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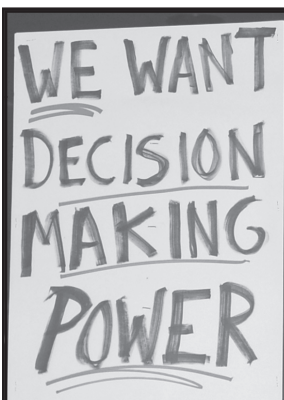
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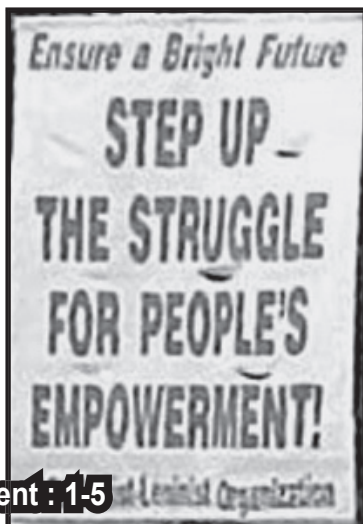
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**Political Empowerment : 1-5**



## Governance by Threat, Congressional Dysfunction and the Need for Political Empowerment

The country was once again held hostage while the vying factions in Congress threatened another government shutdown. Temporary legislation was passed just hours before funding for the federal

government ran out. It set the stage for yet more threats and continuing uncertainty, as the funding lasts only until December 11.

Legislation to pass the  
**Political Empowerment • 8**

### OREGON SHOOTING

## A Time for Serious Discussion About the Sources of Violence in Society

Yet another violent school shooting, this time at a rural community college in Oregon, saddened people across the country. Ten people, including the young man doing the shooting were killed and

others wounded. *Voice of Revolution* extends its condolences to the families and friends of all those killed and all those involved. We join people nationwide in mourn-

**Sources of Violence • 6**



**Sources of Violence : 6-8**

### JOHN KING TO BE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

## Defending Right to Education Means Defending Democracy

The many attacks on the right to education, such as through Common Core and its testing and assessment regimes, state takeovers, closing and privatizing public schools, are all accompanied by attacks on democracy. The role of the public in governance

is systematically being eliminated, while power is concentrated in the hands of executives and their appointed representatives. State takeover in New York, for example, has concentrated power in the hands of the appointed state

**Defending Democracy • 4**



**Defending Democracy : 9-19**

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### I • Political Empowerment

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federal budget is one of the most important ones for the people, as it funds the many federal departments like education, transportation, housing, healthcare, agriculture, and more. Yet far from any serious debate or even serious effort to address the budget by Congress, partisan interests of the various warring factions held sway.

Government shutdowns are effectively the use of force against the people, as they directly impact millions of people, including federal workers, those on social security, women and children requiring food stamps and Medicare and Medicaid, etc. The threats are a constant source of anxiety, requiring people to scramble to make plans in case it occurs and do so without the federal funds required.

Repeatedly using threats of shutdowns shows that Congressional dysfunction is such that public negotiations, hearings, reasoned discourse no longer have a place. It is governance by threat and counter threat, using irrational arguments. It is governance by secret meetings of top Congressional leaders and the president, not by public debate.

One danger of the constant threats is the discrediting of Congress, and elected governance more generally. Instead,



government by executive rule is presented as a way to “get things done.” Indeed, in this election, the role of Donald Trump is to say elections themselves are of no value and billionaires like him should just decide and run the country like a business. The same can be said of the massive spending by SuperPACS, funded by the billionaires.

The social responsibility of government, its duty to meet the rights of the people, is eliminated. This too is why shutdowns are so easily threatened — social responsibility and duties to the people have no place.

While the rulers are acting against democracy and for executive rule, the people are expressing their drive instead to be decision makers. Democracy needs to be modernized, not eliminated. Society needs to go forward and the peoples, through numerous struggles and demands for rights, are showing

how to do so. A new direction for political affairs is needed, one that facilitates the full and informed participation by the people. They cannot be sidelined. Rather political empowerment is the order of the day. The upcoming elections are an opportunity to build and strengthen the movements of the people for their rights and for a democracy of our own making, where we decide!

### THREATS CONTINUE WITH NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER DEADLINES

## Congress Temporarily Avoids Government Shutdown

Just seven hours before federal agencies ran out of money, the House of Representatives on September 30 passed a bill funding the federal government — but only until December 11. The measure was approved 277 to 151, with 186 Democrats and 91 Republicans in favor. The House measure came hours after the Senate also approved the temporary spending bill by a vote of 78 to 20. While normally spending bills originate in the House, Senate majority leader, Mitch McConnell, Republican of Kentucky, took the unusual step of having the Senate act first.

In addition, special measures were taken to “fast-track,” the measure. This includes bypassing a House procedure that requires a one day wait after the Rules Committee produces rules for a floor debate before a vote on the bill can occur. This is supposed to allow for more thoughtful debate, something now absent in general for Congressional proceedings.

These temporary “continuing resolutions” for funding the government also do not allow Congress to make changes to the way money is spent or to alter policies within government

agencies. It will keep the government operating at roughly last year’s levels — a rate of about \$1.017 trillion a year. The law passed only provides funding until December 11. This means that another budget bill has to be passed before that time.

President Obama quickly signed the bill into law. However, the spending measure did nothing to eliminate the on-going conflicts within Congress and between Congress and the president. Indeed governance by threat is intensifying. Reasoned argument and debate, open and public negotiations are non-existent, as the parties no longer function as political parties.

The next most likely battle will be over raising the debt ceiling. The Treasury Department recently announced that the federal government would not have funds to pay its debts and obligations by about November 5. At that point, the Treasury Department would only be able to pay the country’s bills with the cash it has on hand — expected to be roughly \$30 billion. That would not be enough to cover the bills on some days, which can amount to \$60 billion.

Treasury officials, representing the president, threatened that if the debt ceiling is not raised, “There is no way to predict the catastrophic damage that default would have on our economy and global financial markets.” Democratic leader Senator Reid claimed that a government shutdown pales in comparison to the damage failure to raise the debt ceiling would inflict. Others in Congress threaten saying unless various social programs are cut and Pentagon funding raised, the ceiling will not be raised. Threats and counter-threats to impose devastating conditions on the general public.

It should be noted that with both the issue of the debt ceiling and government shutdown, it is not those in Congress who suffer the consequences. Rather, it is more than 800,000 federal workers; public schools dependent on federal funds, like those on Native American reserves; veterans and veteran hospitals; the elderly on social security, women and children in need of food stamps, etc. When it comes to making payments, the Treasury Department first of all pays debts to the Wall Street financiers, not the paychecks and benefits due the people.

The dysfunction of Congress can also be seen in the resignation of House Republican leader John Boehner, which takes place the end of October. While he said he is resigning in the interests of the Republican Party, his leaving is more a reflection that the parties no longer function as parties and the old way of doing things no longer exists. Boehner has repeatedly been unable to get legislation passed, despite having a majority and despite being considered a seasoned dealmaker. The repeated threats using government shutdown show that deal making is no longer on the agenda, and nor is following the House or Senate leadership. Instead various factions within and across party lines pursue their own partisan interests, which do not favor the people.

It is reported that Congressional leaders and the White House have started talks to work on a longer-term budget deal. But the intensifying infighting will make crafting such a deal

extremely difficult. In the past, 12 separate spending bills for the various departments would be passed, each with debate, hearings, and so forth. None have passed this year and it is likely that a single giant omnibus bill will now be attempted. None of those in Congress want to have a budget fight during elections next year. So it is likely that a bill for funding through the November 2016 elections will be proposed.

### **NY Governor Cuomo Calls for a Shutdown**

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo joined in using the threat of a government shut down, in the name of passing federal gun control laws. His call to join in this gangster method of using a shutdown, which greatly harms federal workers, schools, and the most vulnerable, was made following the killings at a community college in Oregon.

“I’d love to see the Democrats stand up and say we’re going to shut down the government or threaten to shut down the government if we don’t get real gun control legislation,” Cuomo said. “It should be that high of a priority and I think that the Democrats or those Democrats and Republicans who do support sensible gun control should call the issue. And they should delineate who is for it and who is against it.”

In this manner Cuomo is reflecting that Congressional legislation is not a matter of debate and negotiation but rather of threats and basically use of force, which is what a shutdown amounts to.

As well maneuvering continues as to how secret negotiations with the president will take place, with Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell insisting in a call to Obama that House and Senate Democratic leaders not be allowed at the table. Obama reportedly did not accept, but he has been meeting separately with the various leaders. These types of negotiations increasingly dominate, eliminating what is supposed to be a legislative process that belongs to Congress, not the president. And given the budget is one of the most significant bills, it belongs in public.



GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN 2015

## What Happens to Public Schools if Congress Does Not Pass a Budget?

*Julia Glum, International Business Times, September 29, 2015*

The youngest Americans could be the most seriously affected if the United States government shuts down this week. As Congress weighed options Tuesday to avert a federal funding lapse, student advocates were looking ahead and expressing concern about how vulnerable school districts would pay for expenses like utility bills or arts and music classes without government dollars.

The brunt of a potential shutdown would be felt by schools receiving *Impact Aid*, which allocates money for local districts situated on government land because they do not get property tax revenue, said Deborah Rigsby, director of federal legislation with the National School Boards Association in Alexandria, Virginia. These 1,200 school districts — which tend to be on Native American reservations, military bases or low-rent housing properties — rely on about \$1.3 billion in federal funds for up to 75 percent of their operating budgets, according to New America, a nonprofit in Washington.

It is “a huge concern” if districts do not get the money, Rigsby said. Affected schools would likely rally to locate other resources in the event of a shutdown, but not all districts have financial buffers in place. “They need the certainty, or assurance, of funding,” she added. “What if a district may not have the revenue from other sources? What if there may not be a contingency plan?” [...]

Whereas other loan and grant programs are processed prior to the year students or schools utilize them, *Impact Aid* is disbursed in multiple payments over a given year. If the government shuts down, the whole system for processing districts’ aid applica-

tions and dispensing the money could go down due to employee furloughs, said Bryan Jernigan, communications director for the National Association of Federally Impacted Schools, a nonprofit in Washington. In the Department of Education’s contingency plan, released last week, 3,983 workers would be forced out of office should the shutdown last more than a week. Jernigan said they would simply not be at their desks to release the *Impact Aid* funds.

That delay could be disastrous for school systems in small, rural communities. “If they don’t have the money and they don’t know when it’s coming, they oftentimes will have to go to their local banks to get a loan to pay teacher salaries or to keep the lights on,” Jernigan said.

