

Buffalo Forum



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

Workers of all countries, unite!

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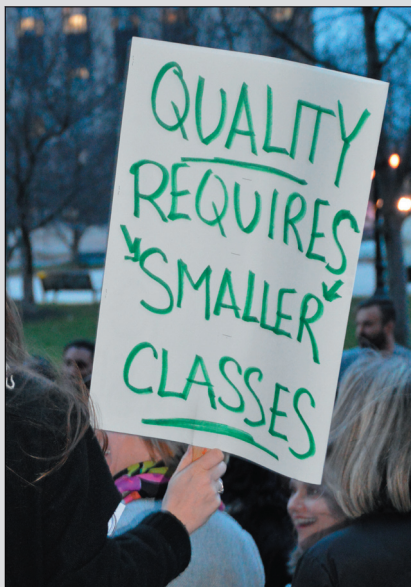
November 20, 2015

Vol. 19 #11

Quality, Transfers and Smaller Classes

According to State Education Commissioner Elia, her recent "Order" (Receivership Agreement) was for purposes of "rapid improvement in student achievement." The "Order" was imposed on five of the 25 Buffalo Schools the state has taken over, including football champs South Park, and Burgard, BEST, Futures and West Hertel. The Commissioner specifically refused the demand from teachers for smaller classes as a vital means to improve the quality of education. She refused to consider the demand because the teachers were the ones making it. She said only her local receiver in Buffalo, Dr. Cash, could make the demand. Dr. Cash refused, even though he has said repeatedly that smaller classes

Quality, Transfers and Smaller Classes • 10



Stop Bombing Syria and Defend the Rights of Refugees

The U.S. response to the violence and horrific crimes against civilians in Paris November 13 has mainly been to increase U.S. aggression. This includes increasing the bombings of the people of Syria and increasing the number of Special Forces on the ground there. These forces

are known for their illegal black ops, including assassinations and attacks on civilians.

According to President Obama, speaking in Turkey November 16, "Our coalition [the U.S. and NATO] is intensifying

Stop Bombing Syria • 3

Statement of the U.S. Marxist-Leninist Organization on the Paris Violence and Crimes

The U.S. Marxist-Leninist Organization (USMLO) condemns the brutal violence and crimes that occurred November 13 in Paris, France, directed against innocent civilians. We express our condolences to the families and friends of all the victims. Such terrible crimes directed at working

people do not contribute to solving problems. We also mourn the deaths and injury of the tens of thousands of innocent civilians in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen and elsewhere, victims of U.S. state terrorism. Further measures now by the

Paris Violence • 2

UNITED AGAINST STATE DICTATE

Teachers, Parents, Students Say NO! to Receivership and YES! to Public Control

Hundreds of teachers, joined by many parents and students demonstrated to oppose receivership of Buffalo Public Schools, November 18 at Buffalo City Hall. Called by the Buffalo Teachers Federation (BTF), the action specifically countered the latest action by the state to impose Education Commissioner Elia's "Order." Buffalo is the only city statewide that is being subjected to the "Order."

Elia could have called for negotiations, she could have mandated improvements to curriculum, and she could have rejected the most harmful of the requests submitted

United Against State Dictate • 7



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I • PARIS VIOLENCE

U.S. to attack the rights of the peoples, such as increasing the bombing of Syria, also do not solve any problem. On the contrary, they create a more dangerous situation for all.

Measures abroad and at home further depriving the peoples of their rights are not acceptable. The Syrians are not to blame for the Paris violence. They are not to blame for the U.S. instigated war in their country, where the U.S. is attempting to impose yet another regime change. Nowhere has U.S. aggression and regime change brought democracy or stability. What it has unleashed is violence and anarchy as the U.S. strives relentlessly for world domination.

The U.S. and the U.S.-led NATO bloc are the ones most responsible for the death and destruction occurring worldwide. They are the ones guilty of collective punishment and civilian massacres and the terrorism of drone attacks and bombings.

