

Buffalo Forum



Local Publication of the
U.S. Marxist-Leninist Organization

Workers of all countries, unite!

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November 21, 2014

Vol. 18 #11

We Support Public Control of Public Schools

Resolution of the Meeting on Corporate School "Reform" and a Public Vision for Public Education, Passed Unanimously

The participants of the November 15 forum on a Public Vision for Public Education express our support for the teachers, parents, students, staff and administrators opposing the efforts to privatize Buffalo public schools and turn them over to private charter school interests, including handing over public school buildings and space for free. We represent teachers, parents, students and community members from Buffalo and surrounding school districts and we stand together for public control of public schools. It is the public that needs to decide how best to raise the quality of our public schools and ensure the equal right to education for all. We teachers, parents and students are the experts in the field of education and we refuse to be excluded or silenced. We call for public debate and discussion on the need for public control of public schools and challenge those calling for privatization to such debate. We stand united in defending the right to education, opposing all attacks taking place on our public schools and supporting the teachers, parents, students and community members standing up for rights. We will continue to conduct public forums and debate opposing the corporate agenda and elaborating our vision for public education.

GOVERNMENT UNPREPARED FOR DEVASTATING STORM

Salute First Responders, Drivers and Volunteers for Storm Efforts

Buffalo Forum salutes the tireless first responders, drivers of equipment of all kinds and the many volunteers who organized assistance of various kinds in the face of the devastating three-day snow storm. In many cases, it was volunteers on snowmobiles that brought food and water

to stranded truck and car drivers. They also played an important role in rescuing people who needed medical assistance getting them from their blocked-in homes to the street. It is volunteers that got Wegman's to provide meals for 200

Salute Storm Volunteers • 3

STEP UP INDEPENDENT ORGANIZING

Strengthen the Role of the Public in Defending Right to Education

Government at the state and local level continue to make clear that they are organizing to wreck public education in Buffalo, while claiming to improve it. Governor Cuomo has repeatedly targeted the public schools, most recently claiming they are a monopoly to be broken up. He

secured more public funding for private charters, while refusing to fully fund the public schools consistent with court rulings.

Commissioner King and the New York State Education Department (NYSED)

Step Up Independent Organizing • 5

KEEPING PEOPLE OUT OF DECISIONS ABOUT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

NYSED Provides No Information on Charter Applications

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) in October organized to extend the deadline for charter school applications for Buffalo *only*. In doing so they set up a number of dates for the applications and for the required public comment and hearings. These include a November 16 deadline for full applications and a November 17-December 15

NYSED Provides No Information • 10

TEACHERS AND PARENTS ORGANIZE FORUM

Public Vision for Education Calls for Public to Decide

Teachers, parents and community organizers recently took the initiative to organize a public forum on "Corporate School Reform and a Public Vision for Public Education." Held November 15 at Karpeles Library Museum on Porter Avenue, the event brought together about 100 people from Buffalo and surrounding school districts. While speakers and participants spoke to Corporate School

Public Vision for Public Education • 4

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**South Buffalo Community Center Organizes
Volunteer Shovel Brigade**

Residents of South Buffalo, like those of East Aurora, Hamburg, Lackawanna and Orchard Park, are still contending with massive amounts of snow, preventing them from leaving home and blocking vehicles. Given this has been true for many since Tuesday and even Monday night, South Buffalo's Old First Ward Community Center organized a volunteer shovel brigade.

The mainly women organizers have been active in the community center, organizing regularly with block clubs and knowledgeable about their resources. This includes knowing people who know the area and can serve as drivers in conditions where roads are blocked; who can be called on to assist with snow on roofs and so forth.

The organizers established a survey page where residents could state their needs and location and gathered this information together. Then they put out the word, using a facebook page established for the purpose, that volunteers were

needed. Hundreds from all over Buffalo and areas not as hard hit responded. The community center was designated as the command post and people told to report there Saturday morning. Organizers would be prepared with lists of homes that needed assistance.

This was the level of independent, collective organizing needed in all the various communities impacted. It demonstrates that volunteers are ready, willing and able to act. It shows what would be possible if county and state government followed this model and contributed to organizing brigades instead of telling everyone to stay home.

As people now prepare for the next round — flooding — the model given by the South Buffalo's Old First Ward Community Center is a positive one to follow. We salute their well-organized efforts and along with teachers and others will join them Saturday!

**DAY AFTER DEMONSTRATION:
TURN UP FOR JUSTICE FOR MIKE BROWN**

5:00PM

**DAY AFTER THE FERGUSON GRAND JURY
DECISION IS ANNOUNCED**

BAILEY AVENUE AND MILLICENT AVENUE

An announcement will soon be made, possibly Sunday November 23, about the grand jury's decision in the case of Officer Darren Wilson, who killed unarmed African American teenager Michael Brown. The Missouri Governor has already called out the National Guard. The FBI is fomenting violence, claiming "agitators" will bring weapons and be violent. Preliminary leaks indicate that Wilson will not be charged by the grand jury for killing Brown, as the prosecutor has not made the case. Demands for a special prosecutor have gone unanswered.

Actions in many cities south, north, east and west are taking place. Buffalo will be among them! Stand against government organized racist attacks in Ferguson and here in Buffalo.

**WE DEMAND JUSTICE FOR MICHAEL BROWN!
STOP RACIST POLICE VIOLENCE! DEFEND THE RIGHTS OF ALL!**

Facebook Event Page: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1499900210294598/>

I • SALUTE STORM VOLUNTEERS

seniors blocked in at a seniors' residence.

The example of South Buffalo's Old First Ward Community Center, which organized hundreds of volunteers for Saturday, November 22, to shovel out homes in the area was a model of what can be accomplished when organized volunteer brigades take action (see p.2).

The fact that 6-7 feet of snow was still blocking people in their homes — many there since Tuesday — is an indication of the failure of government to be prepared. And their refusal to organize more volunteer brigades sooner. Many in Buffalo at first watched in frustration as the government refused to allow people to assist. With schools and universities closed, there was a ready crew of teachers and students available. Rather than being mobilized, those in most of Buffalo and elsewhere where the storm was not as severe, were told to stay home.

Despite the National Guard presence and additional police, the deaths of at least two people, stranded in their cars on Tuesday and found Friday, can be attributed to government failure to allow more organized assistance by the public. In both cases the men called for hours for assistance, were known by police to need help, but never received it. Meanwhile, a tow truck driver trying to reach one was turned backed, and family and friends blocked as well by travel bans and police/national guard barricades.

While safety for people is an issue while streets are being cleared, the government action to completely block access was not a solution, as these deaths indicate. Everyone is hoping, as cars are still being dug out, that there will be no more fatalities.

But this should not be a matter of hope. Government has responsibility to first of all protect and support the people and should not leave this up to chance. To do so, especially given it can be a life and death matter, is criminal. And while no doubt the amount of snow, 6-7 feet in some areas, and speed that it fell, 4-5 inches an hour at times, is unusual, it does not excuse the lack of preparedness and refusal to organize volunteer brigades. Done in coordination with street clean up, this can be done safely. This will be confirmed by the Saturday

volunteer brigade, which takes place while streets are still being cleared.

**Commercial Interests, not People,
the Priority**

Another concern is that main emphasis was given to commercial interests — particularly clearing the thruway. The reality that this was for commercial purposes can be seen in the fact that Governor Cuomo said as a result of exit ramps still being closed and the thruway open, people would have to go all the way to Pennsylvania before they could turn around. Further, Greyhound is making use of Route 33 for travel east, and proceeding without difficulty. Why then so much equipment and human resources devoted to the interstate when whole communities, including South Buffalo, Hamburg, Orchard Park, Lackawanna and East Aurora are still snowed in? Town supervisors in these areas reported that they had gotten no assistance from the county or state as of Thursday, when a few trucks arrived.