Other public school programs would likely not feel serious pressure from a temporary budget shutdown, according to the Education Department’s plan. About \$23 billion has already been appropriated for programs like Title I, which gives funding to school districts serving disadvantaged children, as well as career and technical education. College student financial aid through Pell Grants and the Federal Direct Student Loan program would likely be similarly safe in the short term. [...]

“A protracted delay in department obligations and payments beyond one week would severely curtail the cash flow to school districts, colleges and universities, and vocational rehabilitation agencies that depend on the Department’s funds to support their services,” according to the Education Department’s contingency plan.

## Super PACs Have Already Spent 50 Times What They Did in 2012

*Thom Hartmann*

The last two presidential election cycles broke every campaign spending record in history, but the 2016 race is shaping up to blow those two out of the water.

According to a new report from the Center for Responsive Politics, as of September 21, political groups “outside the party or official campaign structure” have flooded the 2016 race with more than \$25 million dollars, which is five times more than the last presidential race.

And, single-candidate groups – AKA Super PACs – have already spent 55 times more money than they had at this point in the 2012 race.

Unsurprisingly, most of that campaign cash was spent to benefit Republicans. Only one of the 20 top spending groups

has a “liberal view” according to the report, and the others are working to help put a Republican in the White House.

Of course, [some] claim that Super PACs are just “free speech” that is not affiliated with the official campaigns, but that is simply laughable.

Robert Maguire, one of the study’s researchers, said, “Single-candidate PACs have been around for the last two elections, and they make a mockery of the FEC’s coordination rules.” He added, “A super PAC founded by your best friend that does nothing but raise money and buy ads supporting your candidacy is not an independent organization.”

These groups are not independent and the only speech they represent is the speech of millionaires and billionaires.

### I • Sources of Violence

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ing these losses. It is a time for sadness and a time for serious thought and discussion about the sources of violence in society.

The monopoly media and many politicians direct attention to the individual person who carried out the shootings. Every detail of his life is now to be examined, with speculation of all kinds already taking place. Others speak to the need for yet more security at schools, more metal detectors, more locked doors and lockdowns, more armed police in the schools. Following the shooting students at the college were lined up and subjected to police searches.

This answer of more police presence is given despite the fact that such measures have already been taken; schools are more like prisons than schools, yet another tragic shooting has occurred. It is given in the face of the police killings and violence that occur across the country, with police acting and armed more like the military. This was evident in Ferguson, Baltimore and elsewhere and rightly opposed, especially by the youth. Yet more police are presented as an answer.

Still others demand a debate for and against gun control and strive to make that the central issue.

President Obama again said, "Our thoughts and prayers are not enough." He added, "It does nothing to prevent this carnage from being inflicted someplace else in America — next week, or a couple of months from now."

He also asked news agencies to "Tally up the number of Americans who've been killed through terrorist attacks over the last decade and the number of Americans who've been killed by gun violence, and post those side-by-side on your news reports. This won't be information coming from me; it will be coming from you. We spend over a trillion dollars, and pass countless laws, and devote entire agencies to preventing terrorist attacks on our soil, and rightfully so."

It is interesting that Obama calls for this comparison and then asserts that the massive spending on the military and policing agencies is legitimate. Because what example is being set by the U.S. government when it comes to use of assassinations and massacres as a means to solve problems? Just a day after he spoke the U.S. bombed a hospital in Afghanistan, in the name of fighting terrorism. Bombing is also taking place in Syria and drone attacks in Yemen and elsewhere. Targeted assassinations in Palestine regularly kill many dozens of children. Are we not to mourn all of these people as well and recognize that these horrific U.S. crimes have also happened too many times?

The U.S. under Obama has increased targeted assassinations,



drone massacres, bombings of wedding parties, torture and aggressive wars, where millions of children are being slaughtered. How is it that the individual act of one person in Oregon is described as "inhuman" but the violence of the U.S. state is not considered in the same manner? Why is there discussion about gun control for individuals, but there is no discussion of removing weapons from the hands of the U.S. state? Why not lead by example, and call a halt to all violence and killings carried out by the government and its policing agencies, abroad and at home? And why should we think that those who seek instead to justify and authorize these violent acts and massacres abroad are fit to decide what meaningful action to take here at home? More criminalizing of youth, more violence by police, turning schools into prisons outright, are not solutions.

It is not useful to look at the individual shooter without looking first at the society that produced him. Brutal violence, police killings, massacres of children are the norm for the monopolies and their state. They stop at nothing to achieve their world empire, as the ruthless sanctions and aggressive wars against Iraq and Afghanistan and continuing siege of Gaza have shown. These ongoing and repeated crimes make clear that violence as the weapon of choice is supported and defended by the government. That individuals then act in a similar manner is not a surprise, rather a reflection of the violence of the U.S. state.

Clearly those in power have abandoned political solutions and are using violence as the weapon of choice to avoid providing economic, political, cultural and social problems with solutions that serve the people. Meaningful action can begin with ending the violence of the U.S. state abroad and at home. Let aggressive war and police violence be ended and those responsible for it punished. Let assassinations and massacres by the state be ended and punished. Let President Obama set an example by ending use of force in resolving conflicts large and small, abroad and at home. This would be a start in the direction needed, for society and its individual members.

AFGHANISTAN

# MSF Staff Killed, Hospital Partially Destroyed in Kunduz

*Doctors Without Borders, October 02, 2015*

Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) condemns in the strongest possible terms the horrific bombing of its hospital in Kunduz, which was full of staff and patients. MSF wishes to clarify that all parties to the conflict, including in Kabul and Washington, were clearly informed of the precise location (GPS Coordinates) of the MSF facilities in Kunduz, including the hospital, guesthouse, office and an outreach stabilization unit in Chardara northwest of Kunduz.

As it does in all conflict contexts, MSF communicated the precise locations of its facilities to all parties on multiple occasions over the past months, including most recently on September 29.

The bombing in Kunduz continued for more than 30 minutes after American and Afghan military officials in Kabul and Washington were first informed by MSF that its hospital was struck. MSF urgently seeks clarity on exactly what took place and how this terrible event could have happened.

## **Update on Hospital Bombing Casualties:**

It is with deep sadness that we confirm so far the death of nine MSF staff members during the bombing last night of MSF's hospital in Kunduz. Latest casualty figures report 37 people seriously wounded, of whom 19 are MSF staff. Some of the most critically injured are being transferred for stabilization to a hospital in Puli Khumri, two hours' drive away. There are many patients and staff who remain unaccounted for. The numbers may grow as a clearer picture develops of the aftermath of this horrific bombing.

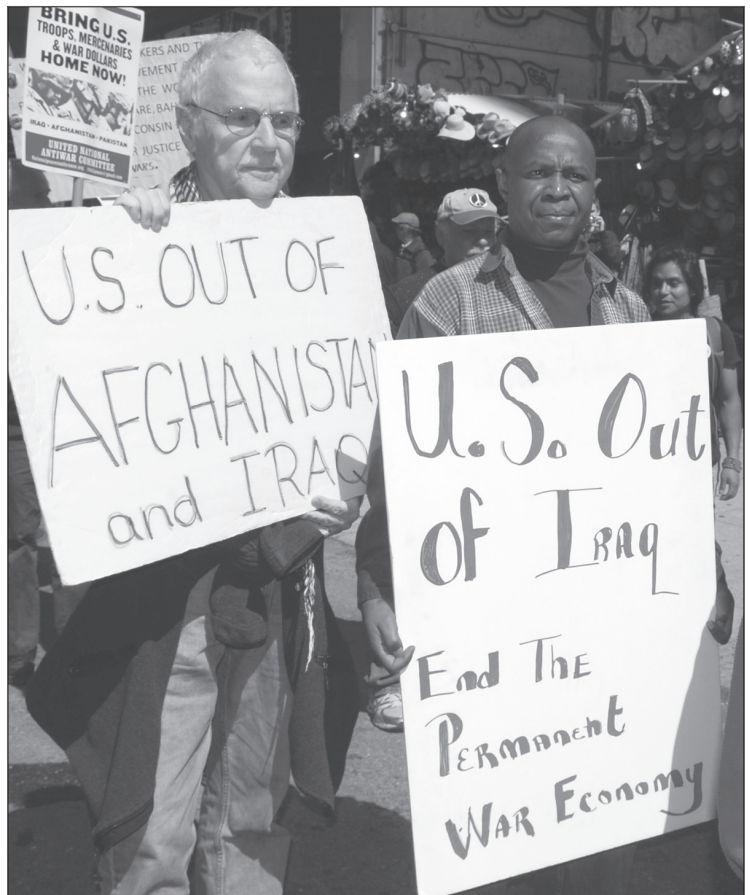
## **MSF's initial statement**

At 2:10 AM local time on Saturday October 3, Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières' (MSF) Trauma center in Kunduz was hit several times during sustained bombing and was very badly damaged.

Three MSF staff are confirmed dead and more than 30 are unaccounted for. The medical team is working around the clock to do everything possible for the safety of patients and hospital staff.

"We are deeply shocked by the attack, the killing of our staff and patients and the heavy toll it has inflicted on healthcare in Kunduz," says Bart Janssens, MSF Director of Operations. "We do not yet have the final casualty figures, but our medical teams are providing first aid and treating the injured patients and MSF personnel and accounting for the deceased. We urge all parties to respect the safety of health facilities and staff."

Since fighting broke out on Monday, MSF has treated 394



wounded. When the aerial attack occurred this morning we had 105 patients and their caretakers in the hospital and over 80 MSF international and national staff present.

## **"Our Hospital Was The Frontline"**

MSF's hospital is the only facility of its kind in the whole northeastern region of Afghanistan, providing free life-and limb-saving trauma care. MSF doctors treat all people according to their medical needs and do not make distinctions based on a patient's ethnicity, religious beliefs or political affiliation.

MSF started working in Afghanistan in 1980. In Kunduz, just like in the rest of Afghanistan, both national and international staff work together to ensure the best quality of treatment. MSF supports the Ministry of Public Health in Ahmad Shah Baba hospital in eastern Kabul, Dasht-e-Barchi maternity in western Kabul and Boost hospital in Lashkar Gah, Helmand province. In Khost, in the east of the country, MSF operates a maternity hospital. MSF relies only on private funding for its work in Afghanistan and does not accept money from any government.

# American Violence: Umpqua, Oregon is “Routine”?

*Jose Martinez*

After Umpqua, Obama decried the routine of mass killings. They will continue, nonetheless. His cries for a tweaking of gun control will not stop the killings, nor will the provision of more mental health services to crazies, nor more school/university security, etc. Elementary school children and church worshippers are slaughtered, as well as college students and others, yet these are not weird occurrences. They are the consequential outcome of what our society, or more correctly the 1 percent, does to us.