It is also the U.S. state and its monopoly media that are responsible not for the calm and sober responses needed, but for whipping up hysteria about refugees. How are refugees the threat? How is collective punishment the

answer? Why are Muslims again being targeted for more profiling and repression here and abroad? All of this serves to divert from U.S. crimes, including racist government profiling, more spying, and more aggression abroad, while justifying more attacks on the peoples. Since 1980, none of the millions of refugees the U.S. has settled, including Syrians, has committed a terrorist attack. To contribute to security, the rights of refugees and all the peoples must be defended.

It is worth asking who stands to gain from the Paris violence. Certainly not the Syrians. It is serving to justify yet more attacks and aggression against the peoples, while hiding who is most responsible for such crimes — the U.S.

USMLO condemns U.S. terrorism and crimes and use of force against the peoples in the name of security. While condemning terrorist acts like that in Paris, we firmly support the resistance to U.S. aggression abroad and its racist and anti-people repression at home. We reject the hysteria against refugees and U.S. violence and use of force. Political solutions are needed. Security at home and abroad lies in the fight for the rights of all.

Buffalo action demands \$15 minimum wage and unions for all now.



I • STOP BOMBING SYRIA

our airstrikes — more than 8,000 to date.” These bombings are mainly impacting the peoples of Syria and Iraq, causing yet more deaths of civilians, destruction of infrastructure like hospitals and forcing more to become refugees.

Obama also announced that the U.S. is “Streamlining the process by which we share intelligence and operational military information with France. This will allow our personnel to pass threat information, including on ISIL, to our French partners even more quickly and more often.” It also means the U.S. will gain more such information more often and use it as it has in the past — not to protect civilians but to illegally spy on them, on foreign government officials and carry out more assassinations and drone strikes, all in the name of security.

Attacking the rights of the peoples, in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine Yemen and elsewhere serves only to create an even more dangerous situation, as the years of war against the peoples of Iraq and Afghanistan show. The invasion of Afghanistan occurred in the name of protecting the U.S. after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It has not brought more security. War against Iraq has not. Efforts at regime change in Syria, including U.S. arming and training various forces, has also solved no problem and only unleashed greater insecurity and violence.

The solution required is not intensifying military action but defending the rights of the peoples abroad and at home. This means first of all bringing *All U.S. Troops Home Now!* This is what would contribute to peace and security. It means ending the use of force to settle conflicts and instead putting forward political solutions and use of diplomacy.

Defend the Rights of Refugees

Inside the U.S., the government is engaged in a broad attack on the rights of refugees and attempting to foment divisions along religious and other lines. While President Obama has said he will proceed with settling 10,000 Syrian refugees in the U.S., he is also supporting yet more profiling and security checks. That is, Syrians are

being collectively punished simply for being Syrian and no other reason. They have long been subjected to increased security measures that many other refugees and students here on visas do not face. The screening process for Syrian refugees



already takes up to 3 years and requires 21 steps with numerous agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security.

Syrians are not responsible for the actions in Paris, just as the people of Afghanistan were not responsible for 9/11. Collective punishment is a crime, not an answer. The U.S. is responsible for the continuing conflict in Syria, yet it takes no responsibility for this and instead targets the refugees and Syrians as a whole.

Since 1980, none of the millions of refugees the U.S. has settled, including Syrians, has committed a terrorist attack. The U.S. government has. Defending the rights of refugees is a vital part of countering efforts to divide and further terrorize the people, abroad and at home.

Signs of More War and Growing Conflicts Inside the U.S.

The response by various politicians and governors inside the U.S. indicate the growing conflicts within U.S. ruling circles in conditions where the rulers can provide no solutions. There is growing inequality, great economic and social insecurity, and yet more war on the horizon. There are signs of the “cold” civil war now underway, becoming a hot conflict. For example, the majority of Governors have said they would not accept refugees. This includes those in Michigan, home to the largest Arab population in the country, Illinois, Ohio, Wisconsin as well as many southern states. House Republican Caucus Chair

Glen Casada said: “We need to activate the Tennessee National Guard and stop [Syrian refugees] from coming in to the state by whatever means we can.”

New York Governor Cuomo, who said he would accept refugees, also raised this same issue, saying, “Where does it say in the state constitution you can refuse a person placed by the federal government? What are you going to have your militia fight the federal government at the borders of your state?” While saying other Governors were making purely political statements, the fact that the possibility of use of National Guard is being raised shows the concern that exists for such a confrontation.