Once the people stranded on the thruway were rescued, clearing the huge expanse of highway need not be a first priority — people should be. As well, for the safety of people, the thruway should have been closed much sooner. This was even admitted by Tom Pericak, director of the Thruway Authority's Buffalo Division. Instead of taking responsibility for this mistake, Governor Cuomo blamed drivers for getting stuck.

Further, it is government budget cuts that have left the Buffalo area without the snow equipment it requires. Lake effect snow is a given in the region and came as no surprise. A severe storm was predicted. But Buffalo simply no longer has what is needed. Snow melting machines, for example, would have made a significant difference in this situation, when the snow was too deep for plows. Indeed, the Bills are bringing in such a machine, this one known as the Snow Dragon, which also heats the melting snow so as to melt even more. It can melt more than 20 truckloads an hour.

Instead private contractors are being paid an estimated \$250,000 a day to use huge front loaders to dump snow into huge dump trucks, which then have to take it to

dumping areas where there are now mountains of snow. Not a few have pointed out that while the city, assisted by the federal government, has funds for a mine-resistant tank and other military equipment that it does not need, there are not funds for snow equipment so necessary for this region.

And while the Bills are organizing for the Snow Dragon to get the stadium cleared, they did not bring in it to assist with clean up in Orchard Park where the stadium is located. Indeed, they also offered to pay \$10 an hour to volunteers to clean the stadium — but did not make the same offer for volunteers to shovel out homes in the area.

In previous storms, 1977 for example, the government organized to pay the unemployed to assist. No such action this time, with private contractors being used for main roads but not homes. In fact, volunteers report that one person with a snow plow who was attempting to assist was fined \$1500 for doing so.

As well, Buffalo-area government is backward when it comes to clearing the public sidewalks. This is left completely to the individual, whereas other cities, like Montreal, have public workers clear their sidewalks with machinery. The lack of such an organized effort by government means many families even now are still snowed in and unable to access their vehicles or even get to their garages to get shovels and snow-blowers.

There are now 13 deaths from the storm and government unpreparedness, with several deaths from overexertion from shoveling snow. If such needs were not left to individuals but dealt with on a social basis, such deaths would not occur or at least there would be fewer of them.

Given this is only the start of winter more storms can be expected. *Buffalo Forum* urges people to hold government accountable while also organizing independently and collectively so as to be prepared. Block clubs have a role to play, schools and unions do as well, as do community centers. Now is the time to put the needed organization in place so that together we are better prepared and organized to meet people's needs.

I • PUBLIC VISION FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

Reform — calling it corporate *deform* for its negative impact on the public and public schools — what stood out about the forum was its united stand to raise the quality of public schools by defending rights.

Participants from Buffalo and the suburbs rejected the current trend to eliminate the public from governance of public schools and target the teachers as the source of problems. As the resolution unanimously passed emphasized, “It is the public that needs to decide how best to raise the quality of our public schools and ensure the equal right to education for all. We teachers, parents and students are the experts in the field of education and we refuse to be excluded or silenced... We stand united in defending the right to education, opposing all attacks taking place on our public schools and supporting the teachers, parents, students and community members standing up for rights,” (see p.1).

The forum also challenged those supporting privatization, like the Buffalo Niagara Partnership, Commissioner King and Governor Cuomo, to a public debate on the matter. *Buffalo Forum* also encourages school board members to join in organizing public meetings to debate how best to raise the quality of the Buffalo public schools.

Opposing Public Space for Private Charters and Urging Student Organizing
The event had three main speakers, with lots of questions from the audience. Leonie Haimson, from New York City (NYC), spoke first. She is executive director of Class Size Matters and works to strengthen the role of parents in public education. She spoke to the significance of smaller class sizes in education, something the privatizers in Buffalo try to ignore. She also played an important role in exposing inBloom, the data mining company of Microsoft’s Bill Gates, which tried to establish a pre-K to 20 (graduate school) 400 point database of all New York students, without parental consent. InBloom was blocked but she and others cautioned that it could re-emerge in a

different form as much of the Common Core testing and teaching modules depend on a similar infrastructure.

She also spoke to the very harmful impact of sharing public school space with private charters. Private charters use public funding, but they also commonly get additional funds from their private backers, like banks (M&T here in Buffalo is one example) or other financiers. One way this is reflected in NYC schools is that the floors where the charter schools are housed have better quality facilities, such as bathrooms — which the students on the public school floors are not allowed to use! This blatant inequality has served to increase conflicts among parents and make public schools appear worse than they actually are in terms of the education provided. The inequality in funding and the harm to society of undermining public schools is to be ignored. She brought out that students have an important role to play and urged participants to involve students more in the organizing efforts.

Dr. Mark Garrison of Buffalo was the second speaker. He elaborated on the trend, mainly since the end of the Cold War, to eliminate the public from governance of the public schools. This includes eliminating the conception that government has a social responsibility to provide the highest quality public education for all students. Instead, government is facilitating the takeover of public institutions, and their public funds, by private interests. He joked that Bill Gates is the real Secretary of Education.

He brought out that facts are important in the discussion and spoke to two kinds of facts. One kind, for example, speaks to whether private charters have shown themselves to actually improve the quality of education. Studies have shown that they do not perform better than the public schools on state standardized tests — the main means used to compare them. This narrow comparison of test scores also leaves out facts like suspension rates (charters are 2-3 times higher), the harm to teaching and learning conditions when the test score is all that matters and so forth. A second type of fact is that those who are

promoting private charters as the means to improve education systematically ignore the facts showing that they do not do so. This is purposeful, and significant as it indicates that the aim is not improving schools, rather justifying the dismantling of a system of public education.

Public schools are public institutions built over a long period of time to provide free public education for all students — as the NYS constitution requires. Garrison brought out that what is needed today is decision making by the public for the public interest. The forum itself was an important example of providing public space for public discussion, a discussion that informs and unites, rather than deforming and dividing.

Those pushing privatization and eliminating the role of the public also ignore that education is impacted by important social factors, like poverty and racism. To fix the public schools it is necessary to strengthen the communities of which they are a part by dealing with poverty and government racism. Teachers play a main role inside the school building, but these social factors play a much larger role in education overall. He concluded that the issue of who decides has to be kept in the forefront, and that it is the right of the public to together decide all matters of public education.

Refuse the State Tests

The last speaker was Eric L. Mihelbergel, a parent and organizer of the New York State Allies for Public Education (NYSAPE). He spoke to the growing efforts of parents statewide to refuse the standardized testing of the Common Core. Their webpage provides information as to why the testing is harmful to the students. Teaching to the test and emphasizing English and Math largely to the exclusion of history, social studies, art, music, lowers the quality of education.

He spoke about steps parents are taking to defend their children and refuse the tests. This contributes to defending public education and is a way for parents to say NO! to the attacks occurring. He brought

Public Vision for Public Education • 6



Photos from Forum on Public Vision for Public Education: Dr. Garrison above, Eric Mihelberg far right and parts of the crowd responding to presentations

I • STEP UP INDEPENDENT ORGANIZING

made a special effort just for Buffalo to allow more private charter schools to take over public schools, potentially including the school buildings. These efforts also include offering grants of up to \$750,000 in public funds to private charters that provide plans for what NYSED calls “persistently low performing” schools. The large majority of Buffalo schools fall into this category. This means not only are Lafayette, Bennett, East and MLK on the auction block, but so are all Buffalo schools branded “low-performing.” It is Commissioner King and the appointed Board of Regents that will decide these matters, not the Buffalo School Board.