Thus what Obama did not and could not say is that the daily bloodshed in his drone mass killings, and his and other presidents’ and societal leaders’ historical mass killings of Iraqis, Yemenis, Afghans, Libyans, Syrians, Vietnamese, Central Americans, etc., sets the frame of mind for violence at home... The U.S. was founded upon violence and is drenched in blood whether in regard to Native Americans, Blacks, Hispanics, poor whites and/or slaughtering other countries.

We have the highest level of inequality among industrialized nations and less income mobility than European and other countries, which directly leads to conflict in our society. European countries altogether have more population than we do and much

less killings (so far, though austerity measures which they are copying from us may change that), or alternatively per capita also have less killings than we do, with apples to apples comparisons of the crime rate per 100,000 population...

Thus unless we change our level of inequality, which will not occur in one day, nothing will change, mark my word. Other “solutions” to violence will not work, from the nonsensical counseling types (which O.J. Simpson was attending) to body cameras on police. In fact the only thing that cell phone camera technology did is make us aware, for example, of the extensive violence on Blacks and the poor in society, which said victims had always known for centuries. Rinky-dink band-aid approaches will not reduce the killings.

The push, front and center and now, needs to be for equality, while the 1 percent will undoubtedly push back on that. The latter will not give up what they have been getting illegally, unethically, by chance or by inheritance and marriage. The picture will likely get uglier before it gets prettier, but it needs to happen the sooner the better on the road to equality, or we of the 99 percent will continue to live with more bloodshed, violence and injustice.

## COMMENTARY

# School Shootings Mystery? Connect the Dots

*Tina Olson, Citizens Commission on Human Rights, New Mexico*

According to news sources, since the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut, there have been [more than 70] additional school shootings. The numerous theories attempting to explain these can leave the average person shaking his head in despair and confusion.

From research done by my organization, let me dispel the mystery as to why these mass shootings continue in a seemingly epidemic proportion. It is time to connect the dots between psychiatric drugs and violence and suicide.

Harvard University’s Dr. Joseph Glenmullen warned that antidepressants could [contribute to explaining] the rash of school shootings and mass suicides over the last decade. People taking them feel like jumping out of their skin. They cause irritability and impulsivity that can make people suicidal and homicidal.

Between 2004 and 2012, there have been 14,656 reports to the Food and Drug Administration’s Med Watch system that psychiatric drugs caused violent side effects. More than 1,400 of these report that psychiatric drugs caused homicidal ideation/homicide. Nearly 3,300 reported mania and 8,200 reported aggression.

Nine out of 10 children who are seen by a psychiatrist are prescribed dangerous mind-altering drugs for attention deficit disorder, depression, anxiety, etc. Yet there are 286 drug regulatory warnings citing the dangerous and life-threatening side effects of these

psychiatric drugs to children.

At least 31 school shootings and/or school-related acts of violence have been committed by those taking or withdrawing from psychiatric drugs, resulting in 162 wounded and 72 killed.

I have been surveying parents here in New Mexico and found there is tremendous societal pressure to put their children on psychiatric drugs. Not a single one of the parents I surveyed was aware of the horrific side effects. I also found that parents are not told by the psychiatrist that there are non-drug alternatives to handle problems. Now we have nearly 20 million children on these clearly dangerous drugs... Alternatives are rarely suggested to these parents.

Children diagnosed with a mental disorder may be experiencing malnutrition, head injuries, early onset diabetes, heart disease, worms, viral or bacterial infections, allergies, mercury or manganese exposure, and hundreds of other possible minor, major or even life-threatening medical problems.

They also may simply need more physical and creative activities or additional help and attention that one cannot get by taking a dangerous, mind-altering drug that only masks the child’s real problems.

Let’s think outside of the box. Do not accept a non-verifiable psychiatric diagnosis that your child is mentally ill. Let’s work to prevent future deaths of our children.

Commissioner of Education and local appointed receivers, with neither accountable to the public. Similarly in Newark, New Jersey, power is concentrated in the hands of an appointed state Superintendent. In Chicago, there is mayoral control, with the mayor given great powers over public schools.

Consistent with this, former New York Commissioner of Education John King is now to be appointed U.S. Secretary of Education. King, faced with broad resistance to the Common Core and many parents refusing the state tests, was notorious for openly attacking the public. This included efforts to humiliate parents, not holding public meetings and having meetings by invitation only — but where the public could not speak. His background is not in public education but rather in the private charter schools that use public funds but eliminate public authority over the schools.

An important feature of the attack on democracy is this elimination of the role of the public in any decision making or even having a say. Participating in deciding, including working out what is needed to raise the quality of education, requires thinking. It requires discussion and debate and thoughtful judgment. To succeed in its attacks on democracy and education, the government, at all levels, must eliminate thinking.

The public, to play its role, must instead demand its right to decide and organize as a collective force for this right. Refusing federal dictate, refusing state takeovers and refusing the Common Core testing is integral to refusing to be, or allow students to become, non-thinking drones. We are not drones to be produced by and for the rich. We are human beings with rights and with the role to advance the quality of education and the decision making and thinking necessary for it.

### PREPARATION FOR LIVING WITHOUT THINKING

## The Behaviorist Origin of Close Reading

*Dr. Mark Garrison, [markgarrison.net](http://markgarrison.net)*

I believe behaviorism plays an important role in the current attack on public education and democratic living more generally. In particular, I contend, behaviorism is implicated in an ever increasing drug-like fixation on qualification, a mechanistic and reductionist mentality that deform understandings of skill, thinking, teaching and learning. One such distortion is “close reading.”

*“Close reading’s most enduring techniques and assumptions have their origins in psychological behaviorism, the deterministic doctrine made famous by John Watson and B. F. Skinner.”*  
— Joshua Gang

With the exception of a few, the connection between behaviorism, close reading, and the Common Core remains hidden. While those celebrating the obvious goodness of the Core standards sometimes mention close reading’s official founder I. A. Richards, nowhere is it discussed that close reading (or what Richards called *practical criticism*) emerged out of the behaviorism of John B. Watson.

This absence is significant. Why?

This realization is significant because it offers further evidence that the Core regime consists of repackaging the worst ideas of the past two centuries, and therefore is about as far away from innovation as is its partner in crime, high-stakes testing. The ideas guiding the Core are simply not new; they are old and discredited.

Behaviorism in particular has long been discredited, which is why it is rarely mentioned by name in public discussions about education; instead, we are presented with “personalized learning” and “educational games” that are nonetheless behaviorist in nature (McRae, 2013; Skinner, 1958, 1968). That behaviorism is

now being revived is significant because it and its offspring, close reading, reflect a dead vision for society. The Core’s rendering of close reading is one means to socialize the young to accept that vision. So, it needs to be exposed and interrogated.

### **Experience with the Common Core’s Close Reading**

Educators and parents alike have been struck by the very odd teaching practices demanded by the Common Core ELA standards (Core’s close reading is also to be a basis for teaching history). These apparent anomalies include:

- an insistence that students not know the context of a text;
- an insistence that students not read texts in their entirety, or only read short “hard” texts;
- an insistence that students focus only on the text itself;
- only questions about the text itself can be entertained.

Importantly, these principles dictate that one is not permitted to consider author intent, a corollary to the demand that texts be studied without concern for their social and historical context. Also included is the imposition of an emphasis on a particular form of annotating texts (Frey and Fisher, 2013). That one might read to learn something about the world is minimized while the emphasis on the mechanics of reading dominates. I cannot escape the feeling that the word *close* is best replaced with the word *machine*. While the most obnoxious of these mandates is related to denying the importance of a reading’s context for “deep learning,” the “rationality” of each of these tenets becomes clear when we place them in *their* behaviorist context.

### **Behaviorism: Yearning for Skill Without Consciousness**

While many social factors contributed to rise of various

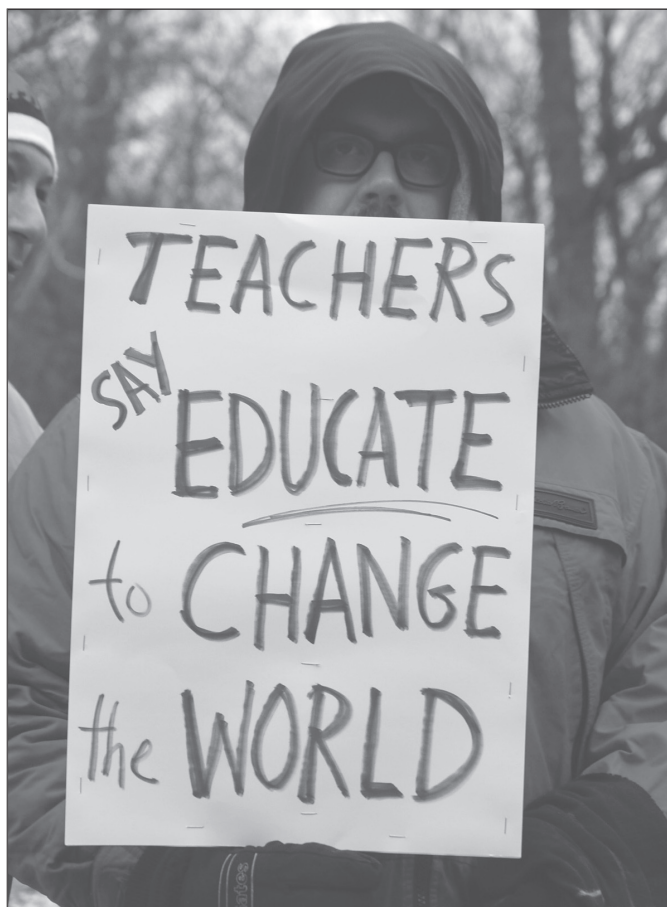
“behaviorisms”, common themes do exist (Mills, 1998, intro.). A key tenet is this: Behaviorists have in common disregard for or denial of human consciousness. Because consciousness is not something one “does,” it is not “observable;” its existence or importance is denied in favor of fixing attention on behavior itself.

E. L. Thorndike, an early behaviorist and leading developer of standardized testing techniques, argued that both animal and human capacities could, “be explained without making recourse to unobservable phenomena (like consciousness) or other ‘magical agencies’ ” (Gang, 2011, p. 2). By removing consciousness, the question of purpose is removed from the study of human ability. While radical behaviorists such as B. F. Skinner scoffed when words suggesting consciousness or understanding were used, thinking for them is a mere behavior no different in principal than voluntary arm movements.

