7-year period from the implementation of the Common Core Standards, the PARCC test and test-prep materials; and

WHEREAS, the Obama Administration awarded PARCC and Smart Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC) a combined \$360 million to develop the new standardized tests aligned to the CCSS instead of dedicating said funds to provide the much needed support for our most disadvantaged students in the form of more social workers, 40 counselors, support staff, funding school libraries and providing robust extracurricular programs; and

WHEREAS, the State of Illinois, has consistently underfunded public education, is spending over \$57 million on PARCC implementation this year for a test administration that will be neither valid nor reliable, and is an expensive experiment to norm PARCC on students without their or their families' consent; and

WHEREAS, in 2014, the CPS schools with large percentages of students who opted out of the Illinois Standard Achievement Test (ISAT), and/or teachers boycotting the ISAT, were threatened with loss of accreditation, the decertification of teachers, funding cuts, lowering of schools performance ratings; yet, none of this occurred; and



WHEREAS, for the 2014-2015 school year, PARCC is a low stakes test; therefore, it has no effect for the 2014-2015 school year on the School's Quality Rating Policy (SQRP), teacher evaluation, student promotion or school funding; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the CTU encourage and support its members and parents to hold parent informational sessions around the PARCC and the option of opting out; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the CTU will encourage its members to speak and petition Local School Councils, Bilingual 53 Advisory Committees and/or Parent Advisory Councils about the excessive amount of time that our students are being tested and prepared for tests, and the harmful impact on teaching and learning; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the CTU will distribute a sample petition supporting a curriculum shift away from test-prep and towards a well rounded curriculum described in The Schools Chicago Students Deserve and a testing calendar to each school's delegate; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the CTU support the "Opt-out" bill sponsored by State Representative Will Guzzardi and Senator William Delgado and legislation that delays the PARCC; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the CTU, either independently or in cooperation with CPS develop and conduct a complete audit of the

time and resources expended on high stakes testing and preparation for such tests by June 2016; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the CTU encourage Barbara Byrd-Bennett, all members on the Board of Education and all 64 principals to take the PARCC test and publicly release their results; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the CTU encourages teachers to hold "PARCC parent/teacher practice sessions" where the 66 parents and teachers take the practice PARCC and reflect on their experiences; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the CTU encourage the Board of Education to stop using standardized test scores for making decisions on student promotion, teacher evaluations, school ratings and the decision to close or turnaround schools; and be it further

RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be sent to the Illinois State Board of Education, the Chicago Board of Education, the Governor of Illinois, and all members of the Illinois legislative branch; the Mayor and City Council of Chicago; and be it finally

RESOLVED, that should this resolution be passed by the CTU House of Delegates, an appropriate version will be submitted to the Illinois Federation of Teachers and the American Federation of Teachers.

(<http://www.ctunet.com/blog/text/Resolution-Against-the-PARCC-Assessment-2014.pdf>)

ORGANIZING TO REFUSE PARCC TESTS

Raise Your Hand Parent Group Opposes Threats from Illinois State Board of Education

Recently, in the face of growing opposition to imposing the PARCC (Partnership for Assessing Readiness for College and Careers) test in Illinois and a growing Refuse the Tests movement, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) threatened school districts with a loss of funds if their schools refused the tests. The parent education advocacy group Raise Your Hand for Illinois Public Education (RYH) sent a letter to Illinois State Superintendent Chris Koch and recently appointed Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Chair James Meeks charging them with misleading the public and unjustly threatening school districts so as to stop parents and students from exercising their right to refuse the tests.

Such threats are used by state officials across the country, even though no such loss of funds has ever occurred. The RYH said, "Instead of threatening districts across the state with loss of funding, ISBE should be doing everything in its power to make sure taxpayer dollars are going to the most vital areas in public education. Protecting the interests of children across Illinois — not corporate interests of Pearson (monopoly owners of the tests) or regulatory interests of the federal government should be the fundamental duty of the state board." Below is the letter from Raise Your Hand (RYH).

* * *

Dear Superintendent Koch and Chairman Meeks:

We have serious concerns about the threatening and misleading letter that you sent to Illinois school districts on January 30, 2015. You have not listened to the voices of administrators, teachers and parents across the state who have asked you to seek a one-year waiver for the PARCC. We have also learned that some districts are receiving approval for using all paper-pencil testing due to tech issues discovered during field testing. This information needs to be made public to taxpayers and stakeholders.

In addition: 1) The letter misleadingly threatens dire consequences if all students do not take the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments. No state has ever lost Title I funds for deliberately breaching the assessment requirements of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) sec. 1111(b)(3)(C). At most, the U.S. Department of Education (USED) has prevented state agencies from keeping a small part of the Title I funds at the state level; there has never been a net loss of funds.

For example, California had permitted half of its 8th graders (219,000 students) to take a test aligned to 6-7th grade content standards for several years. As a consequence, USED required that California's department of education had to pass on 6% of its Title I administrative funds directly to the districts. Last year, California

unilaterally administered the Smarter Balanced assessment as a field test, without any reporting at the student or school level and with 5% of the students taking an exam in either math or English, not both. USED granted them a waiver. This year, Massachusetts unilaterally allowed its districts to choose between the PARCC and the MA assessment for which they received the sanction of a letter of reprimand.

2) You threaten to create the very consequence you hope to avoid: the loss of Title I and other funds to school districts. We fail to see how a limited assessment of students with a test of dubious quality would imperil their education, compared to the denial of multiple funds.

3) High schools giving the PARCC will not be testing all students in English and math in any single grade. Instead, students will take the assessment based on what courses they completed, which means that some students will not take any assessment. In addition, high school districts were given the choice of which (partial) cohort of students to test this year — either those completing first year, second year or third year coursework; and so there will be no uniformity across the state in which year will be tested this spring. There is no provision in the ESEA testing requirements or Illinois' flexibility waiver for either of these modifications. Your position appears to be that the federal law cannot be violated except when you want to violate it. Why do you get to pick and choose which part of the law you will comply with?

4) The PARCC has not been shown to be valid and reliable. As stated above, some districts are using pencil-paper versions due to technical glitches discovered during field testing. Other students are taking the electronic version on a variety of devices, with different screen-sizes and resolutions. Without validity studies completed, the validity of the test across different modes and platforms (especially

for different student subgroups) is uncertain. As such, we question your commitment to "implementing valid and reliable performance measures for our schools" and the legality of using the PARCC in its current forms as an accountability assessment under Illinois School Code sec. 2-3.64a-5(i) and ESEA Sec. 1111(b)(3)(C)(iii), which require that all assessments be shown to be valid and reliable.

5) The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) could have pursued a one-year waiver to postpone the PARCC assessment but refused, despite petitions from the public, school districts and legislators asking you to do so. We do not understand why you wrote the U.S. Department of Education in November 2014 to ask what current law stated — something we already knew — rather than seeking reasonable, temporary changes to the Illinois test schedule like those that were granted in California last year.

6) It is unclear how ISBE will comply with the ESEA requirements for grade-span testing of students in science. No students will be assessed in science this year. This means that unless next year's 5th graders and 12th graders take science exams, which they have never previously done, Illinois will violate the federal requirement that such students be assessed in science between grades 3-5 and 10-12. Are we to believe that in only a year, Illinois will be able to commission, design, and field-test a valid and reliable science assessment for 5th and 12th graders?