NYSED is not providing the public with any information about charter applications filed, though they are required to do so. They are also required to provide for public comment and hearings (see p.1). The lack of information is such that the teachers’ union had to file a Freedom of Information Law request in an effort to secure it. NYSED is a public institution that is supposed to serve the public interest yet it is clearly organizing to serve private interests and block the public from governance.

These efforts are being facilitated by the federal government, all in service to private monopoly interests, like Microsoft, Walmart’s Walton family, Pearson and

hedge fund managers like those behind Success Academy. Cuomo and King have both called on Success to come to Buffalo and many expect they are among those who have filed an application — but this information is so far being kept secret.

In contrast, the local effort by teachers, staff, administrators, students and community organizers to develop a plan for Lafayette High School has been done in public. Indeed, the school organized a public meeting to inform people about its plan and encourage public input on it. Teachers and students have also gone to School Board meetings and participated in demonstrations, all contributing to the defense of public education and the role of the public in having its say.

Teachers and parents also organized together to have a public forum and develop their own public vision for public education (see p.1). They are expanding efforts to involve parents and students alike in refusing the state’s standardized tests and the whole Common Core testing regime.

All of these various activities are contributing to developing the independent politics of people’s empowerment, as they bring to the fore the right of the public to decide. They are demonstrating that politics that defend the public are needed and positive,

as they serve to inform and unite the public in defense of its interests. This is in contrast to the rotten and dirty non-politics of the rich and their representatives, so completely revealed in the most recent elections where two thirds of voters did not vote, saying, No, None of the Above!

Stepping up the independent political organizing means having more public meetings to advance a public vision and alternative where we, the people decide. It means increasing the role of students in the work. It means strengthening our independent voice by joining in building *Buffalo Forum* and the various webpages of those organizing, like NYS Allies for Public Education (NYSAPe) and Western New Yorkers for Public Education. We urge students to join in building a youth page for *Buffalo Forum* and organizing a student union, at your school and together with others city-wide. We urge all to demand that their School Board and Common Council representatives hold public meetings on privatizing public schools and alternative public visions for public education. We encourage the weekly and monthly newspapers to also organize public meetings. Broad discussion unifying public opinion in defense of public education, by defending the rights of all is necessary. Join in!

LAFAYETTE, BENNETT, EAST AND MLK

NYSED Continues to Block Public Participation in Plans for Public Schools

The Buffalo Teachers Federation (BTF) recently called on Interim Superintendent of the Buffalo Public Schools, Donald Olgilvie, to provide in writing a directive from the New York State Board of Education (NYSED) concerning Lafayette, Bennett, East and MLK schools.

The four schools are ones that NYSED has designated as “out of time” for making improvements, which means they have to submit “turnaround” plans acceptable to the state or face closure, state takeover or being turned into private charter schools. Apparently, NYSED has declared that the principals who develop “turnaround” plans for their schools cannot remain at the schools. As well, the teachers of the schools cannot participate in developing the plans and the plans must include transferring 50 percent of the teachers.

The BTF rightfully called this idiotic and insane. It is yet another example where decisions being made are clearly against the public interest and their right to decide matters of education.

Forcing principals to leave the schools only exacerbates already existing problems. And it is no doubt directed in part at Principal Cerre at Lafayette, who together with teachers, parents and community members has been working hard to keep Lafayette open and public.

At a recent community meeting organized by the administration, teachers, students, staff and community organizers a basic plan for Lafayette was presented.

There was information provided about significant programs at Lafayette that would likely be lost if it becomes a private charter. These include special language programs for the students

who do not speak or write any English on entering school, one of the only programs of its kind statewide. The plan also includes development of “academies” within the school, enabling students to gain certification as interpreters and translators.

Lafayette already was previously forced to bring in a new principal and transfer teachers. To impose this again, especially given the clear stand being taken by Principal Cerre and teachers to strengthen the quality of education and keep it public, is an attack on students and parents alike. And these are among the most vulnerable students, with 70 percent English Language Learners (ELLs) and 30 percent with special needs. Teachers,



students, staff, and in this case administrators, are the experts on what is needed in their schools, and more generally in education. Their role in deciding how to raise the quality of education needs to be expanded, not blocked, as NYSED is doing.

The demand by NYSED is consistent with their general efforts to dismantle the public school system, by handing schools, including the public buildings, over to private charters. Already NYSED orchestrated a special extension, just in Buffalo, of the application deadline for charter schools (see November *Buffalo Forum*). And it is offering up to \$750,000, in public funds, to these private charters if they submit applications to take over “persistently low-achieving” schools, the label given to Lafayette and most of Buffalo’s schools.

Federal and state government has ensured that the public schools are grossly underfunded, then arbitrary state tests are used to brand them as “low-achieving,” then \$750,000 is provided to private interests to take them over! And the principals, teachers and public are to have no say. It is a systematic effort to dismantle the public school system while handing over public funds to private, often monopoly interests. The aim is not improving education — it is removing students, teachers, staff, administrators and the public in general from their rightful role in governance.

I • PUBLIC VISION FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

out how both NYSAPE and Western New Yorkers for Public Education provide materials for parents to use. These include letters to their school principal and teachers, steps to take on test day and more. Parents are increasingly organizing to leaflet at school events where large numbers of parents gather so as to inform people about the movement to *Refuse the Tests!* and bring more people into the organizing.

He explained that an estimated 60,000 students statewide refused last year and organizers are aiming for 250,000 statewide this year. Efforts are going forward to identify parents in each school district, establish groups and develop organizing consistent with the specific needs and concerns of each area.

The various questions asked in the course of the forum brought out experience

of teachers and parents in organizing and contending with efforts to suppress their resistance and use fear to silence teachers. The importance and necessity for raising the quality of public education by defending the rights of teachers and students alike also was highlighted. The spirit and united stand was reflected in the resolution, which affirmed the support of all for public control of public schools.

Lafayette Teacher Defends Student Voice in Decision Making

The Buffalo News recently carried an article about school board member Larry Quinn's attacks on Lafayette teachers and students, calling teachers "clowns" and students "political plants." Quinn expressed the view that there was no reason to listen to Lafayette students and teachers and did not like the fact that they participated in public school board meetings where the fate of Lafayette was being discussed. We reprint below a blog post to the News by Lafayette teacher Pat Foster defending teachers and students and their role in deciding what happens to their public schools

* * *

I am perplexed that Mr. Quinn is so offended that students spoke at a Board meeting in defense of their school last month. The story of Lafayette potentially closing if a reform plan is not approved is by no means breaking news, and to imply that students would not be aware or concerned about this reality, without teacher input or "manipulation," is inaccurate, disingenuous and indeed insulting to the students.

Many students, not just the three who came and spoke at the Board of Education (BOE) meeting, ask me daily what is going

to happen with Lafayette. My response to their concerns is a consistent reassurance that our school community is working on a plan and that we believe wholeheartedly in its merits and efficacy.

It is a matter of public record that Lafayette has been facing closure as a possibility from as far back as May of 2009, then again in June 2011, then again in December 2011, then again over the summer of 2013, and now again during the fall of 2014. Our community, inclusive of parents, teachers, students, alumni, administrators, and concerned citizens, has rallied at Board meetings on each of the above dates, and we have shown the kind of spirit, resilience, heart, talent, persistence, and civic awareness that have been hallmarks of Lafayette over its proud 111-year history.