As such, *understanding*, *awareness* and even *intention* are banished. In banishing consciousness proper, behaviorists exclude the social and historical aspects of human existence, denying the centrality of purposeful action for human beings. In denying human agency, behaviorists struggled to explain social change. Thus, a technological determinism ensues, where somehow behaviorism is able to separate the origins of techniques from the society in which they were created, re-envisioning human beings as biological machines.

This vision in turn is reflected in the behaviorist conception of *skill* as the ability to perform a task to a *pre-defined standard of competence*, a definition common to almost all discourse regarding so-called 21st century skills as decontextualized and thus transferable. If it can’t be “measured” it does not exist; skills are solely defined by how they are tested. Testing fixation is a necessary outcome of the behaviorist program (Hinchliffe, 2002).

Behaviorists were also insistent that they could turn individual human beings into whatever they wanted, if given the chance. “Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in,” Watson bragged, “and I’ll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any specialist I might select — doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief, and yes, even beggarman and thief, regardless of his talents,



tendencies, abilities, vocations and race of his ancestor” (as cited in Birnbaum, 1955, p. 17). This determinism is thus another important feature of behaviorism.

It is important, however, to distinguish it from the notion that social class relations structure the educational experiences of youth. The only way in which behaviorism acknowledges the social is in the individual’s interaction with his or her environment, which structures individual human behavior through what is known as *operant conditioning*. This model postulates that individuals *only as individuals* interact with their environment to maximize rewards; there is no common good or shared experience, etc., since these are forms of consciousness. In this model, individuals have no agency; they only have successful or unsuccessful responses to stimuli, that is, either the desired behavior is reinforced or

it is not reinforced. For behaviorists, what behavior is “desired” is self-evident and success is defined in especially conformist, narrowly quantitative terms (e.g., test scores).

### Watson and the Birth of Close Reading

So, how does an outlook that denies the social essence of human existence inform a technique for reading instruction in schools?

I. A. Richards is regarded as the founder of close reading. Richards was both a contemporary and follower of Watson, publishing reviews of Watson’s work in leading literary journals. While critical of some aspects of Watson’s work, it is clear from Richards’ own writings that his theory of *practical criticism* is derived from and consistent with behaviorist principles (Gang, 2011).

Following Watson, Richards and his followers took the following approach. First, they treated literary texts as *behaviors*, defined as “external phenomena without reference to internal mental states.” Second, they would record how the stimuli of poems affected readers physiologically and use these results to ground analyses of meaning and form. “When we defer to the authority of the text,” Gang argues, “or insist on the irrelevance of authorial intent, these actions can be traced back to Brooks, Wimsatt, and Richards.” Any attempt “to ascertain the mind of the author would compromise the critic’s objectivity,” according to Richards (p. 1, 5).

Richard’s *Practical Criticism* (1929), for example, “tries to

develop a type of literary criticism based on this model: the imagined listener who gleans meaning from overt language use rather than covert (and imagined) mental states.”

“Richards transformed his classroom at Cambridge into an ersatz laboratory; in the spring of 1926, just when his review of Watson was published in the *New Criterion*, Richards led a seminar at Cambridge called “Practical Criticism.” In this seminar, he provided his students with radically decontextualized poems — poems with no titles, identifying marks, or clues about origin. Such decontextualization, Richards hoped, would force his students to restrict their analyses to the poetic text exclusively — and to make psychological speculation impossible. Students provided Richards with written responses to each poem which then became the central evidence cited in the monograph *Practical Criticism*.... Richards forced his students to analyze the poems as “behaviors” — as overt phenomena to be considered independently of the poet’s consciousness.” (p. 7)

For Richards, “all mental events — including literature — occur in the course of processes of adaptation somewhere between stimulus and response” (p. 8). Thus we have the basis for a method that renders the skill of reading necessarily devoid of consciousness.

### Close Reading is Preparation for Living without Thinking

In 1922 in an essay entitled “Living without Thinking,” George Santayana reviewed John B. Watson’s *Psychology from the Standpoint of a Behaviorist*, and penned an apt description of the behaviorist vision. “I foresee,” he wrote based on his read of Watson’s book, “a behaviorist millennium; countless millions of walking automatons, each armed with his radio ... all jabbering as they have been trained to jabber, never interfering with one another, always smiling, with their glands all functioning perfectly” (Santayana, 1922, p. 735).

*“I foresee a behaviorist millennium; countless millions of walking automatons, each armed with his radio ... all jabbering as they have been trained to jabber, never interfering with one another, always smiling, with their glands all functioning perfectly.”*  
— George Santayana

Replace radio with smart phone, educational technology for “personalized learning,” and consider the health and insurance industries desires to “nudge” everyone into “functioning glands” and you have an apt description of the neoliberal ethic of individual responsibility developed by way of behaviorist technique.

(For references and notes and additional materials, see [markgarrison.net](http://markgarrison.net))

# Black Parents Should Opt Their Children Out of High Stakes Testing

*Glen Ford, Black Agenda Report*

This is a battle for democracy in public education.

The movement by parents to opt their children out of high stakes testing is growing by leaps and bounds, but remains largely white and suburban, despite the fact that Black folks are the primary targets of the destructive testing regime. Almost two decades ago, the corporate world began pouring millions of dollars into a massive campaign to split the two pillars of the Democratic Party: teachers unions and Black voters. It began as a mainly Republican strategy to divert public funding to private school vouchers — an idea that was never very popular among Black parents. But, corporate Democrats discovered that public education could be privatized even more effectively — and much more profitably — through chartering the schools. Charter schools are a capitalist’s dream, in which the public provides all the money, private companies get rich contracting services, teachers are deprofessionalized and deunionized, and Black parents lose all democratic rights concerning their children’s education.

In one of the great ironies of recent U.S. history, the Democratic Party took the lead in what had begun as a Republican project to vilify teachers and privatize schools in Black neighborhoods. High stakes testing became a weapon guaranteed to fail the students, fail the teachers, fail the neighborhood schools, and fail entire school districts in largely Black cities. Everybody loses except the hedge funds and other billionaire investors in the charter school marketplace. These are the people whose interests

President Obama has served for the past six and a half years. Obama became the biggest public school privatizer of all time, wielding executive power to force the states to establish more charter schools or lose federal education funds.

### A Scam to Destroy any sSmblance of Democracy in Inner City Schools

Studies show that charter schools are not better than public schools, but they are great sources of wealth for big investors, while the public — mostly, the Black inner city public — takes all the risk. But, because Obama is Black, and Democrats are the party pushing hardest for charters, the established civil rights organizations are urging Black people to opt in to the high stakes testing madness. Twelve of these misleadership groups signed a letter in support of high stakes testing, including the national offices of the NAACP and the Urban League.

At root, this is a battle for democracy in public education...The whole charter school scam is based on destroying any semblance of democracy in inner city schools, many of which are already under the control of the states or strong-mayoral forms of governance. The testing regime is crafted to make local control of schools an impossibility — forever — and to reduce the teaching staffs of inner city schools to temporary drones, not educators.

Black people desperately need to opt-out of this nightmare.

FIGHT IN CHICAGO

# The All-Too Familiar Story of School Closures in U.S. Cities

*Carol Burris, Network for Public Education Fund*

Twelve community activists on the south side of Chicago are capturing national attention by putting their health on the line to save their school. It is their third week of a hunger strike designed to force Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel to keep Dyett High School open with a program approved by the community. [The twelve ended their hunger strike after 35 days, having succeeded in taking opposition to privatization and elimination of the public in governance to a national level, gaining support for resistance and keeping Dyett a public school — VOR Ed Note]

Dyett serves the community of Bronzeville on Chicago's South Side. Bronzeville was the cultural hub for African Americans who fled the south during the Great Migration. The school's significance in the community runs deep.

The struggle to save the school is part of the growing push-back against neighborhood school closures both within and beyond Chicago — closures that slam poor communities who find beloved institutions shuttered and yanked away. In just one evening, in May of 2014, the Chicago School Board voted to close 50 public schools. A 2014 report by *Journey for Justice*, entitled "Death by a Thousand Cuts," describes the devastating effects of school closings and maps the march of school privatization in communities of color across the United States.

Poor test scores and low graduation rates are the excuse for closures, but the reasons for academic failure that lie beyond the schoolhouse are never addressed. Jitu Brown, a Dyett hunger striker and board member of the nonprofit advocacy group called Network for Public Education (NPE), summed up the frustration when he said, "We're tired of our children and our communities being demonized and being blamed for being under-served."

## **The Schools that are Closed**

The story of Dyett is a familiar story in under-served urban communities across the United States. As far back as 2011, closures in New York City were criticized for their disparate impact on schools that served the largest numbers of disadvantaged students and were located in communities that needed the stability of a school the most.

A 2011 report by the New York City Independent Budget Office (IBO) recognized that the demographics of the 14 schools slated for closure served a disproportionate number of homeless students, black students, special education students, low income students, and students who were over-age for their grade. Ironically, one third of the schools on the list had replaced another school that had been closed before it — repeating a cycle of disruption for neighborhood kids. In a 2013 report, the same patterns emerged — schools on the chopping block served a

more disadvantaged student population, and students entering the school had lower scores.

Even as the identified schools were set up for failure, the schools that often replaced them were set up for success. When the schools were reconstituted as smaller schools, they generally served populations of students with less need and higher, entering test scores. One report issued by New York City Communities for Change referred to the shutting and opening of schools as nothing more than "a shell game."

In a beautiful tribute to the once great Jamaica High School, alumni Jelani Cobb, tells the history of the school and how its final demise was brought on by the policies of the administration of former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg. In the end, school choice, which dramatically disrupted the demographics of the school body, pushed the school over the test score brink, thus leading to the closing of the school. Cobb writes:

"In the battle over the school's future, many came to see those changing demographics not as happenstance but as a purposeful way of insuring that the creation of small schools in the building would be a fait accompli."

Although Bloomberg is gone, not much has changed. NPE board member, Leonie Haimson, has been fighting New York City closures since 2011. She was hopeful that school closures would stop when Bloomberg exited, yet now these same schools are being threatened by takeover from the state. She said: "Every neighborhood school that is closed is a tragedy for that community. All efforts should be taken to preserve and strengthen them rather than close them down." [...]

## **The Human Impact of School Closures**

Cobb begins his story of Jamaica High with the commencement ceremony of its last graduating class, the Class of 2014. Twenty-four graduates were pushed out of their school auditorium for that ceremony, as what remained of Jamaica High School competed for space with the new, co-located school.