7) ISBE has violated the terms of state testing law in the past. From 2011 to 2013, ISBE failed to assess students in grades 3, 5, 6, and 8 in writing despite state law requiring it to do so. ISBE argued then that the General Assembly did not appropriate enough money.

We call on you to retract the threats you have made to districts, produce validity studies for PARCC, and seek the one-year testing waiver that parents and districts have asked for.

Reject Common Core and the PARCC Test

Chicago Education Activist

(The views below were presented to the Chicago Board of Education and have been edited for publication by Voice of Revolution. Similar to Buffalo, NY and other cities, where speakers from the public are limited to three minutes, in Chicago they get only two. And like elsewhere, the board is not obligated to answer the public and can instead sit silently, or use their cell phones or even leave the room while the public is expressing its demands.)

I want to address the issue of Common Core. This is a set of standards that is to be reflected in high-stakes standardized tests and that will narrow the curriculum and education that our students get, unless it is beaten back.

Common Core is an attack on public education by corporations. You, like [Illinois] Governor Quinn, who signed onto it, did not take up your responsibility to organize the necessary debate and discussion before imposing it without the knowledge or permission of parents, teachers, and other concerned people in the city.

People have the right to decide what kind of education our children receive. You repeatedly violate that right:

You have made devastating decisions, against strong community opposition, to recently close 49 more neighborhood schools, to

install a military academy to replace a popular community school in Logan Square, and to increase the number of privately run charter schools — which are taking money away from our neighborhood public schools.

Now you have a chance to deal with the problem of Common Core and its unscientific and oppressive standardized test known as PARCC, to be administered in the spring. [PARCC, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, is an un-elected body, not accountable to the public, made up of several states including New York, Illinois, Ohio, Massachusetts, Maryland, Colorado and others. It is being used to remove the public from governance and to impose the testing — known to be unreliable and unjust and used as a means to brand schools as failing so as to close them or privatize them — VOR Ed. Note]

Common Core is a program initiated and funded by the biggest corporations in the U.S. Some 25 years ago one of their main organizations, the National Business Roundtable, made clear that they need students who will help them make more profits. They then worked hard to impose programs such as No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and now Common Core. The corporations want

students trained to be obedient employees with a narrow outlook and set of skills, or soldiers who follow orders for the wars launched for the corporations' greater profits and power.

But these corporate goals are not what most parents or teachers want for their children.

Those running Common Core have actually warned parents that up to 70 percent of children will fail Common Core tests such as the PARCC test. This is a barbarity. Failure can only discourage and humiliate children — especially poor and minority children. Teachers are forced to teach to these tests, and are terrorized because they and their schools will be evaluated based on invalid student scores.

Why are the federal and state governments so insistent on implementation of these Common Core tests — which are designed and sold to school systems like ours by monopoly corporations such as Pearson?

The Chicago Teachers Union is on record against Common Core, with a unanimous vote of their House of Delegates. Many parents

and other teachers have organized against Common Core here and in many other states, as have some school boards and school administrators. Here in Chicago people are organizing to oppose and refuse this year's PARCC test.

A school board that represents the people would support discussion by those who are bringing out the damage that Common Core is doing.

This damage of Common Core includes removing the public from governance on issues of education. It includes the narrow standards that exclude truly critical thinking and consideration of history and social justice issues that exclude creativity and art. Common Core ignores the developmental realities of children. The program violates the needs of special education students and English language learners. The Common Core program is providing sensitive private data on children and their parents to all sorts of vendors and others. It is completely removing the public from governance at a time when democracy demands an increase in the role and control of the public.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

REJECTING FAILURE OF STATE TAKEOVER

Philadelphia Teachers, Students and Parents Organizing for Public Control of Schools

The Philadelphia School District was taken over by the state in 2001, in a manner much like Governor Cuomo is proposing for Buffalo and school districts statewide. In place of a local public board, the state created the School Reform Commission (SRC), a five-member *appointed* board. Cuomo is planning something even more like a dictator, appointing just a single “czar” or executive.

The SRC has a 13-year record of failure when it comes to the public schools, imposing cuts and closings while handing over public schools to private interests. Imposing it was in part justified based on finances — yet it has not fully funded the schools while continuing to have large deficits. Its aim was much more to eliminate public governance and wreck the teacher's union while attacking the right to education and the quality of schools open to all.

This was evident recently when the SRC last fall simply eliminated the existing contract with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT). Refusing to negotiate, the SRC said the contract was not valid and took unilateral action, including cutting health care. Resistance by teachers and students, including walkouts, has blocked the SRC efforts. In a court case brought by the PFT, the Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court ruled January 22 that the SRC actions were illegal and that negotiations must now take place.

Another part of the struggle saw the PFT join other organizations to petition the City Council for a referendum on public, local control of the public schools. The demand was widely supported, with more than 40,000 signatures gathered. The City Council, reflecting an undemocratic and anti-public stand refused to vote in favor.

The PFT and others are not accepting this and are continuing to fight for public control and rejecting the elimination of the SRC.

This was also recently evident in actions by the Philadelphia Student Union, which has blocked votes by the SRC and organized actions outside their schools in support of their teachers.

Further strengthening the organized student resistance, in unity with teachers, in Philadelphia, Buffalo, Chicago and elsewhere is on the agenda.

We reprint below the statement to the Philadelphia City Council by PFT President Jerry Jordan.

* * *

When the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) joined Pennsylvania Working Families and other community and labor organizations in January to collect petition signatures to put local control on November's ballot, we were amazed and thrilled with the response we got from residents.

The PFT alone collected over 17,000 of the 26,000 signatures required to place the referendum before City Council. In all, over 40,000 signatures were collected, far more than what was required.

City Council has been a champion for full funding for our schools and a consistent voice for more transparency and oversight of school district finances.

Given your past advocacy for our schoolchildren, last week's failure to vote to put local control on the ballot in November was a shocking disappointment.

The issue of local control of our public schools is clearly something Philadelphians care about. The people of this city want the power to determine what happens in their children's schools.

That power was taken away from us in 2001, when the state foisted the School Reform Commission onto Philadelphia. Since then, our school district has experienced triple-digit budget deficits, the closure of neighborhood schools, and an unthinkable loss of programs and services for our children.

This year, schools opened with conditions that can, at best, be called deplorable.

- Schools district-wide have cut back on maintenance and security;
- Austin Meehan, where 26 percent of the students have special needs, has lost 3 teachers and 4 support service assistants;
- Most of our schools still do not have certified school librarians and are sharing counselors and nurses with other buildings.
- Central High School, like many schools throughout the city, has oversized classrooms

I could go on, but you have all heard these stories and more.

All of this and more has taken place under the watchful eye of the SRC. This experiment in state control has a 13-year record of failure when it comes to managing the school district budget.

Now is the time for this experiment to end.

Tabling the vote did not just let down the hundreds of men and women who went into our communities to talk to voters. It was a letdown to the 40,000 voters who want their voices to be heard.