We know, and our students know, that Lafayette High School (LHS) is an awesome place that has been the recipient of a level of injustice that it is going to take years to fully reveal, articulate, and disseminate to a public who deserves to know. Our students are aware of this injustice, they live it every day, as they prepare for high-stakes Regents exams while dually navigating the intricacies of

the English language and overcoming the gauntlet of rigorous content. Mr. Esmonde [Buffalo News columnist] gets it, he spoke cogently and accurately of our students' work ethic and achievements, despite a continuing insistence by "test-obsessed bureaucrats" to look at standardized test scores for judgments and decisions about school success.

This is hardly the first or last time that students have or will speak at Board of Education meetings. Back in 2011, several Lafayette students spoke about how well they had come to know the English language after four years at Lafayette — similar to last month, the Board was visibly moved. Many Buffalo schools have historically had students attend Board of Education meetings in satisfaction of community service hours. This is really a matter of civic awareness and leadership within a democratic, pluralistic society — Buffalo students benefit greatly from these experiences.

To insinuate that the students are "political plants" or that teachers have written their speeches for them or have somehow manipulated them in the political polemic, is preposterous and outrageous and hurtful

Student Voice • 8

Smaller Class Sizes Help Students Learn

Kevin M. Gibson, Buffalo Teacher

This past July, an anonymously written "Vision for Buffalo Public Schools" claimed "more than money, more than class size, more than even demographics,"



teaching will turn around our schools. Such a statement undermines the one thing that we know will help students learn, and that is that smaller class sizes impact student achievement more than most reforms.

The anonymous vision disregards both the importance of properly funded inner-city schools and the fact that New York has a historically segregated curriculum — offering exciting and enriching courses in wealthy suburbs but only the most basic classes to our inner-city children. Moreover, the vision seemingly denigrates impoverished, malnourished and immigrant children by insisting that demographics do not matter as much.

In October, Buffalo passed a last-minute resolution that phases out four public

schools, allowing for the expansion of charter schools (only in Buffalo). Surely had even the slightest notice been given about this resolution, a public debate would have ensued. That same month, it was implied that students who spoke at meetings could not have written their own speeches — such false claims have the power to degrade a child. In November, we heard of a bizarre incident where Buffalo public school teachers were labeled as clowns and idiots by an elected leader.

Let us remind ourselves that while good teaching is important so, too, are smaller class sizes, properly funded schools, demographic factors, transparency and civil leadership that has a vision beyond dismantling public schools in Buffalo. (*Letter to the Editor, Buffalo News*)

Parents and Educators Erupt in Anger Against Governor Cuomo's Vow to "Break" Our Public School System

NYS Allies for Public Education

(Parents and teachers across the state have rejected Governor Cuomo's threat to break-up the public school system, claiming it represents a monopoly (see November Voice of Revolution). Many point out that the New York State Constitution requires a "system of public schools," and that Cuomo, as a public official, needs to defend the public interest, not those of the private charter schools — with many backed by monopoly interests. We reprint below a statement from New York State Allies for Public Education, which is also playing a leading role in opposing the harmful testing and organizing parents to Refuse!)

In comments to the Daily News editorial board [<http://m.nydailynews.com/news/politics/cuomo-vows-bust-school-monopoly-re-elected-article-1.1989478>], Governor Andrew Cuomo infuriated the members of New York State Allies for Public Education (NYSAPE), an organization that consists of over fifty parent and educator advocacy groups across New York State. The Governor vowed to "break" the state's public school system, which he called "one of the only remaining public monopolies." He said he would do this by expanding charter schools, competition, and imposing tougher teacher evaluations along with punitive sanctions: "The teachers don't want to do the evaluations and they don't want to do rigorous evaluations." He condescended to parents by implying that the only reason parents erupted in



protest was that teachers got "parents upset last year about this entire Common Core agenda."

Eric Mihelbergel, Erie County Public School parent and founding member of NYSAPE said, "The governor's anti-public school and anti-parent rant has only

confirmed what many parents have suspected for quite some time. This governor has no respect for our public schools, parents, or teachers. He is a bully, plain and simple."

Nancy Cauthen, a New York City public school parent, pointed out, "Despite previous statements in which Cuomo absolved himself from the responsibility for imposing fundamentally flawed Common Core standards, curriculum, and high-stakes exams, and tried to blame this entirely on the

State Education Department, it is clear that he continues to believe in this damaging agenda. As several polls recently showed, the majority of New Yorkers are opposed to the Common Core; and yet he continues

Educators Angry with Cuomo • 9

7 • STUDENT VOICE

for our students. It is demeaning and it sells them short. These students have amazed me with their hard work, intelligence, talent, and sense of justice. Anyone that was present on that October evening can testify to the pure truth of what they wrote in their letters to the Board.

They spoke with sublime truth and the room filled with a pathos that I have seldom seen excepting the powerful narrations of Dickens. One of the students, a young man from Burma, even penned his letter extemporaneously during the middle of the Board meeting. The young lady from Iraq related a personal narrative

of a war-ravaged country and what her journey to the United States and to Buffalo has meant to her, unleashing a flood tide of tears amongst Board members, journalists, and community members alike.

I am proud to say that our students are powerful participants and advocates for their school. This was evident at our recent community meeting held at Lafayette's own historical auditorium, and in which the locally-devised plan was being presented. During a gallery walk presentation of various components of our plan, I witnessed a community member ask one of our students directly, "Most

importantly, I want to know what you think of this plan?" This question, more than anything else, speaks of the power and importance of our students' voices within this process.

Those voices were heard boldly and with impact at last month's Board meeting. Questioning the veracity of their letters and the independence of their thoughts and voices is regrettable, unfortunate, and just plain disgusting. The sincerity, honesty, beauty, passion, and intelligence of these students is truly amazing and really self-evident as soon as you read their letters or hear one sentence spoken!

Buffalo News Targets Those Fighting to Defend Public Education

In a November 17 editorial, the *Buffalo News* again targeted teachers, their union and organized resistance as the problem facing public education. They also joined current efforts to eliminate the Buffalo public school system by giving public funds to bring in more private charter schools.

The editorial starts by saying “The city’s approximately 34,000 students need educational opportunities that are not being provided by the system’s traditional public schools.” The editorial does not address what these opportunities are nor how private charter schools will provide them. It does say that those defending public education are the ones harming “schoolkids whose education might be rescued by an expansion of charter schools.”

It also makes the claim, echoing Governor Cuomo and Commissioner King and the New York State Education Department (NYSED), that the main existing problem is a lack of flexibility by teachers: “Charter schools are not perfect. Some of them have

failed and been closed, and some will do so in the future. But charters also have the flexibility needed to succeed.” It says that those demanding full funding and the equal right to education for all actually have the goal “to prevent changes to a failing educational system.”

The issue at stake is what changes and in whose interest? Who decides? Teachers, students, parents and community organizers are united in demanding that the quality of public schools be raised and that public dollars serve the public interest — not those of the private charter schools. Private charters are privately controlled without accountability to the public, but they are publicly financed. The public is demanding instead public control of public schools and rejecting decisions being made at the executive level (Cuomo, King and NYSED) and in the interests of private owners — like the Wall Street financiers behind private charter Success Academy. Success Academy is one of the private charters both King and Cuomo

have encouraged to come to Buffalo. It just received millions in funding from the Broad Foundation, which serves private monopoly interests. It is also notoriously one of the most anti-teacher and anti-student schools with high turnover rates and students forced out.

No Evidence Charters Improve Education

The *News* editorial, like Cuomo and King, does not address the fact that there is literally no evidence that charter schools perform better than existing public schools. Indeed, studies repeatedly show the large majority perform the same or worse on state standardized tests (see for example, “The bottom line on charter school studies,” Washington Post). Charters often are more segregated and more regimented with worse teaching conditions, meaning worse learning conditions. Consider the suspension rate, one aspect of particular concern to Buffalo students, parents and teachers. Charter rates are generally far higher than

Buffalo News Targets Organized Resistance • 10

8 • EDUCATORS ANGRY WITH CUOMO

to defend it and reveals he will push it even harder in a second term. The governor has revealed himself to be completely out of touch with what parents and communities want for our schools.