Such events are not unique. The *New York Times* featured photographs from a Philadelphia art show that captured the raw emotions felt by community, students and staff in one of the 31 city schools that were shut down. School "closings by the numbers" exact a human toll when students and teachers lose their place. Some scramble to find spots in other schools once the decision to phase out the school is made. Many students become "over the counter" enrollees in schools where there is space, which is often another school that is spiraling down. The school slated to be closed withers away until only a few dozen students remain. It begs the question: Are school closings worth the price?

### Do School Takeovers Work?

Reformers will tell you that school takeovers work miracles, and they will point to New Orleans as their existence proof. While it is true that New Orleans' state test scores are higher, the complexity of what occurred in that city (including the mass migration out after Katrina) has added variables that are unique and impact results. Doug Harris, the Director of the Research Alliance for New Orleans, speaks not only of the complexity of measuring achievement, but also of the unevenness of improvement. He makes it clear that New Orleans' lessons "can not be summed up in a headline." [As one example, New Orleans have one of the highest suspension rates for students in the country; 92 percent of students are in private charter schools, which are not required to take students with Special Needs, English Language Learners, etc; parents have to apply to each school separately and do not know if their child will be accepted; etc. — *VOR* Ed. Note]

Takeovers in 2012 in Indiana have resulted in little improvement in achievement and steep drops in enrollment in takeover schools. Of the schools taken over that year, only one had its grade improve from an F. Meanwhile, Tindley Schools, a charter school organization that managed one of the schools, pulled out. They wanted more money to continue.

In 2012, six schools joined the Tennessee Achievement School District, headed by reformer, Chris Barbic, who was charged with turning them around. Three were run by the district; three were privately run by charter operators, using public funds. For two years scores were stagnant. In the third year, math scores in the district-run schools improved, but in the charter-run schools scores declined. Mr. Barbic announced his resignation as of December of this year.

None of this should come as a surprise. In 2002, the state of Pennsylvania began what was called "the nation's largest experiment in the private management of public schools" in Philadelphia. A 2007 study by the independent, non-profit research organization, the Rand Corporation, found no increases in achievement from the private management of Philadelphia schools, but small gains in restructured schools controlled by the district. Those district-controlled schools that improved were given extra resources and intensive staff support.

### The Same Failed Strategies Replayed

And yet, despite the dismal results of private control of public schools in the state's largest city, the same bad playbook was



used in Pennsylvania's York City School District in 2014. Diane Ravitch, education historian and president of the Network for Public Education, lamented the loss of citizen voice in the community:

"There will be no 'choice' for the families of York City. Their children will have to attend a charter school whose headquarters are in Florida. Yes, it is the death of local control and democracy in York City."

Since Republican Governor Tom Corbett's defeat, the York City model has softened. David Meckley, whose plan was to turn the district over to charter schools, resigned citing the new Democratic governor's hostility to his charter takeover plan. The new chief, Carol Saylor, is a veteran educator who is taking a public-school friendly approach. But without adequate resources, improvement will be tough.

NPE board member, Mark Miller, is the vice president of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association. He sums up the problem faced by Saylor and her counterpart in Chester Upland, where employees are working without pay, this way:

"York City and Chester Upland receivers, Carol Saylor and Francis Barnes, are trying to bring about positive change. Unfortunately, nothing can change without more money or fewer unfunded mandates. The unjust enrichment of charter/cyber charter operators is at the crux of the problem."

For Chicago's Dyett and so many schools who are blamed for conditions out of their control, the strong spirit of the strikers and their hunger for justice will continue until the cycle of shame, shutter and student displacement and neglect finally ends.

LOS ANGELES

# Disrupted Democracy and Dismantling the Public School System

*Cynthia Liu, The Progressive, October 1, 2015*

On Sunday, September 20, 2015, the new Eli Broad museum opened in Los Angeles - and nearly a thousand parents, students, and teachers seized the occasion to march against the “philanthrocapitalist’s” plan to groom 130,000 public school students in Los Angeles Unified to attend unregulated new charter schools in the district.

Philanthrocapitalism describes a certain kind of “weaponized generosity” where donors offer their self-interested charitable giving to remedy the very lack they create elsewhere. The cultural critic Slavoj Žižek has called this the “chocolate laxative” — the sweet treat that constipates is also the flavor of the cure.

Eli Broad is the city’s chief benefactor for numerous charities; his wealth comes from decades of real estate developments in the Midwest, Southern California, and from the insurance industry. He has particular interests in expanding charter schools in Los Angeles and nationwide. He appears to invest a lot in the city of Los Angeles but when you look more closely, his giving defunds the public sector and Broad ends up with the better part of the deal.

For example: originally, Broad wanted to lease the expensive downtown Los Angeles parcel the Museum sits on for \$1 a year over 99 years. Said one county supervisor, “Instead of a project that generates sales and property taxes, we’ll now have an art museum that generates no property or sales taxes and Mr. Broad will get the land for free.” It is now leased for \$7.7 million a year for 99 years, and the 501c3 Broad Foundation housed inside the museum still doesn’t put much by way of revenue back into the city.

A coalition of groups such as United Teachers of LA (UTLA), Vet the Supe, and students and parents spoke to local press about their concerns in a small public park adjoining the new downtown Los Angeles museum.

Alex Caputo-Pearl, head of UTLA, challenged Eli Broad’s largesse by pointing out how the wealthy Angeleno publicly backed Proposition 30, a ballot initiative that restored funding to California’s schools, but in private donated money to defeat Prop 30 and impose a separate ballot initiative targeting the state’s unions. Broad funded out-of-state groups that then funneled the money to anti-tax and anti-union groups in violation of the state’s campaign financing disclosure laws.

The *San Diego Reader* reported: “After the election was over, the [state] Fair Political Practices Commission went after the group and its allies for breaking campaign disclosure laws. A \$1 million settlement was made public, coupled with an \$11 million demanded “disgorgement” of the stealthy campaign cash to the state. The really big donors to Americans for Job Security came from Los Angeles and San Francisco... LA developer Eli Broad, no stranger to San Diego big-money politics, was down for \$500,000.”

Parent and New Orleans public education advocate Karran Harper Royal testified how New Orleans’ all-charter Recovery District has removed “choice” from parents. She pointed out how charter lottery systems mean “charter schools now choose families. They cast out the ones with expensive to educate disabilities or who test poorly.” Those families without transportation or other means to travel to another neighborhood fall back on the school that is closest. Chances are it is a low-performing public or charter school. “What kind of choice is that?” asked Royal. “I’m here to tell you the New Orleans model is a terrible model to follow. But that’s what Eli Broad is trying to build — an all-charter district like New Orleans. And you should fight that.”

Student leader Cecilia Jimenez from Dorsey High School and art teacher Jay Davis at Hawkins High School pointed at the self-serving hypocrisy of a donation of private art to a public museum by Broad when defeating Prop 30 would have meant no funding for arts instruction in any California public schools. Luckily Prop 30 passed despite Broad’s covert attempts to quash it.

## When “Generosity” Means Top-Down Control

Also at the rally, Roberta Eidman, founder of Vet the Supe, said she was extremely disturbed at the lack of transparency in Broad’s plan for the public school district. “It gets more and more disturbing as news of The Plan trickles out. We only learned about it because somewhere along the line, someone leaked it to media. As a resident of Los Angeles, I have to wonder: how much has been going on that has not been leaked?” She and other bloggers at K-12 News Network have pointed out how Broad practically installed John Deasy as past Superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD).

Deasy is now being investigated by the FBI and the SEC for the appearance of bid-rigging his much-touted — and failed — \$1 billion iPad deal. “Broad reportedly paid for ex-Supe John Deasy’s staff and living expenses. Try telling me that Deasy wasn’t really a Broad employee all along,” Eidman said. [...]

In a highly unusual maneuver at the tail end of the Great Recession, Eli Broad’s foundation paid for the salaries of nine supposedly public school officials (who should have been public sector employees paid through taxpayer funds):

“Less than two weeks after taking the helm of Los Angeles Unified, Superintendent John Deasy is adding six-figure positions to his reorganized management team — a move he says will help the district meet his ambitious performance goals.

“The nine administrative jobs are being added even as the district faces a \$408 million budget deficit and 5,000 teacher layoffs.” [...]

Deasy still works at his patron’s Broad Center as “superintendent-

in-residence,” presumably training new business-minded school district leaders in the same techniques that landed Deasy in hot water with federal investigators.

More chocolate laxative: Broad-backed mismanagement of LAUSD, which included increased de-funding of public schools which weakens them, makes schools less able to offer music, art, science, afterschool, or reasonable class sizes, which in turn makes Broad’s charter school solution seem almost tasty. Is this not reminiscent of the 2015 downtown Los Angeles revitalization project, envisioned as early as the 2000s, from the same man who created the Los Angeles exurbs and profited from suburban sprawl in the late 1960s, which depopulated downtown?

Eidman joined union head Caputo-Pearl in calling for open dialogue between school board members and school communities about the criteria for the next Superintendent hire. “Grasstops” organizations like the United Way of Los Angeles and others that comprise the Civic Alliance have already met with school board members, but the voices of actual parents and students and teachers have not had a similar reception.

The *LA Times* reported that members of the Civic Alliance consisted of “Antonia Hernandez, head of the nonprofit California Community Foundation; Ed Avila, a former city official and leader of the downtown revitalization group Project Restore; Monica Lozano, a University of California regent and publisher of the Spanish-language newspaper *La Opinión*; Nolan V. Rollins, leader of the Los Angeles Urban League; Gary L. Toebben, president of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce; and George Kieffer, a partner in the law firm Manatt, Phelps & Phillips and also a UC regent.” Not surprisingly, many of those “grasstops” non-profit groups are funded by Broad’s philanthropy and the rest are businesspeople with no background in education. And these are the same local leaders who, in the *LA Times* story just quoted, “pressured the board to choose Deasy without a search.”

### A Declaration of War on Public Schools

Eli Broad plans to spend \$490 million to fund charter school expansion in Los Angeles Unified. He intends to fund three main areas: paying for staff for charter schools, helping charters score space from existing schools in co-locations or other buildings, and marketing this mass privately-managed constellation of schools funded with public money but with no public accountability to



families. He intends to do this — like Deasy’s failed and possibly criminal tenure, or intervening in staffing public officials with eyebrow-raising private funds — without any accountability to the public. [...]

UTLA’s Caputo-Pearl has issued a challenge to debate Broad on his charter school expansion plans. Where is the evidence that charter schools outperform public schools? To date no reputable study (i.e., one not funded by a charter lobby group) substantiates that claim. In fact, public schools mostly outperform private and charter schools, especially in math achievement. So far Broad has not responded.