We have not given up on the idea of securing local control of our schools. We will continue to advocate for local control through this election season and beyond.

On behalf of the members of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, I hope Council will do the right thing when this matter comes before you again in the Spring.

Thank you.

Lorain County, Ohio

Ohio Superintendents Take Stand Against Corporate Education “Reforms”

In January 2015, all 16 superintendents of Ohio’s Lorain County took a stand against the corporate education “reforms” — actually *deforms* of public education. These are being pushed and funded by major monopolies, like Microsoft and Walmart, and imposed by the federal and state governments, using the Common Core testing and teacher evaluation regime. In many states, including Colorado, New Jersey, New York, Illinois and Ohio, people at the local level, like these superintendents, and the Mayor in New Jersey, and principals, are joining the fight to defend the right of the public to govern public schools. In Ohio, the superintendents engaged the public using a phone survey and meetings with various groups and the public more generally.

Their survey found that unlike the federal and state government, which is branding their schools as failing and thus subject to closures and takeovers by private interests, about 90 percent believe their school districts are doing a good job, with 40 percent of these giving their district a “B.” People feel high quality teachers are the most important indicator of a high quality education, followed by a comprehensive curriculum. Two out of three respondents do not believe that increased state testing has helped students. Most did not consider earning high marks on the state report card was important. They did feel that school financing is the biggest challenge facing the schools.

Like those in the many struggles taking place, the majority felt decisions are best made by those actually involved in the work of education, those at the local level. Less than one third felt that policy decisions made at the state level are in the best interests of students. People opposed having their local tax dollars going to support for-profit and online charter schools. About 70 percent opposed vouchers going to support private schools.

The superintendents also found that the vast majority of people in the county are unaware of the changes being mandated

by the education policymakers at the state and federal level. They bring out that these policies have imposed competition instead of cooperation and “high stakes tests, teacher rankings, and charter schools — but there is very little proof that these reforms are working.”

They concluded: “It is time for a change. We (superintendents) are much to blame for not standing up to these ill-fated reforms.” They added that using the broad feedback they received “from our communities, the teachers and administrators we work with each day, and our own experiences as veteran educators,” they are fighting for changes for their districts and those of Ohio more generally and demanding that the state do the same.

They are calling for the public to be more directly involved in any education initiatives before they become law. Among the issues being addressed are concerns about the PARCC test. PARCC, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, is an un-elected body, not in any way accountable to the public. It is now in control of testing and teacher evaluations for a large number of states, including all those listed above. The testing and teacher evaluation regime has already shown itself to be unjust, arbitrary and anti-education, harming students and teachers alike. They bring out that “Teachers are concerned that the tests are too long and not developmentally appropriate for the students. There is also a concern about students having the opportunity to learn the technology skills necessary to have the test measure the subject matter and not their ability to use the technology.”

Demand for Charter School Accountability

As is being shown across the country, the charter schools — which are controlled privately and thus not accountable to the public, while they are funded publicly — are doing worse than the public schools. The superintendents report, “In Fiscal Year

2013 alone, Ohio deducted \$828,145,901 from public schools to charter/community schools. Specifically, in Lorain County the 14 public schools lost approximately 3,372 students (5% of the total student population) to charter/community schools at a cost of \$25,919,853. The 14 Lorain County public school districts had an average performance index score of 98.176 versus an average of 87.074 for the charters. In simple terms, the public schools averaged a grade of “B” as compared to the average charter community grade of “C.” Further, when comparing the value-added gain index, the public schools averaged growth of 3.231, while the charter schools averaged a dismal -2.120. Based on the aforementioned two simple metrics that continue to permeate the news, the charter/community school movement is clearly failing

the students of Lorain County and ultimately costing County residents millions of dollars.

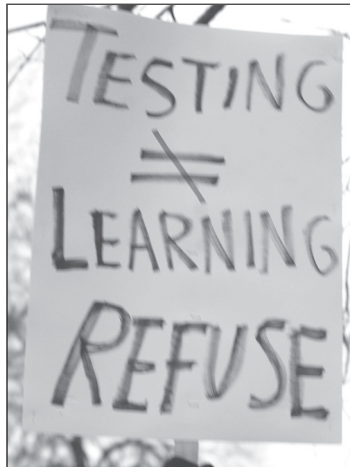
“Additionally, \$4.5 million of locally generated tax dollars in Lorain County were diverted to support on-line, for profit, and other charter schools without the approval of the local school boards. These dollars were approved by local voters to support their local school district only!” They demand that no local funds should leave the district to support the charter schools.

The superintendents are continuing to organize discussions and debates with the parents, students, teachers, staff and administrators about concerns and solutions. They state “Without widespread grassroots support for change, our children will be faced with the same failed reforms. We look forward to talking with you!”

Newark, New Jersey

Newark Mayor Supports Parents Who Refuse State Tests

Newark Mayor Ras Baraka released the following statement opposing the statewide tests known as PARCC and supporting the right of parents to refuse the tests. PARCC is the Partnership for Assessing College and Career Readiness, an un-elected body not accountable to the public with people from a number of states. PARCC is using a test that teachers cannot see or have or even discuss and that was produced and is administered by the private monopoly Pearson, not teachers and other educators. Even to access information, it is necessary to go through “PearsonAccess,” which is right on the PARCC website. Mayor Baraka states:



“Newarkers have had enough of standardized testing being used to harm not help their children. Many parents, students, educators, and advocates are standing up and standing together in support of their children and schools. Some parents are preparing to opt their children out of these exams, refusing to take them. They know PARCC tests are longer, more stressful, and designed to produce lower scores. They know that the district has not adequately prepared their children to sit for a computer-based test. They know that not every school has had the preparation required to implement the CCSS, let alone begin using PARCC to test students on their mastery of those standards.

“More than half the states that originally signed on to PARCC have withdrawn. Recently, Chicago announced plans to delay full implementation of PARCC testing until its schools and students were better prepared. Parents and educators nationally are questioning the purpose of this rapid transition to this high stakes assessment system that has major consequences for students, teachers, and educators without creating the appropriate infrastructure or ensuring the preparation required to meet the standards. Like parents, many states do not want to be set up to fail. However, this is exactly what the rapid fire and premature

implementation of PARCC is setting us all up to do.

“Diagnostic testing and assessment have a place in student learning, to tell us where an individual child needs help, what teachers need to re-teach, and where a school can do better. However, the overuse of standardized tests as the primary gauge of what students know has undermined their credibility as useful assessments. Testing should be de-emphasized. Standardized tests should be administered much less frequently. For example, students in Finland are tested once in high school. We also do not have to test every child, every year.

“New Jersey Department of Education should create a more fair and open assessment

development process that allows for multiple approaches to assessment, provides more opportunity for educator initiative and professionalism, and is more useful and friendly for parents and families. The state should focus on creating a balanced accountability system that uses many types of evidence of student learning. It should put in place a protocol for testing representative samples of students at different grades without narrowing curriculum or imposing test-prep mania on schools and classrooms, as the established National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) does. Until then, New Jersey needs an immediate moratorium on using standardized test for high-stakes purposes, such as graduation, teacher evaluations, and restructuring schools.