According to Marla Kilfoyle, a Long Island parent and educator and general manager of the national organization known as the BATs, “Governor Cuomo’s continued war on the teaching profession and public education is a direct assault on children and their families. He continues to cut funding, disrespect parents, insult teachers, and hurt our children. Enough is enough!”

“Once again, Cuomo has put hedge fund managers, corporate interests and his charter school cronies above public school students and their families. Truth be told, parents see the devastating impact of the Common Core on our children every single day around our own dinner tables. We know that Common Core is failing our students and Cuomo is failing New York’s children,” said Anna Shah, Dutchess County public school parent.

Lisa Rudley, a Westchester public

school parent and Education Director of the Autism Action Network commented, “In his rant, Governor Cuomo calls public educators ‘the only remaining public monopoly.’ Would the governor consider firefighters and police officers a monopoly? Will he call for competition and sanctions based upon unreliable metrics for health care workers and other public service professionals? If so, it appears that his real goal is to dismantle our public schools to garner more support from his financial backers.”

“Governor Cuomo’s assertion that competition leads to better schools is ludicrous,” noted Ulster County public school parent, Bianca Tanis. “If he thinks that the answer to a lack of adequate funding for our schools is charter schools, competition, and test-based ranking and sorting, he is calling for a Hunger Games regime that will disadvantage all students, but especially those most vulnerable — our special needs students and children living in poverty.”

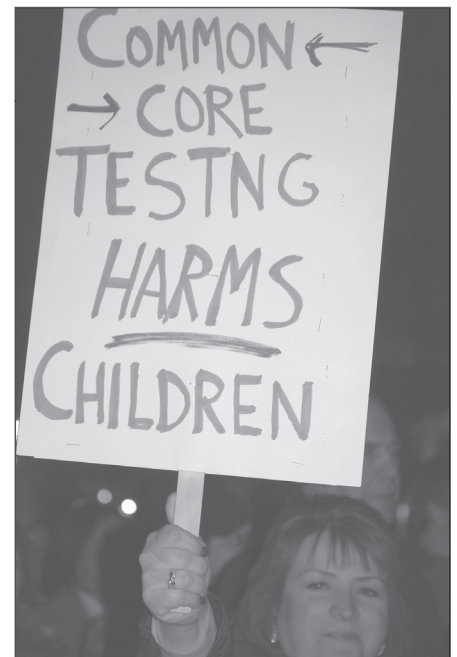
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NYS Allies for Public Education (NYSAPe) – www.nysape.org



1 • NYSED PROVIDES NO INFORMATION

timeframe for public hearings. These hearings must take place within 30 days of *notification of receipt* (not necessarily acceptance) of an application by NYSED. The November 16 date has now passed and the November 17 timeframe started, but to date no information is available from NYSED. And this is true even though final decisions by the Board of Regents are to be made at their meeting December 15-16. NYSED is supposed to conduct a “full panel review” of applications from November 17-21. So far, no news on this review. NYSED also said the public can comment on the applications at anytime at charterschools@mail.nysed.gov, but they need information to do so!

The lack of information for the public is such that the Buffalo Teachers Federation (BTF) made a Freedom of Information Law request to secure it. BTF has requested:

- Copies of all applications, charter and otherwise, filed in compliance with

the opening of applications for Buffalo in conformance with the timelines outlined in NYSED’s October 10, 2014 letter.

- All correspondence with the Buffalo School District and School Board members relating to the above notification.

- All documents, criteria and assessments relating to NYSED’s determination for each Buffalo Public School that has been designated as an “Out of Time” school including but not limited to NYSED’s definition/criteria of an “Out of Time” school.

- A list of all other New York State schools and their locations that have been designated as “Out of Time” schools by NYSED.

- Records relating to how schools such as Lafayette High School that received little or no School Improvement Grant (SIG) funding were determined to be “Out of Time” schools.

In making the request the BTF is striving to secure information for the public

concerning how decisions are being made about the public schools. The four Buffalo schools directly involved now, Lafayette, Bennett, East and MLK, have all been branded as “Out of Time.” But no criteria for the designation, and no concern about the specifics of each case — such as Lafayette being denied its SIG funds — are being given. How is it that a public body like NYSED, funded by public dollars, is not providing the public with the information it requires and instead forcing BTF to file a Freedom of Information request?! This is a public institution that has been entirely taken over by private interests and is being used to serve those narrow interests.

Public schools are a social responsibility of government. They are not products; students are not products. They are human beings with rights and schools are a public good belonging to the public and must be controlled by the public.

9 • BUFFALO NEWS TARGETS ORGANIZED RESISTANCE

existing public schools, which themselves are too high. Success Academy, for example, has suspension rates of 15-20 percent while public schools in the same area have rates of 6-9 percent. Charters force out many special needs and English language learners.

All of these facts are completely ignored by those promoting charters as a means to “rescue” students in a “failing educational system.” Why? Why ignore such facts? It is likely because the aim of such editorials, and promotion of private charters by executives like King and Cuomo, is not improving the quality of public education for all. It is to justify the elimination of the public from governance — using the high ideal of the well being of the children. It is to hand over public dollars to private interests, like the financiers of Wall Street. It is to eliminate the Buffalo school district and its unionized workforce, which contributes to better teaching conditions and thus better learning conditions. It is to remove teachers, staff, students and parents — the experts on educational matters — from any role in governance. And it is to sanction the elimination of a *system of public education* and replace it with the chaos of individual private charter schools and state-run schools.

The *News* urges those opposing the privatization of Buffalo schools to “focus on the real problem of providing a sound, quality education to all students.” Agreed. The *News* should do the same, beginning with providing facts that charters can accomplish this.

Raise Quality of System of Public Education

The New York State Constitution also requires the “maintenance and support of a system of free common [public] schools, wherein all the children of this state may be educated.” A *system* of free public schools for all children — those with special needs, English Language Learners, all nationalities, those who are impoverished — a public system for all. Private charters destroy such systems, as is evident in New Orleans, Philadelphia, and elsewhere.

The *News* goes out of its way to defend School Board member Carl Paladino, who has financial interests in several existing charter schools: Health Sciences, Applied Technologies, Tapestry, Aloma D. Johnson and West Buffalo. His private real estate interests secure a 10 percent profit — millions of public dollars, from these interests.

The *News* leaves out that Paladino and the school board are not the ones deciding what happens to the public schools — Cuomo, King, and private interests represented by the Buffalo Niagara Partnership and the appointed Control Board are. King can decide not to approve any plan submitted by the school board, as he has done in the past. Further, a far more powerful player than Paladino is the Partnership’s James Sampson, current president of the Buffalo School Board. It is these private interests and their representatives in government, like Sampson, King and Cuomo, that are the targets of all those fighting to defend public education.

There is no question that the Buffalo public school system needs to be modernized and its quality raised. This can be done by modernizing governance, by having teachers, staff, students and parents as decision makers in matters of education and ensuring that public schools serve the public interest. It means full funding and accountability of government to guarantee the highest quality education. For urban cities like Buffalo, this requires addressing the major issues impacting education, like poverty and government racism.