Caputo-Pearl also says UTLA would enthusiastically support a listening tour by the LAUSD School Board, so publicly-elected members could hear what parents, students, and educators in the communities have to say about possible candidates and criteria for superintendent selection.

Broad has made his intentions clear. But as with mayors in cities that were key bastions of school privatization, under Bloomberg in NYC (now replaced by the election of DeBlasio), Booker in Newark, New Jersey (now replaced by the election of Baraka), and Villaraigosa in LA (now replaced by the election of Garcetti), voters have spoken and thrown out city leaders who meddled in public school administration.

City residents across America understand what is at stake when private operators take over the commons. Now it is up to Angelenos to marshal authentic grassroots forces to defy the wishes of one very powerful and extremely wealthy man — the same one who backed a corrupt superintendent and has thus far bent the grasstops groups reliant on his donations to his will.

# Who is in Charge of America's Schools?

*Interview with Dale Russakoff, by Terry Gross*

In 2010, Cory Booker, who was then mayor of Newark and is now a U.S. senator, wanted to create a series of reforms in the Newark schools that could serve as a model for other cities. He enlisted the support of New Jersey Governor Chris Christie and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg. Zuckerberg donated \$100 million with the



understanding it would be matched by another \$100 million from other sources. Dale Russakoff chronicles this experiment in school reform. She was a reporter for *The Washington Post* for 28 years, covering politics, education and social policy. Dale Russakoff, can you give us a sense of where you think the Newark story fits into the larger story about the education reform efforts in America?

**Dale Russakoff:** Yes. I think this is one city where the ideas of the education reform movement were tried all in one place. Cory Booker, the mayor of Newark, had the idea that just to bring these ideas to one city and use the extraordinary powers of a governor who controlled that school district and the money from Mark Zuckerberg of a hundred million dollars to try, as he said, what was working in the school reform movement. So in that view, it was dramatically expanding charter schools, getting rid of teachers whose evaluations found them to be “weak,” judging other teachers by their test scores and rewarding them and streamlining the management of the school district so that it ran more like a business.

**Gross:** So right from the start, there is a problem. Booker and Zuckerberg announce this gift of a hundred million dollars to reform the Newark schools. They announce it on “Oprah.” So parents and teachers learn about this big reform movement that is about to hit them from Oprah’s show. How did that play in the community?

**Russakoff:** Well, it played disastrously in the community because, immediately, nobody understood why do we have to turn on “Oprah” at 4 o’clock to find out what is going on in our

own city? And if you want to save the schools for the benefit of our children, why were we not told? And, by the way, there is a very large consensus on the ground in Newark at this time that the schools really need change, that the schools are failing in unacceptable ways. And so there were a lot of people, including some

very skilled, experienced teachers, who deeply understood the needs of the children in Newark who would have been eager to be part of that conversation. And not only were they insulted that they were left out, there was an agenda that was crafted that did not have the benefit of their important insights into what was needed in Newark.

**Gross:** So Cory Booker takes the Zuckerberg money and creates a local foundation to handle the Zuckerberg gift and the matching donations. It is called Foundation for Newark’s Future. The seats on this foundation went only to donors who gave \$10 million or more. That was later reduced to \$5 million or more, which meant that virtually no one from Newark could afford to serve on this foundation that was trying to change the Newark schools. How did that play in the community?

**Russakoff:** Well, that was again totally alienating of the community because there were a number of local foundations in Newark that had been involved for years in education and \$5 million was not in their budget. And so they were excluded from having any say. But more importantly, there was no way for the parents, the teachers, the principals, the community leaders — really smart, committed people who had been in the fray for years in the lives of children in education — to be part of this. So basically, the board decided to spend the money the way the wealthy donors wanted it spent. And the priorities were not about getting money to the classroom or to the children. The priorities were to have to this kind of business model, top-down reform.

**Gross:** One of the criticisms of how the money was handled was that \$20 million went to consultants, and a lot of the

consultants were paid, like, a thousand dollars a day. And you compare that to what teachers make in a year, and that what was their response to that?

**Russakoff:** Well, that was another case of this enormous gap between the people who have come to “save” the Newark children and the people who actually cared for and taught the Newark children. And it became a huge flashpoint because Mark Zuckerberg had indicated that he wanted to give teachers enormous bonuses if they were the top teachers in the district. And that was not possible because the district just did not have the money to pay those bonuses beyond the time that they would have the Zuckerberg money. So there were some merit bonuses put into the contract, but they were relatively small.

The new contract that came out of this reform effort also required teachers in quite a few schools to work longer hours, longer years and to work some weekends for a pretty small stipend that was added to their annual pay. It was \$3,000, which they calculated came to about \$10 an hour. And they felt they had been conscripted into working these extra hours and extra days while the people who were in the district scripting these plans as consultants were getting a thousand dollars a day.

**Gross:** So let’s talk about what the plan actually was for reform, called One Newark.

**Russakoff:** Cami Anderson, the appointed superintendent, saw this plan as a way to expand charter schools and stabilize the school district at the same time. This is one of the great challenges of urban districts where charter schools are expanding rapidly. When children leave the school district and go to charters, the [public] money goes with them, and the school district ends up under tremendous stress. The other huge thing that she did in this was that she created something called universal enrollment.

Newark had been a city where kids walked to school. There were many small neighborhood schools, and there was no bus system that took kids to school, except in the case of kids with special needs who had to go to special schools. But the average child in Newark just walked to a neighborhood school.

From One Newark onward, which started in the fall of 2013, no family automatically was sending a child to a neighborhood school. They had to go online and pick one of 60-something schools in the city — some charter, some district — and then an algorithm would sort whether they got into that school. At the same time, she was closing, consolidating and rearranging the district schools to make way for the charter school growth and to basically downsize the district, which already had lost a lot of kids to charter schools. It turned into a massive upheaval in the way school was experienced by children and families in Newark. [...]

**Gross:** Mark Zuckerberg was hoping to use his hundred million dollars to, in part, negotiate different contracts with teachers to have more “flexibility” in who got hired and who got fired and who got placed in what school. And then he found out something he did not know initially, which was that seniority was controlled by New Jersey law.

**Russakoff:** Yes, half his money, he said, he wanted to go to reforming teachers’ contracts to create this new “flexibility.”

[...]

**Gross:** So how far did the Newark model get in terms of shutting down schools, consolidating schools, starting new charter schools?

**Russakoff:** Well, I think that the most visible thing they did was that they doubled the number of children going to [private] charter schools in Newark in just a short period of time. Twenty percent of kids were in charters at the time this effort started, and within a year or two, 40 percent of children will be in charters. The charter schools are not part of the school district. They are independent. [...]

**Gross:** There is a whole new network of funders, foundations, philanthropic groups and education consultants who are leaders of one part of the education reform movement. You actually use the word education industrial complex to describe some of them.

**Russakoff:** The education industry is over \$600 billion a year in terms of the amount of money that is spent by all the school districts in the country on private contracts and consultants and textbooks and testing. What I have found interesting about the [corporate] education reform movement is that it has its own education industrial complex. When somebody who is very friendly to the reform movement becomes a leader of a school district or when a governor, like Governor Christie, who is friendly to the reform movement, is running school districts in the state of New Jersey, all of these consultants just suddenly appear.

They are available to do work on how to help them develop the most reform-oriented teacher evaluation system, the most reform-oriented teacher and principal contracts, the best data system. So there are all of these consulting firms and businesses. A lot of them are founded or staffed by people who started off, say, in Teach For America, or who worked for some of the more famous reform-oriented superintendents and chancellors like Joel Klein and Michelle Rhee.

In fact, one of the leaders of one organization said that he got so many queries from these people that he started calling them the school failure industry. They were people who showed up when you had “failing” schools that were the target of the education reformers or some of the federal grants that were available for “failing” schools. There was money in failing schools. And he said there was a school failure industry that was trying to compete for it.

In Newark they spent millions — literally millions of dollars



on a human resources consulting firm to get a new teacher evaluation system and teach everybody in the district, principals, department heads, senior teachers, how to use it. And this was an initiative that came straight from the federal government. The Race to the Top that President Obama and Arne Duncan, the education secretary, put in place encouraged states to change their laws so the teacher evaluations were based increasingly on the student test scores.

Interestingly, I spent some time interviewing the measurement scientist who developed the system in New Jersey for measuring whether students grew or not from year to year on their standardized tests. And the state is using that measure of growth to say whether a teacher is effective or ineffective to some degree. And this measurement scientist said that the system was never intended to judge teachers. It was only intended to measure whether children are growing or not because it does not tell you why they are growing or who caused them to grow... All it tells you is

whether they are progressing or regressing. And the teacher is a factor in that, but there are so many other factors that he this is just not the way this data should have been used. And his system is being used in 35 states, I think.

**Gross:** I am wondering what your takeaway is from the Newark education reform.

**Russakoff:** You know, the main thing that I am struck by was witnessing what this particular charter school was able to do with the extra resources that came into the building and the classroom. The principal of the charter school... said unequivocally she never would have these results if she did not have these extra resources. In other words, if she only had the resources to work with that the school district schools had, she could not have done this, and her students could not have done this. To me, the biggest takeaway is to figure out how to get resources to... school districts to meet the needs of children because they really do not have the resources to meet them now in cities like Newark.

# With Federal Millions, “Wild West” of Charters Is About to Get Even Wilder

*Jonas Persson, PR Watch*

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) has announced the winners of the next round of state (SEA) grants under the quarter-billion-dollar-a-year Charter Schools Program (CSP) designed to boost the charter sector.

While eight state departments of education shared a \$125-million pot of federal taxpayer money for 2015, the biggest recipient by far for this round of grants is Ohio. It landed a whopping \$32.6 million grant to the dismay of public school advocates.

With its lax-to-non-existent charter school laws, and vast number of unaccountable authorizers, Ohio has long been an embarrassment even to the charter school industry. “It’s more broken than the Wild West,” a spokesperson for the National Association of Charter School Authorizers told Cleveland’s *Plain Dealer* last year.

But as the Center for Media and Democracy (CMD) has documented, ED has never quite decided whether to bet on the sheriff or the outlaw in its approach to the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, which provides for the federal largesse that has fueled the charter school industry, even with its numerous failures.

To a certain extent, the charter school funding mechanisms were designed to reward “lawlessness”—that is, states in which authorizers call the shots while the departments of education act like banks or conduits for cash but lack any real statutory authority to hold the recipients accountable. This comes under the mantle of “flexibility” recited by charter advocates.