“Parents of Newark Public School students are increasingly raising concerns about PARCC. Educators have consistently challenged the benefit of these tests for their students and on the quality of curriculum. It is my view that parents and educators are vital voices in schools and educational policy. I stand in solidarity with their opposition to this regime of standardized testing and call upon the district to meet parental decisions to “opt-out” with educationally appropriate, not punitive responses, including alternative settings and activities wherever possible.”

I • New Direction for Economy and Political Affairs

massacres — all decided unilaterally by the U.S. completely against international law — will relentlessly continue.

Another is that use of executive power will also increase, in part through the use of veto power. While this is a power granted by the Constitution, it is not common for the president to unilaterally declare even before a bill is passed that he will veto it. This is an open threat by Obama that he decides, not Congress. He said he would veto bills that “put the security of families at risk by taking away their health insurance or unraveling the new rules on Wall Street or refighting past battles on immigration.” He also said he would veto any new Iran sanctions bill.

As well the double-speak and double standards will continue. The war in Afghanistan is said to be over with 15,000 troops still there. There is no longer talk of winning a war, just that it is winding down. And now “over” means most troops are home, but not all. The firm demand of the anti-war movement is *All U.S. Troops Home Now!* Not only from Afghanistan but from the entire region, from Korea and Japan, from the hundreds of U.S. bases worldwide ALL Home NOW.

Obama says he has prohibited torture. Yet he has not acted to end solitary confinement, a form of torture, in U.S. prisons. He has also blocked release of the full report Senate report on torture while ensuring all the U.S. officials responsible, his own administration included, go unpunished. The broad and growing impunity that characterize the Obama years, in regards to human rights both at home and abroad, is also to relentlessly continue.

It is also the case that the deep distrust in government that has been generated from the pre-emptive use of force and attacks on rights is a concern for Obama. This was evident in his efforts to appear to stand with movement that emerged from the battles in Ferguson against racist government killings and police brutality, echoing its phrases.

He tries to eliminate the resistance by saying “We may have different takes on the events of Ferguson and New York. But surely we can understand a father who fears his son can’t walk home without being harassed. And surely we can understand the wife who won’t rest until the police officer she married walks through the front door.” Community leaders and law enforcement are to come together “to reform America’s criminal justice system so

that it protects and serves all of us... That’s how we start rebuilding trust.”

In this manner the government organized racist attacks are not to be confronted. The militarization of the police force as an aggressive force that also acts unilaterally and pre-emptively against the civilian population is not to be ended. The genocide of mass incarceration is not to be recognized. There is no mention of accountability. Trust is to be restored not by targeting the government for its crimes and defending rights, but rather by allowing impunity to continue.

The speech also had significance in Obama’s efforts to try use the chauvinism of the ruling circles to convince working people that there is one united country with the same values and interests. This in a situation where the division and contradictions between rich and poor, between workers and capitalists, have greatly deepened and inequality has increased to even greater levels. Workers have no common interests with relentless wars, militarization of life, attacks on rights at home and abroad.

It is perhaps because this reality — that the existing political and economic system is not in the interests of the people at home or abroad — is becoming increasingly clear that Obama several times uses the term new. We are rebuilding “our economy on a new foundation.” “We have laid a new foundation.” “Let’s begin this new chapter together.”

This content reflects that the battle of today is one between the old and the new. Obama and the ruling circles fear this new, but cannot deny its reality. So instead they try to dress up the very old and tired American nightmare of a “fair shot” and “opportunity.”

It is time for the new — a new direction for the economy and political affairs. It is time to break with the old, with the notion that workers can share the aims and thinking of the imperialists. It is time for our own thinking, our own independent politics, our own democracy of our making. That is what the new is all about. It is time for a society that guarantees not opportunity, but the rights of all. It is time for an economy that serve to guarantee rights and advance society. It is time for political empowerment that puts decision making in the hands of the people themselves. A new direction is not one with the ruling circles, it is one with the peoples of the world standing against U.S. imperialism and for the rights of all abroad and at home.

The 2015 State of the Union Address: A Major Omission

David Krieger, Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, January 23, 2015

When President Obama first took office he was deeply concerned about nuclear disarmament. In 2009, in a speech in Prague he had this to say about nuclear weapons:

“Today, the Cold War has disappeared but thousands of those weapons have not. In a strange turn of history, the threat of global nuclear war has gone down, but the risk of a nuclear attack has gone up. More nations have acquired these weapons. Testing has continued. Black market trade in nuclear secrets and nuclear

materials abound. The technology to build a bomb has spread. Terrorists are determined to buy, build or steal one. Our efforts to contain these dangers are centered on a global non-proliferation regime, but as more people and nations break the rules, we could reach the point where the center cannot hold.”

He also said at Prague:

“So today, I state clearly and with conviction America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear

weapons. I'm not naive. This goal will not be reached quickly — perhaps not in my lifetime. It will take patience and persistence. But now we, too, must ignore the voices who tell us that the world cannot change. We have to insist, 'Yes, we can.'"

We might well ask not only what happened to "America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons," but what happened to President Obama's commitment?

In President Obama's 2015 State of the Union Address, the only mention of nuclear weapons was in relation to the agreement the Obama administration is seeking to negotiate with Iran. The President promised to veto any additional sanctions placed on Iran, which he said would undermine the negotiations between the US and Iran to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran. President Obama also expressed considerable concern for the dangers of climate change, a clear danger to the environment and the future. But there was no mention in the State of the Union of "America's commitment" to nuclear disarmament.

President Obama's early concerns for nuclear disarmament led to his receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, but he seems to have given up his pursuit of a world without nuclear weapons. He does so to the detriment of all Americans and all people of the world. Nuclear weapons are equal opportunity destroyers — women, men and

children. Under Obama's leadership, America is setting a course to modernize its nuclear infrastructure, weapons and delivery systems. Not only is the expected price tag for the U.S. nuclear modernization program expected to exceed \$1 trillion over the next three decades, but such a program endangers all Americans rather than providing them with security.

In a recent article, Theodore Postol, a MIT professor emeritus of science, technology and national security policy, argued, "No rational actor would take steps to start a nuclear war. But the modernization effort significantly increases the chances of an accident during an unpredicted, and unpredictable, crisis — one that could escalate beyond anyone's capacity to imagine." Postol concluded, "In a world that is fundamentally unpredictable, the pursuit of an unchallenged capacity to fight and win a nuclear war is a dangerous folly."

Mr. President, we live in an unpredictable world, but it is predictable based on history that nuclear weapons and human fallibility are a dangerous and highly flammable mix. Nuclear weapons, including our own, threaten all Americans and all humanity. Do not give up on the essential quest for a Nuclear Zero world, which you seemed so eager to achieve upon assuming office.

(David Krieger is president of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, www.wagingpeace.org.)

The Hidden Threat To Free Speech in Obama's State of the Union Address

Douglas Lucas, WhoWhatWhy

President Obama proposed new laws to protect Americans and "especially our kids" from hackers during his State of the Union address. Swaddled in that almost tender-sounding language, though, was a plan that would strengthen the government's ability to go after journalists like Barrett Brown.