Syracuse University Students Organize 18-Day Sit-In

Students at Syracuse University organized a sit-in in the lobby of the Chancellor Kent Syverud's office for eighteen days, ending November 20. They took a stand for equality and democracy, demanding that students have a role in decisions on campus. They rejected efforts to run their university more like a corporation and elaborated various demands for changes needed to meet student needs. They received widespread support from campus faculty, unions, and community organizations as well as from students across the country. They organized teach-ins where professors brought their classes for discussion and "teach outs" where student organizers went to classes to engage students in discussion on their rights, including their right to assemble and protest. We reprint on pages 11-13 several articles from their organization, The General Body. Additional materials can be found on their webpage, thegeneralbody.org

* * *

What We Have Achieved

*Tessa Brown, The General Body,
November 20, 2014*

I am here to tell you what we have achieved.

Let us start with the small victories, the met demands: Because we were here, the Student Association president can now e-mail the entire student body. We have secured a 7% increase in Teacher Assistant (TA) pay for 2016, and a commitment to an immediate search for an Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator. Because we were here, Chancellor Syverud added 11 more student positions to 7 Fast Forward workgroups.

We have raised awareness on this campus. We have drawn student, faculty, and staff attention to the fact that the Chancellor changed the language of the mission statement in critical ways, removing language on diversity, democracy, and inclusiveness. We have highlighted that this is the first time in fifty years that the university has not released the financial and salary data necessary for the AAUP (American Association of University Professors) to write its annual Z report. And by living through it ourselves, we have exposed the kind of policing and legal intimidating that is possible in the corporate university. Chancellor Syverud, we are still waiting for you to explain what you meant by these envelopes, provided, as Provost Spina wrote, "to afford those students who continued to remain in the building maximum due process."

These cryptic, highlighted forms suggest we obstructed teaching. But in this space we held teach-ins every day — our tenured and untenured faculty as well as graduate students brought their students here to learn from us, because, in this building lobby, we opened up space for honest and critical dialogue — something so necessary to this campus that they had to leave their buildings to come here and learn. And for every class that came here, three more invited us to visit and speak with them.

In this space, we created the community we need to live in. But — as one member reminds us — it was not all tea and roses. We created a space that is anti-racist. That did not mean racist ideologies disappeared — but it meant we respect and love each other so much in here that we can speak out when aggressions manifest themselves. We created a space that is anti-ableist. That does not mean this space is accessible — look around, this built environment is inaccessible — but our anti-ableism means another member can speak out, reminding us to stay on the ground floor,

What We Have Achieved • 12

We Are Leaving This Building, But We Are Not Going Anywhere

*Vani Kannan, The General Body,
November 20, 2014*

My name is Vani Kannan, and I am going to talk about where THE General Body is going next.

Last night we gathered to discuss our future. The conversation went late into the night, and reinforced for me the strength, passion, clarity, and commitment to each other and to this campus that I have observed throughout this movement.

Being in this room has been one of the greatest educations of my life. The deep commitment of the people in this room to each other, to the university and to the Syracuse community, should not be underestimated.

The faculty, staff, and community support we have received this week speaks more loudly than any one person can.

The messages of solidarity from universities across the country, where students are struggling with the same corporate imperatives speak more loudly than any one person can.

The letters from students, alumni, faculty, staff, and community members about their individual, collective, and institutional struggles speak more loudly than any one person can.

And the messages of solidarity pressed against those glass windows, which speak to the crackdown on dissent nationally and globally — scream much louder than any one person can.

This movement is growing.

This is our 18th day in Crouse-Hinds. After this press conference, we will be leaving.

We are leaving with the knowledge that what we are asking the Chancellor to commit to works towards equity, justice, and safety for every person here today and every person not here.

We are moving into phase two of The General Body, starting now. This new phase represents a growing body of students, faculty, staff, and community members who refuse to submit to undemocratic administrative policies that hurt this campus and this community.

We will continue to fight alongside each other despite the forces that are trying to divide us.

When we look back, and look around, we know we are in good company.

Now, today, we are leaving this building, but we are not going anywhere.

11 • WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED

and we will listen. We created a space that is sustainable, where we clean and cook and donate extra food and reuse our waste where we can. It does not mean we have zero emissions, but it is a start. And we created a space that is anti-rape, where forty strangers can come sleep on the floor together and be safe, respecting each other's boundaries—

Except.

Except for the armed DPS (Department of Public Service) guards who sit in groups of two and three at the doors.

Who videotape and scan our IDs for our own safety so that the Assistant General Counsel of this university can threaten us.

DPS guards, as personally kind as they may be, who took pictures of us in our sleep—the most egregious non-consensual action that took place in here.

To those of you who never got to visit, I wish we could have shared this space with you, but I am glad we can promise there will be so many more opportunities for us to come together in the future. And we will bring into that future our new knowledge from this experience. Every day we learned the limits and the possibilities of this university. We wrote together, studied together, protested together, enacted our shared values together. We were also policed together, marginalized together, visibly obstructed from view together, legally threatened together. All of that is Syracuse.



This complex and contradictory Syracuse existed before Chancellor Syverud arrived and it will exist after he is gone. But we are here to fight and to bear witness to his efforts to unilaterally shift our culture and to deny our voices in the processes through which this university evolves.

We stand before you as the bodies who get forgotten in statistics: the twenty percent of women who will be raped on this campus;

the thirty percent of enrolled students who are graduate students teaching for an unlivable wage; the thirty percent of students who are of color being devalued and explicitly written out of the constitutional documents of this university; the eighty percent of students who need some kind of financial assistance to attend this school.

And lest you think that climate change does not affect us here in Syracuse, we have only to look west and acknowledge the eight people who died around Buffalo in the cataclysmic snowstorm they are suffering through, to recognize that climate change touches all of us on this planet, including here in central New York.

We believe in the right of every college student in this country to go to a college that values them, that is accessible, that provides adequate health services, that is invested in the health of this planet, that values its students' health and safety enough to take an active stand against the cultures of rape, racism, ablism, and homophobia that are endemic on campuses across America. This is not acceptable for any school and it is not acceptable for Syracuse. And we will keep fighting until Chancellor Syverud makes a written commitment to honor these critical demands.



CALLING ON SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY CHANCELLOR SYVERUD:

Sign A Good Faith Commitment Contract

November 19, 2014

The General Body calls on Chancellor Syverud to sign the following Good Faith Commitment Contract to demonstrate his commitment to the needs of the campus community. These six crucial student needs were not addressed in the Chancellor's "final response" to students' needs, grievances, and solutions. We also ask that the Chancellor fulfill his commitment to sign a non-retaliation agreement, thus ensuring that students, faculty, and staff participating in the sit-in will not face punitive measures for their work to address these pressing problems.

A committed and growing group of faculty, students, parents, and alumni await the Chancellor's commitment to addressing these crucial campus needs.

* * *

Demonstrating my good faith commitment to the university community, I, Chancellor Syverud, commit to the following critical needs:

I, Chancellor Syverud, commit to not cutting any more programs or scholarships that recruit and admit US students of color

and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

I, Chancellor Syverud, commit to the original contract made to the POSSE program, three years of which were prematurely cut without consulting a single student.

I, Chancellor Syverud, commit to hiring seven more counselors for Syracuse University's Counseling Center, as the International Association of Counseling Services, SU's accrediting agency for counseling, recommends. The agency recommends one counselor for every 1,000 students.

I, Chancellor Syverud, commit to hiring an additional psychiatrist to the one that serves nearly 24,000 students on both SUNY ESF and SU's campus. This is in addition to the psychiatric nurse that the university is currently searching for.

I, Chancellor Syverud, commit to honoring and implementing the recommendations of the Workgroup on Sexual Violence Prevention, Education, and Advocacy, which was created after community outcry in response to the irresponsible

closure of the Advocacy Center.