This “flexibility” has been a recipe for disaster in state after state, but Ohio—which has already received CSP grants of nearly \$125 million—offers a particularly bleak picture.

CMD conducted a review of the schools in the Buckeye State that were awarded money under the 2007-2011 grant cycle, and

found that:

- Out of the 88 schools created by the grant money, at least 15 closed within a few years (this is a conservative estimate based on Ohio’s Closed School Directory; the status of some of the other schools remains unclear) – but not before pocketing more than \$4.9 million (out of a total \$32.6 million) in planning and implementation grants.

- Seven charter schools never even opened to students.

- The majority of the schools that remain open scored in the bottom 16 percent (letter grades D-F) on the 2014 Ohio Performance Index, as measured by student performance on state assessments.

### Accountability Scandal Rocks Ohio

This time around, however, things are bound to be different, right? Such was the optimism of Nadya Dabby, assistant deputy secretary with ED. When asked by Lyndsey Layton of the *Washington Post* why the state “with multiple charter school problems received the biggest federal grant,” she assured her that Ohio has improved its oversight of charters. “Although,” noted Layton, “she could not provide details.”

But a look at documents released September 28 shows that the reviewers contracted by ED to score the applications have adopted a position that Ohio is now practically a model for oversight, in terms of holding charter authorizers accountable.

- “Ohio has established high and exacting accountability expectations of authorizers (including evaluation against standards) and, inferentially, schools. This is critical to their plan and the priority of high quality authorizing permeates this and other sections of the application.” (Score 15/15 on the rubric “State-

Level Strategy”)

- “Ohio has established Frameworks that include strong and clear language for the expectations and evaluation of charters AND authorizers ... The Office of Quality School Choice (QSC) evaluates authorizers and posts the reviews for public consumption” (Score 15/15 on the rubric “High-Quality Authorizing and Monitoring Processes”)

- “[I]t is highly likely that this method of oversight of authorizers is highly effective.” (Score 12/15 on the rubric “Oversight of Public Chartering Agencies”)

Notably, the process for becoming a reviewer of potential awardees for ED seems designed to ensure that the only people who can pass the screening to volunteer for the role hail from the charter school industry in some way.

But while out-of-state reviewers were deliberating on Ohio’s application—extolling the virtues of the new authorizer “frameworks”—events in Ohio took a sudden and rather less virtuous turn.

In June, *The Plain Dealer* discovered that the much-touted Office of the Quality School Choice was actually “giving overseers [i.e. authorizers] of many of the lowest-performing schools a pass from taking the heat for some of their worst problems” by scrubbing data from low performing online schools in their performance reviews.

“We found that the state isn’t counting the performance of online schools—one of the most-controversial and lowest-performing charter sectors—in the calculations ... This means that many F-rated charter schools that serve thousands of students won’t be included when their oversight agencies are rated this year,” the paper wrote in its exposé.

So much for Ohio’s “highly effective” method of oversight.

The director of Ohio’s Office of Quality School Choice, David Hansen, fell on the sword and announced his resignation in July. But Democratic lawmakers suspect that this goes higher up in the chain of command, and have called on State Superintendent Richard Ross to resign. Emails released this month to state newspapers under an open records request confirm that several agency employees knew about the scheme, although there is no direct link to Ross.

But none of this scandal apparently deterred the federal officials in charge of handing out big money for charters.

ED Turns a Deaf Ear

These developments raise several questions:

- Were the ED reviewers aware of how authorizer oversight had played out in practice when they sang the praises of the Office of Quality School Choice?

- Was Steven Tate with the Ohio Department of Education aware of his colleague’s sleight of hand when he wrote the abstract to the application, and affirmed Ohio’s commitment to “strengthening the guardrails of quality authorizing and [holding] state authorizers rigorously accountable for protecting student trust?”

- Does the application submitted (and still not released) contain scrubbed data?



For all its self-touted commitment to transparency, ED has refused to honor a CMD *Freedom of Information Act* request for the state grant applications.

It has chosen instead to make the final decision with no input from the real stakeholders, from families in Ohio who have been reading about press investigations of the industry.

It is possible that the ED official who signed off on the grant did so with no knowledge of the Ohio charter scandal that made a mockery of the pious accountability pledges of the state. Alternatively, the grant may have been approved despite the ongoing scandals in Ohio charters, without any accountability for proceeding.

“Aggressive” Charter Expansion in the Works

According to a recent report by the Ohio Charter School Accountability Project, each charter school in the state currently spends more than twice as much of their revenue on administration compared to public schools.

To offset this cost — which includes advertising buys to lure parents to send their kids to the schools and bonuses for the CEOs — they have had to cut corners. And they have done so by allocating \$1,000 less per student a year on classroom instruction. Plus, charter school teachers generally make 40 percent less than their public school colleagues, even as charter executives and outsourcing firms get richer.

One thing seems certain: with the new millions in federal money for Ohio, the Wild West of charter schools, is going to see a gold rush.

# Raúl Castro Delivers Speech at UN Sustainable Development Summit



We reprint below remarks by Raúl Castro Ruz, President of the Councils of State and Ministers of the Republic of Cuba, in his address to the United Nations Summit for the Adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, New York, September 26, 2015. *Voice of Revolution* stands with Cuba and her revolution, which is greatly contributed to peace and progress worldwide. We demand that the U.S. immediately lift the blockade against Cuba, remove the Navy and prison from Guantánamo Bay and fully respect Cuban sovereignty.

\* \* \*

Esteemed heads of State and Government,  
Distinguished heads of delegations,  
Mister Secretary General of the United Nations,  
Mister President,

The current instability prevailing in numerous regions of the world has its roots in the pervasive underdevelopment afflicting two-thirds of the world population.

Fifteen years after the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals progress is insufficient and unevenly distributed. In many cases, unacceptable levels of poverty and social inequality persist and even aggravate including the industrial nations. The gap between the North and the South widens, and wealth polarization keeps growing.

We realize that a long distance must still be covered to achieve a real world association for development.

No less than 2.7 billion people in the world live in poverty. The global infant mortality rate for children under five years of age is still several times higher than that of developed countries. Likewise, maternal death in developing regions is fourteen times higher.

Amid the existing economic and financial crisis, wealthy individuals and transnational companies are growing richer while the number of poor, unemployed and homeless people increase dramatically as a result of the harsh so-called “austerity” policies, and waves of desperate immigrants arrive in Europe escaping misery and conflicts that others have unleashed.

The resources needed for the implementation of the Agenda,

lacking measurable commitments and timetables, are inadequate to meet the seventeen objectives of sustainable development.

If we wish to make this a habitable world with peace and harmony among nations, with democracy and social justice, dignity and respect for the human rights of every person, we should adopt as soon as possible concrete commitments in terms of development assistance, and resolve the debt issue, a debt already paid several times over. It would be necessary to build a new international financial architecture, remove monopoly on technology and knowledge, and change the present international economic order.

The industrial nations should accept their historic responsibility and apply the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities.” The lack of resources cannot be used as a pretext when annual military expenses amount to 1.7 trillion dollars; absent a reduction of such expenses neither development nor a stable and lasting peace will be possible.

Mr. President,

The reestablishment of diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States of America, the opening of embassies and the policy changes announced by President Barack Obama with regard to our country constitute a major progress, which has elicited the broadest support of the international community.

However, the economic, commercial and financial blockade against Cuba persists bringing damages and hardships on the Cuban people, and standing as the main obstacle to our country’s economic development, while affecting other nations due to its extraterritorial scope, and hurting the interests of American citizens and companies. Such policy is rejected by 188 United Nations member states that demand its removal.

Nevertheless, Cuba fulfilled the Millennium Development Goals and offered its modest cooperation to other developing nations in various areas, something we shall continue to do to the extent of our limited capabilities.

We shall never renounce honor, human solidarity and social justice, for these convictions are deeply rooted in our socialist society.

Thank you.

# Cuban Government Describes Devastating Effects of U. S. Economic Blockade

*W. T. Whitney, Counterpunch*

Meeting with reporters on September 17, Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez discussed his ministry's recent report on the U. S. economic blockade against Cuba. The 36 – page document presents Cuba's case in advance of an October 27 vote in the United Nations General Assembly on a Cuban resolution calling for the blockade's end. This will be the 24th consecutive year for such a vote. The Assembly approved the resolution overwhelmingly last year – 188 nations in favor, two opposed.

This year is different. Cuba and the United States recently re-established diplomatic relations. The Obama administration has eased some embargo rules through executive action. And the President has urged the U. S. Congress to exercise powers it gained through the 1996 Helms – Burton Law and lift the blockade.

Nevertheless, Rodríguez pointed out, “The blockade continues[s] to be tightened with notable, increased extra-territorial application, in particular in the financial arena.” It is the “principal obstacle to our development” and “leads to unmet needs and deprivations for all Cuban families.” According to the report, the blockade has deprived Cuba of \$834 billion (allowing for inflation) over the 50 years of its existence.

This detailed, comprehensive report is accessible in English (<http://www.cubavsbloqueo.cu/sites/default/files/INFORME%20BLOQUEO%202015%20-%20EN.pdf>). It surveys multiple U.S. laws underpinning the blockade, details executive actions the Obama administration has already taken, and has recommendations for further presidential initiatives. In particular the document underscores hardship from financial services being withheld by international bankers and lending institutions seeking to avoid U. S. sanctions. The report surveys present day U. S. and international actions and campaigns opposing the blockade.

The overall thrust of the report is to emphasize the complexity and reach of blockade regulations. Prohibitions on



exports to Cuba from foreign subsidiaries of U. S. corporations, for instance, interfere with Cuba's efforts to acquire needed medical supplies. The report makes it clear that any congressional action taken to end regulations most responsible for damage in Cuba must be comprehensive.

Cuba's report submitted to the General Assembly catalogues stories of distress and dysfunction stemming from the blockade. Its descriptions of adverse effects on agencies, organizations, companies, hospital patients, students, farmers, and athletes are taken from the year ending on June 1, 2015. Some examples follow:

- In March 2015 the U. S. Treasury Department fined Commerzbank of Germany \$2,283,456 for violating regula-

tions on Cuba (56 transactions) and three other countries.

- Because foreign banks often refuse to handle dollars intended for Cuba, Cuba faces the loss of \$27,645,000 owed for patient care for foreigners in Cuba and for academic services.

- “Botox,” a U. S.-made drug used to treat some 50 diseases, is obtainable in third countries only and so costs \$500 instead of \$200 per dose.

- Cuban hematologists cannot monitor adverse effects of the anti-cancer drug Methotrexate because they lack “diagnostic systems” made in the United States.