In fact, the new cybersecurity legislation would further criminalize the kind of activity for which Brown is due to be sentenced in Dallas federal court on Jan. 22. Judge Sam A. Lindsay will decide whether to let Brown, 33, off with time served for the more than two years he's already spent behind bars, or imprison him for a maximum of eight-and-a-half years. Brown struck a deal to plead guilty to, among other charges, a Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA) felony.

That particular element of the case against Brown demonstrated how he, as a journalist, worked with hackers to expose corporate behavior. The CFAA violation involved his efforts to shield one of his sources, Anonymous hacktivist Jeremy Hammond, from prosecution. Hammond, a self-described anarchist based in Chicago, broke into the computer systems of the private intelligence firm Stratfor hoping to expose wrongdoing and corporate malfeasance.

Brown's prosecution fits a pattern that has seen the U.S. government treat online journalists, crusading bloggers and idealistic hacktivists as enemies more than new-style investigative reporters. Already, his sentence stands to chill those who would emulate him in conducting real-time, public research into leaked data troves. At

the last hearing in Brown's case, in December, journalist Quinn Norton testified that his prosecution was "absolutely chilling" to 21st Century journalism.

Easier Prosecutions

With President Obama's legislation, it will become easier for prosecutors to pursue such people. The proposals would, among other things, broaden the meaning of "unauthorized access" such that the Department of Justice could more easily turn the sharing of hyperlinks into illegal "trafficking" as they see fit. Prosecutors accused Brown of that but dropped nearly that entire indictment amid sharp criticism that they were bending the law and attacking free speech.

Brown's guilty plea allowed him to escape an indictment that construed the sharing of a hyperlink as identity theft. The opening for prosecutors was that the file was said to contain canceled credit card data and user password material hacked out of Stratfor's servers.

One crucial difference was that Brown had no plans to profit from the sharing of the link, precisely the kind of criminal fraud the law was drafted to stop. Instead, he thought the information might aid his virtual research syndicate ProjectPM, which was investigating shadowy cybersecurity contractors that work for law enforcement and intelligence agencies. Indeed, he publicly criticized hackers who spilled the personal data of innocent bystanders.

That difference won't matter under the new proposals. The

Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, under which Brown will be sentenced, would be amended to define unauthorized access as something done “for a purpose that the accesser knows is not authorized by the computer owner,” a practically limitless definition. The law will also make hacking that’s now a misdemeanor a felony.

Cybercosa Nostra?

The proposed legislation will also give federal prosecutors authority to use the most powerful weapon in their arsenal against hackers: The Racketeer and Influenced Corrupt Organizations Act, known commonly as RICO. The government would then have the discretion to pursue hackers and hacktivists alike with the same tools used to dismantle the mafia and drug cartels.

The government already seems to consider people like Brown

a threat. Consider the effort they have poured into his case alone: the prosecution tried to take away funds donated for his defense, gagged him from speaking out about his case, fished for the names of ProjectPM members, pursued a case against his mother, and argued that he and Anonymous “secretly plotted the overthrow of the government.”

In other words, prosecutions like that pursued against Barrett Brown, may well become more common. They will certainly be easier to bring forward. And the government will have even more authority to rein in alliances between journalists and hacktivists, and other previously unheard voices exposing how governments and corporations work together in the dark corners of cyberspace.

(January 22, 2015)

State of the Union 2015: Lethal, Predatory, Delusional

Glen Ford, Black Agenda Report

In his next-to-last State of the Union address, President Obama flashed a bag of tricks that has no chance of passing the Republican-controlled Congress, but will allow his apologists to claim that the genuine, more progressive Obama is revealing himself in his final two years in office. [...] Now that Democrats are the endangered species on Capitol Hill, Obama hangs a piñata of subsidized community college education, additional tax deductions for child care, seven days paid sick leave, higher capital gains taxes on the wealthy, and billions in fees on casino bankers.

On closer examination, his grab bag of bills and requests for legislation contains even less than advertised – a vapor-thin rhetorical veneer for a center-right presidency whose real accomplishment has been to re-inflate the Wall Street casino, flush the last vestiges of secure employment out of the economy, and put the imperial war machine back on the offensive. [...]

“The shadow of crisis has passed, and the State of the Union is strong,” said Obama, reflecting the corporate consensus that the rich can safely get on with the business of appropriating to themselves the wealth of the world. “Over the past five years, our businesses have created more than 11 million new jobs,” he said, failing to clarify that the vast majority of these jobs are low wage and highly insecure, or that five million workers have dropped out of the job market – half a million in December, alone. The economy inhabited by the vast majority of Americans grows smaller and more cutthroat, with nearly all the new wealth accruing to the rich. Yet, “the shadow of crisis has passed....”

Obama celebrated the “resilience” of the “strong, tight-knit” American family, exemplified by a Minneapolis couple that have both regained employment. “Our economy is growing and creating jobs at the fastest pace since 1999,” said Obama – bad jobs, in a nation of growing inequality. For Blacks, wages relative to whites have regressed to 1980 levels, and Black household wealth has collapsed so completely there is no statistical possibility of ever reaching parity with whites under the existing economic system – period.

The modern State of the Union address is designed to showcase the transparency of US governance, with all three branches of the American State scrunched together in the space of a TV



screen, applauding the leader. But late stage capitalism dare not reorder the world in the light of day. Since almost the beginning of the 21st century, lawyers and lobbyists for the global corporate class have been hammering out the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), sometimes called “NAFTA on steroids,” in total secrecy. Speaking to the American people, last night, President Obama feared to utter the treaty’s name. Instead, he asked “both parties to give me trade promotion authority” – ‘fast track’ passage of the legislation, unread by lawmakers – “to protect American workers, with strong new trade deals from Asia to Europe that aren’t just free, but fair.” If it were fair, of course, they wouldn’t keep it secret.

By now, even the illiterate know that NAFTA and other “free trade” pacts smoothed the way for the export of US jobs to the Global South and China, 20 years ago. But Obama inferred to the nation that the new deal will have the opposite effect. “More than half of manufacturing executives have said they’re actively looking at bringing jobs back from China. Let’s give them one more reason to get it done.”

For the record, there is no reason to believe that TPP will cause jobs to flow back to the US from China – quite the opposite. But then, Obama didn’t exactly say that the jobs flow would be reversed; like the worst kind of liar, he only inferred it.



What a farce the whole exercise of bourgeois democratic capitalism has become. The world is made to turn under our feet, in secret, while politicians of the two corporate parties allude to the real substance of economic restructuring only in coded language.

China, having served Obama's speechifying purposes as the jobs-stealing boogeyman, then becomes a prop for presidential self-congratulation on the environment. "In Beijing," he said, "we made an historic announcement. The United States will double the pace at which we cut carbon pollution, and China committed, for the first time, to limiting their emissions." This is Obama, Enviro-Man. But, wait! Here comes Obama as Frack-Man, who has overseen the hyper-production of US oil and gas and turned the White House into PR central for the fracking industry. "We believed we could reduce our dependence on foreign oil and protect our planet. And today, America is number one in oil and gas." One million new barrels of US oil per day have flooded world markets, further encouraging fossil fuel-intensive development and global warming. He is a super-fracking enviro-marvel.