I, Chancellor Syverud, commit to financial transparency on campus, including providing the necessary salary data to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). Last year's failure to provide this data led to the Syracuse University's AAUP's inability to write the Z report (a critical data source on faculty salaries) for the first time in nearly 50 years. I further commit to making a comprehensive budget breakdown public, including student tuition, the \$1.044 billion raised in The Campaign for SU, the amount of money spent on student services, community projects, scholarships, and the amount of money given to the university from both the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security.

After addressing these critical university community needs, I, Chancellor Syverud, look forward to a more inclusive governance process that includes the entire university as we work toward our common goals of safety, diversity, accessibility, equality, social justice, and democracy.

Letter of Solidarity from Colgate University Students

Colgate University students and professors visited the Syracuse campus to show their support during the sit-in and sent the letter below when the sit-in concluded. Their letter is one among many received.

* * *

To The General Body and students of Syracuse University,

As you enter the next stage of your protest after spending 18 consecutive days in Crouse-Hinds Hall, we salute your resolve, and we, at Colgate University, stand in solidarity with you and your movement for change on your campus. We wholeheartedly support your ongoing battle and we are outraged at the complete lack of respect and dignity the Syracuse University administration has shown THE General Body. We are disheartened by the University's lack of response to your

reasonable and necessary demands. You are fighting for the safety, health, inclusion, and security of all Syracuse students and your fight has not gone unnoticed. Your struggle is our struggle.

Our admiration for your dedication runs deep. We too are strongly against the changes made in the Fast Forward platform, and agree with you that Syracuse University needs to re-wind and focus on creating an open environment for students of all backgrounds. We support your fight for campus accessibility, divestment from fossil fuels, a positive and safe sexual climate, inclusivity and transparency, attention to mental health services, the celebration of Indigenous Peoples Day and an overall environment that benefits students of all backgrounds.

We stand firmly against the actions of the Syracuse University administration,

which has locked students in over the weekend, put in barriers to block student visibility, stationed security guards at the space, and taken other steps to block justice and the right to freedom of assembly. At our own sit-in, we first-hand experienced the importance of this right and are appalled at what has been happening during THE General Body's movement. As we are still in the process of an ongoing and long struggle to transform the climate of Colgate University, it should be noted that our struggles are part of a general struggle to transform education from its corporate model to a democratic and equal one.

Individuals must work together to combat systemic and cultural oppression and marginalization. We are inspired by your efforts and send you solidarity and support as your movement continues.

“A Light for Mexico” Vigils Held Worldwide Demand Return of Missing Students

On November 11, vigils for the 43 missing Mexican students from Ayotzinapa, Guerrero were held around the world. Many were organized by students on their campuses, as well as outside Mexico's embassies and consulates, to denounce the corruption of the state that led to the assault on the students September 26 in Iguala and their subsequent disappearance.

So far 74 people have been arrested in the case. They include: the Mayor of Iguala, Jose Luis Abarca, and his wife Maria de Los Angeles Pineda, who were arrested on November 6; their political allies; policemen and cartel members; as well as three gunmen, said to have been working for the local drug gang, whose evidence was heard on November 7.

The gunmen testified that the students were handed over to them by the Iguala police force — who seized them on the orders of Mayor Abarca and his wife. Ms. Pineda was holding a rally and was said to have been concerned that the students would disrupt the activity. The students were taken by truck to a garbage dump in neighboring Cocula. Fifteen suffocated in transit in the tightly-packed vehicle, said the gunmen. The rest were marched into a hollow, shot, and their bodies doused with gasoline and set ablaze. The assassins were then ordered by the drug gang to collect the ashes and dump them in the San Juan River.

The people's distrust of the Mexican state and its corruption means that every fact it provides to the public is being received with great skepticism, to the point that many of the parents of the missing students will not accept the story they are being told until unequivocal and verifiable proof of what happened to their children is provided.

The increase in drug trafficking and the brutality and arming of the cartels is largely the result of the U.S. “war on drugs,” which has served to intensify problems in countries like Mexico. The U.S. agencies, especially the CIA and DEA are known for fostering the drug



trade and arming the cartels and ensuring their impunity to act. The situation with the students stems from a combination of this U.S. interference and the chaos it has unleashed, and the corruption of the Mexican state. The chaos, in turn, is used as justification for U.S. policing agencies, like the FBI and DEA inside Mexico.

Many actions have taken place across the U.S. in support of the students and the struggle against U.S. interference and its “war on drugs.”

Actions Continue Across Mexico

On November 11, the teachers in Guerrero State, home of the Ayotzinapa teacher-training college where the 43 students studied, held protests at the ruling PRI party's Chilpancingo headquarters. Youth Secretary Luis Adrian Ramirez Ortiz criticized the protests as violent. Ortiz has also called for the president responsible for the 1968 Tlatelolco Massacre, Gustavo Diaz Ordaz, to be returned to power.

That morning five busloads of Ayotzinapa students took control of the Palo Blanco toll booth on the Acapulco-Mexico City Highway, allowing motorists free passage, while asking for support for their efforts to obtain justice.

On November 12, teachers in Guerrero State held protests at the state parliament buildings and the Education building in the capital Chilpancingo. They demonstrated at the government buildings associated with Bernardo Ortega Jimenez,

a politician widely known to be associated with organized crime. The teachers attempted to detain another lawmaker from the opposition PRD party, Tomas Hernandez Palma, a close associate of former Guerrero State Governor Angel Aguirre. Guerrero's interim Governor Rogelio Ortega did not show his face.

Students protested in Michoacan State, with actions at the airport, PRI headquarters and the state's finance ministry.

In Oaxaca, more than 3,000 students from the state's 11 rural schools, like Ayotzinapa, announced an indefinite work strike in support of the 43 missing students.

On November 12, students took over buses, which they used to travel to several points to stage protests. They temporarily took over the State Public Security offices to demand the resignation of a state police commander who fired on protesting students at the Teposcolula experimental teacher-training school.

Protests were also held at the Monte Alban archaeological zone and Oaxaca government buildings. The same day, students took over highway tollbooths and blocked highways leading to Puerto Escondido and San Juan Bautista Coixtlahuaca, in the Mixteca region.

Protests are also growing in Mexico City, where enormous marches continue.

The Mexican Inter-university Students Assembly has called for the boycott of the

Mexican Students • 15

FBI Fomenting Violence to Repress Ferguson Actions

The FBI has taken two pre-emptive actions threatening organizers for nationwide demonstrations in Ferguson and nationwide the day of or day after the Grand Jury decision in the Michael Brown case is announced. This could come Sunday, November 23.

First, in mid-November the FBI circulated a bulletin to police agencies around the country and the media that they anticipated violence at the protests — despite concerted efforts by protest organizers to have peaceful actions. Demonstration organizers in Ferguson have been making every effort to block police violence, including asking that rubber bullets and tear gas not be used and police not be in riot gear. As one organizer put it, “You don’t approach peaceful protesters in your community as if they’re enemy combatants and expect that not to be a problem.” Police have refused these requests.

Organizers have brought out that violence that has occurred in the past was instigated by the various police agencies (St. Louis, county and state police, as well as FBI, DEA, AFT and National Guard). When police have not interfered, the demonstrations have proceeded militantly and without violence.

The FBI ignores this reality and according to news reports said, “The announcement of the grand jury’s decision will likely be exploited by some individuals to justify threats and attacks against law enforcement and critical

infrastructure.” This addition of “critical infrastructure” — which has not been a target by any of the many actions in Ferguson and elsewhere — is designed to invoke the threat of terrorism. The bulletin adds, “The FBI assesses those infiltrating and exploiting otherwise legitimate public demonstrations with the intent to incite and engage in violence could be armed with bladed weapons or firearms, equipped with tactical gear/gas masks, or bulletproof vests to mitigate law enforcement measures.”