- Medical imaging systems often do not work because they depend for activation on computer programming from Microsoft – which is unavailable.

- Because technical equipment made by U. S. companies or their foreign affiliates is off limits, medical geneticists have to send tissue samples to foreign labs.

- A pediatric cardiology hospital must do without diagnostic catheter equipment manufactured only in the United States.

- Having to buy seeds in Europe and Japan added \$592,269,000 in agricultural sector costs.

- Due to shipping costs, Cuban educators had to pay 30 percent extra to obtain disposable school supplies available only in Europe.

- Cuban athletes competing internationally missed out on prizes paid for in dollars.

These items represent but a tiny fraction of grief-ridden incidents included in Cuba's report for this year. Earlier reports documented hundreds more.

The 2015 version of the report to the UN General Assembly leaves out references to genocide found in earlier ones. Yet State Department strategic proposals on Cuba in 1960 anticipated that crime. As conveyed by Foreign Minister Rodriguez in his remarks, those proposals called for the "greatest inroads in denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real wages, to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow

of government."

The Obama administration is steering now on a delicate course. Reportedly the U. S. government may abstain from the approaching General Assembly vote on the Cuban resolution. [...]

The United States had to abandon its way of bringing down a revolution. Measures of social well-being in Cuba are up, and tens of thousands of Cuban doctors are treating illnesses worldwide and training doctors from all over. The blockade saga is grim. Despite the blockade, Cuban socialism survives and international solidarity with Cuba flourishes.

*(W.T. Whitney Jr. is a retired pediatrician)*

## **Cuban Foreign Minister Says Embargo Must Be Lifted For Relations To Progress**

*Hannah Allam, mcclatchydc.com*

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez said that the U.S. blockade on his country poses a serious impediment to fully restoring relations with the United States, saying that the Obama administration's steps so far have not amounted to "substantial changes" to the Cold War-era restrictions.

The remarks came moments after President Barack Obama and Cuban [President] Raul Castro shook hands in a rare face-to-face meeting in New York, their first encounter on U.S. soil since diplomatic relations were restored last summer after a five-decade break.

Rodriguez described the talks on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly as unfolding in a "respectful and constructive climate," though he added that Obama's measures to remove trade and travel restrictions were no substitute for full removal of what the Cubans call the blockade.

"The executive decisions adopted so far have a very limited value, a very limited scope," Rodriguez told reporters at the United Nations. He added that "the pace of the process toward normalization will depend on the lifting of the blockade."

Obama repeatedly has called for an end to the embargo, but only the U.S. Congress can lift it in full, a prospect Republican leaders and some high-profile Democrats reject. [...]

The next test of the thawing relations comes October 27, when the Cubans take their embargo vote to the United Nations for the 24th year. For years, Cuba has won overwhelming international support for a condemnation of the blockade, and Rodriguez said

the Castro government is eager to see how the U.S. votes next month.

Last year, 188 of the 193-nation assembly voted for the non-binding resolution, with only the United States and Israel voting against it. Rodriguez repeated the vote tally to underscore his point that the embargo only "causes isolation and discredit to the foreign policy of the United States."

Privately, U.S. diplomats have said they are considering an abstention, which would represent a break in longtime U.S. policy. But there has been no public announcement and a brief White House statement on the Obama-Castro meeting did not give any hints.

Officially, the administration line was that the two leaders met to discuss the recent visit of Pope Francis to both countries and to spell out "additional steps each government can take to deepen bilateral cooperation." [...]

This week marked Castro's United Nations debut. He gave three speeches defending Cuban foreign policy, denounced the international order as exclusive, and said the United States and Europe must get a handle on the refugee crisis that they helped to generate through interventions in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Cubans also repeated their demands in order to reach full normalization: lifting the embargo, returning the Guantánamo Naval Base, ceasing broadcasts and programs that threaten Cuban sovereignty, and paying out compensation to people and companies for embargo-related damages.

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# Proof Positive that Both the Conservatives and Liberals Must Be Rejected

*Geneviève Royer and Pierre Soublière, mlpc.ca*

The federal elections are taking place in the context of collective resistance by Quebec's public sector workers to the brutal neo-liberal austerity measures the Couillard Liberal majority government is implementing with impunity. To add insult to injury, while the government is imposing these measures, the National Assembly is giving government ministers and all Members of the National Assembly (MNAs) significant pay hikes. Couillard's reform package for MNAs will see their salaries go from \$90,000 to \$136,000 a year, ministers will see theirs go from \$154,000 to \$217,000 and the premier's own will go from \$186,000 to \$272,000.

Across Quebec workers are showing up in record numbers and voting overwhelmingly to give their unions a strike mandate. The teachers are in the forefront of the collective resistance. Close to 90,000 primary and secondary school teachers have participated in different actions starting last spring to defend their wages and working conditions and oppose the wrecking of public education by the Couillard government. Teachers affiliated with the Fédération autonome de l'enseignement (FAE) voted for three



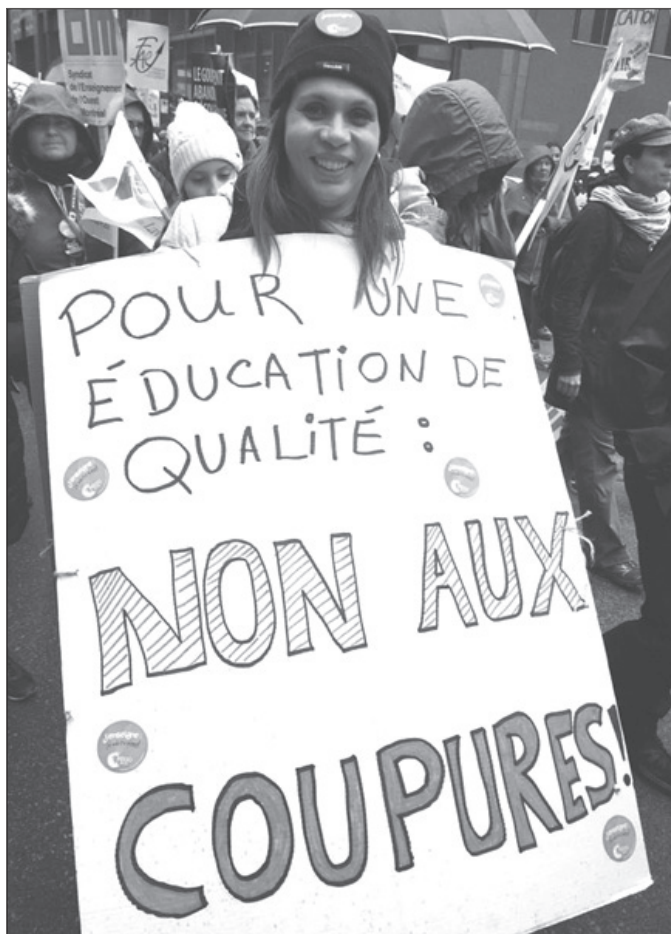
different one-day strikes. The first was on September 30, and around noon that day more than 20,000 people participated in a demonstration in Montreal. People on the sidewalks and in their cars expressed support for the teachers on a massive scale as they marched on the streets of the downtown core demanding that the Couillard government take up its social responsibility towards Quebec's public education system.

The Common Front, which brings together the Inter-Secretariat of Public Services (SISP), the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CSN) and the Federation of Workers of Quebec (FTQ), has called a mass demonstration also in Montreal on October 3.

On October 1, more than 500 nurses of the Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé also blocked the cars coming out of the National Assembly in Quebec to denounce the irresponsible offers of the Couillard government.

In preparation for the teachers' first one-day strike, the FAE pointed out that according to the Treasury Board proposal, "The Couillard government wants to increase teachers' workload by increasing the work week from 32 hours to 40 hours, and this in a context of a wage freeze for the next two years and an increase of 1 percent per year for the three subsequent years."

Besides the needs of students in general as well those with special needs "The government is maintaining its determination to augment the number of students per class. In doing so, students who will be in larger groups and for whom services have already been reduced or are completely non-existent, will also be the losers in this proposal from the employer."



The Couillard government is also attempting to blackmail teachers by telling FAE members that it will keep funding the positions of resource teachers “If the current measures which guide school administrations to take into account the number of students with special needs when determining the class size are removed.” This means that the government wants to get rid of the current arrangement through which some of the requirements of students with special needs are addressed by reducing class size.

At the heart of these austerity measures is the impunity with which the Couillard government denies public sector workers the working conditions and wages commensurate with the services they provide to the population. The new normal as far as the government is concerned is for teachers to expect to work many hours for free — which is what Kathleen Wynne in Ontario also expects.

These governments, like the Harper government, claim that what they are doing is good for society, despite all evidence to the contrary. They take public funds and hand them over to private interests. They then declare there is no money in the treasury to meet the needs of education, health care and public service. Meanwhile, the rich get richer and the consequences for the people and society are dire.

Last week, workers were shocked to hear that the Quebec government, in spite of all the representations made by the nurses’ union, had, among other things, decided to withdraw the nurses’ night premium. In light of the most recent attacks, the nurses’ union broke off negotiations. A similar situation exists in education where not only teachers, but parents, artists and others are defending public education and its importance within Quebec society. Even well-known economists are affirming that such austerity measures have only exacerbated the crisis in countries such as Greece, Spain and Portugal. The fact that the government maintains its “hard line” despite the pleas of its front line workers such as nurses and teachers shows how utterly rotten it is. Its mission is to implement the neo-liberal agenda and put all the assets of society at the disposal of the financial oligarchy.

Federally, the Harper government also attacks the public sector



with impunity. In this election, the vicious anti-social program of Liberal governments in Quebec and the provinces prove that it would be dangerous to elect a Liberal government to federal office. Any illusions about such things are dangerous indeed.

By uniting in action all sectors of the economy, community organizations, the youth and others, the Quebec people embody what it means to fight for the rights of all. As the living force of the society, the working people in action also embody the kind of society they want — a society which does not act on the basis of privilege or deceit, but which considers each worker and member of society to be a full-fledged human person whose rights must be affirmed. In this regard, there is no more important right than their right to participate in taking the decisions which affect their lives, such as the working conditions and wages they require to perform their jobs in a manner which is at par with the society they live in.

Send a clear message to all those who want to block the progress of society that *No Means No!* No to the anti-social offensive of both the Liberals in Quebec and the Harper Conservatives federally! Make sure neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals get elected on October 19!

*Geneviève Royer and Pierre Soublière are the MLPC candidates in La Pointe-de-l'Île and Gatineau, respectively.*