Weaponized US oil production threatens to destabilize Russia, Iran and Venezuela – and possibly the entire global economy, which is slumping and does not need the extra fuel. But oil warfare is clearly Obama's purpose. Sanctions are just gravy. "We're upholding the principle that bigger nations can't bully the small by opposing Russian aggression and supporting Ukraine's democracy, and reassuring our NATO allies," he said, celebrating his alliance with Ukrainian Nazis.

Obama urged Congress to lift the trade embargo on Cuba, while Havana's neighbor and number one ally, Venezuela, is struck with the one-two punch of US sanctions and the oil glut.

He asks permission from Congress to wage a wider war against the Islamic State, whose rise is the direct result of US and Saudi Arabian nurturing of the international jihadist network for more than three decades. But, he is also training more fighters – inevitably, jihadists – to topple the secular government in Syria.

Thousands of US troops now man the machinery of war in Iraq, where the US was compelled to withdraw, five years ago.

Obama has no plans whatsoever to leave Afghanistan, where about 10,000 US troops, largely Special Forces, remain on indefinite assignment. Yet, he begins his State of the Union address with the lie: "Tonight, for the first time since 9/11, our combat mission in Afghanistan is over."

What is over – kaput! – is the US's ability to compete in a world that is breaking the chains of Euro-American imperial bondage. Washington can muster no response, except war. Neither can it maintain living standards for the vast majority of its own people, whose interests are diametrically opposed to those of the financial ruling class to whom the Democrats and Republicans answer.

As he prepares for transition, two years from now, to more lucrative position in service of the Lords of Capital, Obama harkens back to his national television debut, at the Democratic convention, in 2004. "I gave a speech in Boston where I said there wasn't a liberal America, or a conservative America; a black America or a white America — but a United States of America."

He was lying back then, just as he lied Tuesday night when he promised "to reform America's criminal justice system so that it protects and serves us all."

So said the man who gave the final coup de grace to due process and the rule of law with his preventive detention bill, his Tuesday assassination sessions, and his ever expanding Kill List.

The State of the Union is lethal.

(January 26, 2015)



massive bombings of Gaza, the civilian massacres and continued siege of Gaza, making it a concentration camp. Voice of Revolution denounces these actions by the U.S. and joins the Palestinians in demanding that Israel be held accountable for its crimes. We also call for the U.S. to be held accountable as the backer and funder of Israeli crimes and the power that acts with impunity and allows Israel to do the same. We reprint below a report on developments from Ali Abunimah

* * *

The International Criminal Court in the Hague has opened a preliminary examination into the situation in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Amnesty International said this step “could eventually lead to an ICC investigation into crimes committed by all sides in Israel and the [occupied territories] and break the culture of impunity that has perpetuated a cycle of war crimes and crimes against humanity.”

A press release today from the ICC said the examination would cover the period since June 13, 2014, which would include Israel’s biggest assault in the occupied West Bank in a decade and its summer attack on Gaza that killed more than 2,200 people.

However, this is only a very small step in what would still be a very long and obstacle-filled road to justice for Palestinian victims of Israeli rights violations.

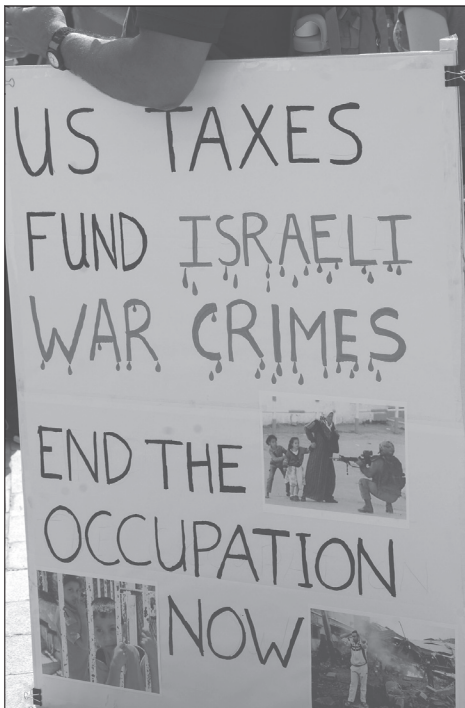
The ICC said that the Office of the Prosecutor opens a preliminary examination “as a matter of policy and practice” when it receives a valid declaration from a UN member state that it has acceded to the Rome Statute, the treaty that created the court.

This indicates that the preliminary examination was not taken at the discretion of chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda, but rather as a matter of routine.

On January 2, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon accepted as valid documents from the Palestinian Authority (PA) that the “State of Palestine” had signed on to the Rome Statute.

No timelines

According to the ICC, “a preliminary examination is not an investigation but a process of examining the information available in order to reach a fully informed determination on whether there is a reasonable basis to proceed” with a full investigation.



The press release also notes that there are “no timelines provided in the Rome Statute for a decision on a preliminary examination.”

Based on the preliminary examination, the prosecutor has discretion to decide whether to proceed or whether to “decline to initiate an investigation.”

Amnesty International, among others, has already collected a large amount of evidence indicating that Israel committed war crimes in Gaza last summer.

US Anger

Although the ICC is supposed to be independent, Bensouda is likely to face intense pressure not to proceed with an investigation into Israel’s actions, especially from the US administration of President Barack Obama, which has worked tenaciously to guarantee impunity for Israel.

The US State Department issued a statement that even for the Obama administration was remarkable in its sheer hostility to the notion of justice for Palestinians. It asserted that the ICC’s preliminary examination was “counterproductive to the cause of peace.”

“As we have said repeatedly, we do not believe that Palestine is a state and therefore we do not believe that it is eligible to join the ICC,” the statement said.

“It is a tragic irony that Israel, which has withstood thousands of terrorist rockets fired at its civilians and its neighborhoods, is now being scrutinized by the ICC,” the State Department added, making no mention of the fact that Israel dropped roughly the equivalent of an atomic bomb on Gaza last summer killing and injuring thousands of people and leaving more than 100,000 homeless.

Israel’s foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman called for the ICC to be dismantled altogether.

Credibility

The court already suffers from a credibility problem. It has long been criticized for disproportionately focusing on Africa while alleged crimes committed in other countries have been ignored.

In an analysis for *The Electronic Intifada* last August, international law expert Michael Kearney said that Palestine would present the court with a series of major challenges.

“The political pressure against the Office of the Prosecutor is likely to be immense,” Kearney noted, “and the task of as-

serting and retaining prosecutorial independence is something to be monitored very closely.”

Nonetheless, Kearney sees potential that Palestinians could eventually use the court to bring prosecutions not only for specific incidents such as those which may have occurred during the attack on Gaza, but also for state-level policies such as Israel’s settlements in the occupied West Bank and the crime of apartheid.

Another danger is that the Palestinian Authority will continue to use ICC membership as a tactical bargaining chip and will halt or withdraw proceedings in exchange for a resumption of the moribund “peace process.”

But given the total impunity Israeli politicians and military leaders have enjoyed to conquer, destroy, settle and kill at will, many Palestinians are likely to welcome any development, however modest, that could eventually help them find justice.

STAUNCH DEFENDER OF PALESTINE

Sami Al-Arian, Professor Who Defeated Unjust Terrorism Charges, Deported from U.S.