In this manner, any demonstrators with gas masks in preparation for tear gas, which has been widely used by police in Ferguson and numerous other demonstrations, will be considered threats. As well, the stage has been set for police infiltrators to instigate violence and then blame demonstrators, as has occurred at many demonstrations. This serves to divert from the just demands of protesters, in this case demanding an end to the racist violence and killings by police of unarmed youth.

The same day news of the bulletin circulated, Missouri Governor Jay Nixon declared a state of emergency and called out the National Guard. The State of Emergency gives the Governor the right not only to use the military but to suspend basic rights. The Guard is to be used to protect the police command center and private property.

Then, with timing that cannot be considered coincidental, on November

21 the FBI arrested two African American men after a “sting” operation. The FBI claimed the two were members of a “militant group,” and had acquired explosives for pipe bombs for use in Ferguson. They also were charged with purchasing two pistols under false pretenses. These FBI “sting” operations, often using paid informants, have regularly served to involve people in activities they would otherwise not do on their own. They invariably take place just before planned demonstrations, so as to delegitimize their content and make it appear violent terrorists are involved. They also justify the stepped up police and military presence and violence by police at the actions themselves. And they can be fabricated and used to intimidate organizers and disrupt planning.

Taken together, the FBI is giving every indication that they will instigate violence, using their informants and provocateurs, and justify suppression of demonstrations. And they will not limit such attacks to Ferguson. Their bulletin emphasized that “violence” by protesters could occur in Ferguson and nationwide. This can be read to mean FBI actions against demonstrators and to discredit their just actions will occur in Ferguson and nationwide. It is the FBI and police agencies that are the source of violence, including the many racist police killings. They have been and will continue to be a target of protesters demanding *Justice Now!*

14 • MEXICAN STUDENTS

2014 Central American and Caribbean Games, taking place in Veracruz, Mexico, November 14-30.

On November 12 protesters extinguished the game’s torch with a bucket of water as it traveled through the city of Xalapa. Slogans included, “We don’t want games, we want justice.” One poster read, “Mexico is not a mass grave,” and another, “I think, therefore they disappear me.”

The Mexican Inter-university Students Assembly, announced a national strike on November 20 to protest the government’s ineffective investigation into the case of

the 43 missing Ayotzinapa students. The assembly, attended by students from 79 schools, has decided to support the national strike called by the parents of the missing students.

General Strike Called for November 20

In response to the continued failure of public officials to return the 43 students forcibly disappeared by police on September 27, family members of the students joined together November 12 to announce that three brigades will travel throughout Mexico to rally public support for justice

in the case. The brigades will converge in Mexico City’s Zocalo Plaza on November 20, when a national strike is called for the anniversary of the start of the Mexican Revolution. The actions announced for November 20 include a one-day strike at different schools, companies and organizations throughout the country.

The spokesperson for the families of the missing Mexican students, Felipe de la Cruz, said the families will not rest until their children come home and “the flame of civil insurgency is burning” across the country.

Actions Planned Nationwide to Demand Justice for Mike Brown and All Those Killed in Government Organized Racist Attacks

The Grand Jury for the Mike Brown case — the unarmed African American teenager killed by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri — is expected to announce a decision. This could occur on Sunday, November 23. Demonstrations in Ferguson and cities across the country are planned, the day of or day after the announcement. This includes Buffalo, with an action planned at 5pm the day after the announcement at Bailey and Millicent Avenues (see announcement p.2).

The widespread nature of the actions makes clear that people everywhere, from all walks of life, are demanding an end to racist police killings and all the many government organized racist attacks.

Ferguson itself has kept up their daily demonstrations, going on now more than 100 days. They have targeted police and the county prosecutor, with a recent demonstration of more than 100 demanding he resign and a special prosecutor be appointed for the case.

It is the prosecutor who brings the case before the Grand Jury and no one thinks the case is being made. While deliberations are secret, it has been leaked that Wilson himself testified, as well as the coroner who did an autopsy at the request of the Brown family. It is not known if all the other witnesses testified, nor what kind of examination the prosecutor did of Wilson. Commonly prosecutors bend over backward to assist police that are charged and that is likely the case in this instance. For all these reasons, many think the Grand Jury will not indict, or at best will do so only on lesser charges. The Justice Department, because racist police killings have not been made a federal



crime, is investigating civil rights charges. It too has indicated no charges will be filed, but it is still “investigating.”

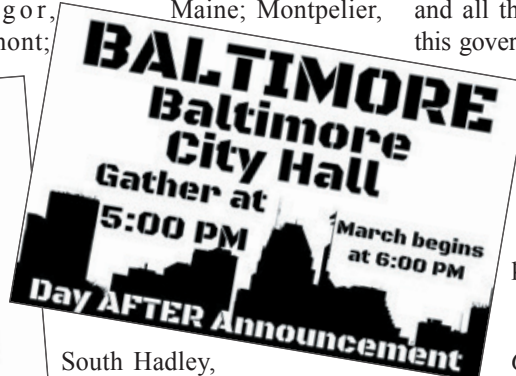
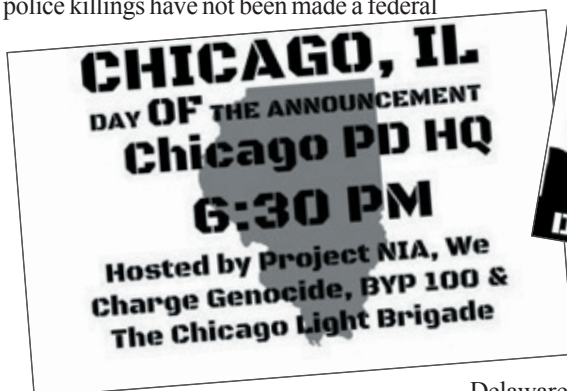
Whatever the result, actions are going forward as people do not consider that justice will be served. And the scope of the demonstrations makes clear that the demand for equal rights and an end to police killings and impunity are widespread. To name just some of the cities involved: Jacksonville, Sanford, Tallahassee and Tampa, Florida; Mobile, Alabama; Atlanta and Kennesaw, Georgia; Richmond, Virginia; Durham, Greensboro and Raleigh, North Carolina; Dunlap, Knoxville, Louisville, Memphis and Nashville, Tennessee; New Orleans, Louisiana; Austin, Dallas, and Houston, Texas; Bangor, Maine; Montpelier, Vermont;

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Columbus and Monroeville, Ohio; Detroit, Grand Rapids and Jackson, Michigan; Indianapolis, Indiana; Columbia, Missouri; Oshkosh and Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Duluth, Minnesota; Des Moines, Iowa City and Waterloo, Iowa; Lawrence and Topeka, Kansas; Denver, Colorado; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Flagstaff, Phoenix and Tucson, Arizona; Salt Lake City, Utah; Seattle and Tacoma, Washington; Portland, Oregon; Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, California.

Buffalo Forum joins all those across the country in demanding that police killings be stopped and treated like the crimes they are. These attacks are government organized and aimed at suppressing African Americans and all those standing up to resist. It is this government racism and impunity that

are the crimes and all those responsible from top to bottom must be punished. We salute all those organizing resistance and refusing to be intimidated by FBI and the violence of the police agencies.

*Step Up the Fight Against
Government Organized Racist
Killings and Attacks!
Impunity is the Crime,
Resistance the Solution!*



South Hadley, Massachusetts; Hartford, Connecticut; Wilmington, Delaware; Albany and Buffalo, New York;