By Murtaza Hussain and Glenn Greenwald, The Intercept

(Voice of Revolution condemns the brutal 11-year persecution, jailing, solitary confinement and endless harassment of Professor Sami Al Arian by the U.S. government. And although he was found not guilty on terrorism charges and the U.S. government finally dropped all charges in 2014, he is still being deported. This is unjust and an attack on the rights to free speech and conscience. The entire attack on Al-Arian is a crime demonstrating the lack of human rights inside the U.S. and particularly, the unending efforts to intimidate and silence all those who stand up for Palestine. Al-Arian did not flinch in the face of these attacks, refused to be used to testify against others falsely charged with terrorism and today stands firm in demanding an end to U.S.-Israeli aggression against Palestine and for a Free Free Palestine! We reprint below a recent article from The Intercept)

* * *

In 2003, Sami Al-Arian was a professor at the University of South Florida, a legal resident of the U.S. since 1975, and one of the most prominent Palestinian civil rights activists in the U.S. That year, the course of his life was altered irrevocably when he was indicted on highly controversial terrorism charges by then Attorney General John Ashcroft. These charges commenced a decade-long campaign of government persecution in which Al-Arian was systematically denied his freedom and saw his personal and professional life effectively destroyed.

Despite the personal harm he suffered and the intense surveillance to which he had been subjected since as early as 1993, the government ultimately failed to produce any evidence of Al-Arian’s involvement in terrorist activities, instead relying at trial overwhelmingly on the pro-Palestinian writing and speaking he had done over the years.

His ordeal finally ended last night, 12 years after it began, as Al-Arian was deported yesterday at midnight (EST) from the United States to Turkey. His deportation was part of a 2006 plea bargain to which he acquiesced in order, he told The Intercept last night while at the airport preparing to leave the U.S., to “conclude his case and bring an end to his family’s suffering.” Al-Arian added: “I came to the United States for freedom, but four decades later, I am leaving to gain my freedom.”

A 2003 Justice Department investigation led by Ashcroft allegedly implicated Al-Arian and 8 other men in supporting Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), a group which had been designated a terrorist organization under the Clinton administration for carrying out bombings and other attacks in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian Territories. Ironically, Al-Arian had been a prominent supporter of Clinton, and even met Clinton in the White House. He once remarked to The Intercept that the multiple occasions when he stood in very close proximity to the U.S. President should, by itself, demonstrate how ludicrous were the “terrorist” allegations. In 2000, he supported the Bush campaign (after Bush denounced racial profiling).

Al-Arian, while a Professor at the University of South Florida, was indicted on multiple counts of providing “material support” to the group and fundraising on their behalf in the United States. In the press conference announcing the indictment, Ashcroft claimed that Al-Arian and his co-defendants “financed, extolled and assisted acts of terror,” and praised the recently passed Patriot Act as being instrumental to helping bring about the charges.

The charges were part of a broader post-9/11 campaign to by the U.S. Government to criminalize aid and support to Palestinians, as exemplified by the successful prosecution of five officials of what had been the largest Muslim charity in the U.S., the Holy Land Foundation. Those charity officials are now serving decades in prison for sending money to Palestinians, which, it was alleged, made its way to designated terror groups in the Occupied Territories.

For most of the three years after his arrest, Al-Arian was kept in solitary confinement awaiting trial. During this time, he was regularly subjected to strip-searches, denied normal visitation rights with his family, and allegedly abused by prison staff. Amnesty International denounced the circumstances of his detention as “gratuitously punitive” and in violation of international standards on the treatment of prisoners.

When Al-Arian’s case did finally reach trial after years of harsh imprisonment, prosecutors failed to convict Al-Arian on even one charge brought against him. Jurors voted to acquit him on the most serious counts he faced and deadlocked on the remainder of the indictments.

The outcome was hugely embarrassing for the U.S. Government. Despite having amassed over 20,000 hours of phone conversations and hundreds of fax messages from over a decade of surveilling Al-Arian, the DOJ – even with all the advantages they enjoyed in terrorism cases in 2003 (and continue to enjoy today) – was unable to convince a jury Al-Arian was the arch-terrorist they had very publicly proclaimed him to be.

Indeed, instead of producing evidence that Al-Arian was involved in actual “terrorism,” the government attempted to use as evidence copies of books and magazines Al-Arian had owned in a failed effort to convince the jury to convict him of apparent thought crimes.

This effort failed and a jury ruled to acquit Al-Arian on 8 out of 17 charges while failing to come to a verdict on the remainder.

Al-Arian agreed to a plea bargain on the remaining charges by pleading guilty to one count of providing “contributions, goods or services” to PIJ, a decision he says he undertook out of a desire to end the government’s ongoing persecution of him and win his release from prison.

Despite this plea, Al-Arian was not released from prison.

Instead, in 2007, shortly before he expected to leave jail and begin likely deportation proceedings, the government brought a new set of charges against him for refusing to testify in another trial against a Virginia-based Islamic think tank. Among several reasons he provided for refusing to testify against the group, he stated his belief that the organization was innocent of terrorism charges and, according to his lawyer, Jonathan Turley, “he doesn’t want them to be persecuted the way he was.” His lawyers also worried that any testimony he gave in that other case would allow the DOJ to bring wholly new charges against him for perjury.

For his refusal to testify, Al-Arian was sentenced to an additional 18 months in prison on civil contempt charges, the maximum allowed by law. Al-Arian served this added time only to be charged at the end of his sentence once again with additional criminal contempt charges stemming from the same case.

In Al-Arian’s description, these charges were in contravention of the plea deal he had previously agreed to with the government. As he told *The Intercept*, “They reneged on their end of the deal when they brought me to Virginia to try to force me to testify in another, unrelated case. It was a perjury trap. I refused to testify, so they charged me with criminal contempt.”

During the course of his imprisonment Al-Arian undertook a hunger strike to protest his ongoing persecution, losing 53 pounds in the process and being reduced to a state in which he was no longer able to walk or speak in a normal cadence. In court appearances, observers were shocked by his physical appearance,



with representatives from the U.S. Marshals Service publicly vowing to subject him to force-feeding if his hunger strike if his condition continued to visibly deteriorate.

After his indictment for criminal contempt, a federal judge eventually ordered Al-Arian to spend the duration of the court proceedings under house arrest. But the judge then proceeded to hold, rather than rule on, his motion to dismiss the indictment, freezing the case in place for years as he was consigned to house arrest. There he languished, confined to his small family apartment as his court case took years to work its way through the system.

In 2014, the federal government quietly and unceremoniously dropped all of their charges against Al-Arian. After 11 years of persecution, which left his once-promising career in academia and public advocacy in shambles, Al-Arian was “free” to be deported from the country where he had spent 40 years of his life and raised his family. As a stateless Palestinian, he was forced to find another country where he could go, and ultimately was able to leave for Turkey, where he was expected to arrive today.

Speaking to *The Intercept*, Al-Arian said that he harbored no resentment despite his ordeal and that he now feels “at peace” with the conclusion of his legal ordeal.

Describing his visceral, firsthand experience of America’s eroding democratic values Al-Arian said, “I came to the United States because I valued living as a free person, one who is able to advocate in a democratic society. Unfortunately, the U.S. has been turning into a less free society, a police and surveillance state, especially after 9/11.”

“However, I’m very encouraged by the millions of Americans who are pushing back against the forces of intolerance and exclusionary politics. I leave hopeful that the tide is turning because as history has seen, when the truth is made known to them, Americans do not support oppression and discrimination.”

Reasons Why 2014 Was a Game Changer in Palestine

Ramzy Baroud, Palestine Chronicle

In terms of losses in human lives, 2014 has been a horrific year for Palestinians, surpassing the horrors of both 2008 and 2009, when an Israeli war against the Gaza Strip killed and wounded thousands.

While some aspects of the conflict are stagnating between an ineffectual Palestinian Authority (PA), and the criminality of Israeli wars and occupation, it would also be fair to argue that 2014 was a game changer to some degree — and it is not all bad news.

To an extent, 2014 has been a year of clarity for those keen to understand the reality of the 'Palestinian-Israeli conflict' but were sincerely confused by the contrasting narratives.

Here are some reasons that support the argument that things are changing.

A Different Kind of Palestinian Unity

Although the two leading Palestinian parties Hamas and Fatah agreed to a unity government in April, little has changed on the ground. Yes, a government was officially established in June, and held its first meeting in October. But Gaza is effectively still managed by Hamas, which has been largely left alone managing the affairs of the Strip after the Israeli war in July-August. Perhaps Mahmoud Abbas's authority is hoping that the massive destruction would weaken Hamas into political submission, especially as Egypt continues to seal shut the Rafah border.

But while the factions are failing to unite, the Israeli war on Gaza has inspired a new impetus of struggle in the West Bank. Israeli plans of targeting holy sites in Jerusalem, particularly the al-Aqsa Mosque, coupled with the deep anguish felt by most Palestinians over the massacres carried out by Israel in Gaza, are slowly reverberating into a wave of mini-uprisings. Some speculate the situation will eventually lead to a massive Intifada that will engulf all of the territories. Whether a third intifada takes place in 2015 or not, is a different question. What matters is that the long-orchestrated plot to divide Palestinians is breaking apart and a new collective narrative of a common struggle against occupation is finally forming.

A New Resistance Paradigm

The debate regarding what form of resistance Palestinians should or should not adopt is being sidelined and settled, not by international do-gooders, but by Palestinians themselves. They are opting to use whatever effective form of resistance they can that could deter Israeli military advances, as resistance groups have actively done in Gaza. Although Israel's latest war killed nearly 2,200 and wounded over 11,000 Palestinians that were mostly civilians, nevertheless, it has still failed to achieve any of its declared or implied objectives. It was another reminder that sheer military strength is no longer the only overriding factor in Israel's conduct towards Palestinians.

While Israel brutalized civilians, the resistance killed 70 Is-



raelis, over 60 of whom were soldiers; this was also an important step testifying to the maturity of Palestinian resistance, which had previously targeted civilians during the second Intifada and reflected more desperation rather than a winning strategy. The legitimization of the resistance was, to a degree, reflected in the recent decision by the European court to remove Hamas from its list of terrorist organizations.

Resistance in the West Bank is taking on other forms. Although it is yet to mature into a steady campaign of anti-occupation activities, it seems to be forming an identity of its own that takes into account what is possible and what is practical. The fact is that the 'one size fits all' modes of resistance debate is becoming less relevant, giving way to an organic approach to resistance devised by Palestinians themselves.

BDS Normalizes Debate on Israeli Crimes

Another form of resistance is crystallizing in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement (BDS) which continues to grow, gathering steam, supporters and constant achievements. Not only was 2014 a year in which BDS managed to win the support of numerous civil society organizations, academicians, scientists, celebrities and to reach out to people from all walks of life, it did something else that is equally important: It normalized the debate on Israel in many circles around the world. While any criticism of Israel was considered a taboo in yesteryear, it has been forever broken. Questioning the morality and practicality of boycotting Israel is no longer a frightening subject, but is open for debate in numerous media outlets, universities and other platforms.

2014 has been a year that made the discussion of boycotting Israel more mainstream than ever before. While a critical mass

is yet to be achieved in the US, the momentum is constantly building up being led by students, clergy men and women, celebrities and ordinary people. In Europe, the movement has been hugely successful.

Parliaments are Feeling the Heat

While, traditionally, much of the southern hemisphere offered unconditional support for Palestinians, the West conceitedly stood with Israel. Following the Oslo accords, a bewildering European position evolved, where they flirted with finding the 'balance' between an occupied nation and the occupier. At times, the European Union (EU) timidly criticizes the Israeli occupation, while continuing to be one of Israel's largest trade partners, providing weapons to the Israeli army, who then use them to carry out war crimes in Gaza and sustain its military occupation in the West Bank.

This debauched policy is being challenged by citizens of various European countries. The Israeli summer war on Gaza exposed Israel's human rights violations and war crimes like never before, revealing along the way EU hypocrisy. To relieve some of the pressure, some EU countries appear to be taking stronger stances against Israel, reviewing their military cooperation, and more boldly questioning the right wing policies of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. A spate of parliamentary votes followed, overwhelmingly voting to recognize Palestine as a state. While these decisions remain largely symbolic, they represent an unmistakable shift in EU attitude towards Israel. Netanyahu continues to rail against European 'hypocrisy', assured, perhaps, by Washington's unconditional support. But with the U.S. losing control over the tumultuous Middle East, the Israeli prime minister might soon be forced to rethink his obstinate attitude.

Israel's Democracy Exposed

For decades, Israel defined itself as both a democratic and Jewish state. The objective was clear: to maintain Jewish superiority over Palestinian Arabs, while continuing to present itself as

a modern 'western' democracy -- in fact, the 'only democracy in the Middle East.' While Palestinians and many others were never sold on the democracy charade, many accepted the dichotomy with little questioning.

While Israel does not have a constitution, it has a "code," called the Basic Law. Since there is no Israeli equivalent to a "constitutional amendment" — the Netanyahu government is pushing for a

new law at the Israeli parliament, the Knesset. This will basically put forth new principles under which Israel will define itself. One of these principles will define Israel as "The national state of the Jewish people," thus casting all non-Jewish citizens of Israel as lesser citizens. While, for all intents and purposes, Palestinian citizens of Israel have been treated as outcasts, and discriminated against in many ways, the new Basic Law will be a constitutional confirmation of their state-enforced inferiority. The Jewish and democratic paradigm is dying for good, exposing Israel's reality the way it is.



The Year Ahead

Certainly 2015 will bring much of the same: The PA will fight for its own existence, and try to maintain its privileges, bestowed by Israel, the U.S. and others by using every tool available; Israel will also remain emboldened by American funds and unconditional support and military backing. Yes, the next year will also prove frustratingly familiar in that regard. But the new, real and opposing momentum will unlikely cease, challenging and exposing the Israeli occupation on one hand, and sidestepping the ineffectual, self-serving Palestinian Authority on the other.

2014 was a very painful year for Palestine, but also a year in which the collective resistance of the Palestinian people, and their supporters, proved too strong to bend or break. And in that, there can be much solace.

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