Additionally, signs of preparations for broader war and repression have also occurred. The budget bill passed by Congress completely suspended the debt ceiling. This means, in the name of a national emergency, President Obama can run up unlimited debt using war bonds, or perhaps “stopping terrorism” bonds, to finance war actions. Further, Obama vetoed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), an unusual action as it provides funding for the Pentagon. A main reason was his demand to close Guantánamo and instead set up a maximum security military detention camp inside the U.S. This is a so civilian, including protesters, or striking longshoremen, or refugees or any others branded a “threat,” can be held in indefinite detention inside the U.S. While Congress has now passed a second, very similar NDAA, Obama has yet to sign it.

Defending Rights Provides Security

It is clear that political solutions and peaceful means are not on the U.S. agenda as it continues to strive for world domination. Indeed yet more violence and repression are being unleashed, as the increased bombings, plans for a U.S. Guantánamo, and continued police killings with impunity show.

As the many demonstrations organized across the country in support of refugees and against war and government racism show, stepping up the fight for the rights of all abroad and at home is the source of security.

Statement of the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) on the Paris Violence

November 14, 2015

The Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) categorically condemns the heinous crimes committed in Paris, France on the afternoon of November 13. We express our deepest sympathies with the families, friends and colleagues of the victims and call for sober-minded measures to be taken which do not turn the French and world's people into targets of counter-violence. Measures which further deprive the people of their rights in the name of protecting the security of the French state are not an acceptable answer.

The reactionary violence displayed in Paris is directed against the working people who are not to blame for the instigation of state terrorism but are its victims. Attempts

to protect the French state, which deprive the people of their rights and, furthermore, target sections of the people for attack, are self-serving and create an even more dangerous situation.

CPC(M-L) calls on its members and supporters to take these events very seriously, remain calm and lead their peers to draw warranted conclusions. Who is behind these attacks? Are they an attempt to further murky the waters surrounding the U.S. striving to bring about regime change in Syria, which is now leading to a new round of violence, such as the targeting of a hospital in Afghanistan by the U.S. and to bombings such as what took place in Lebanon that targeted Hezbollah, and

other similar activities?

All of it shows the anarchy and violence, which has been unleashed by the U.S. striving for world domination in which the NATO bloc is doing its utmost to isolate Russia and not permit a political solution to problems which have emerged.

CPC(M-L) reiterates its opposition to the use of force to settle conflicts. We reiterate our opposition to the use of the state to suppress the rights of the people in the name of security. All of it shows that political solutions are not on the agenda of the U.S. and European powers, as well as Canada. Instead, civil wars and state terrorism are fomented to get an upper hand. It must not pass!

Governors Have No Right to Exclude Syrian Refugees

Marjorie Cohn, Truthout, November 19, 2015

As the world reels from the horrific terrorist attacks in Paris last week, more than half of U.S. governors began lining up to scapegoat Syrian refugees fleeing violence in their country. Of those 27 governors, all but one are Republicans. Democrat Maggie Hassan of New Hampshire joined the gubernatorial group and called for the United States to refuse to admit those fleeing Syria. Many proclaimed they would deny entry to the refugees. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott wrote to President Barack Obama: "I write to inform you that the State of Texas will not accept any refugees from Syria in the wake of the deadly terrorist attack in Paris."

A Republican congressman from Tennessee, House Republican Caucus Chair Glen Casada, wants the National Guard to round up Syrian refugees already settled there and prevent others from entering Tennessee. "We need to activate the Tennessee National Guard and stop [Syrian refugees] from coming in to the state by whatever means we can," he said.

But only the federal government — not the states — has the power to decide if and where refugees can settle in this country.

The Law on States' Rights and Immigration

In 2012, the Supreme Court reaffirmed in *Arizona v. United States* that "The Government of the United States has broad, undoubted power over the subject of immigration and the status of aliens." Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote for the majority, "Returning an alien to his own country may be deemed inappropriate ... The foreign state may be mired in civil war, complicit in political persecution, or enduring conditions that create a real risk that the alien or his family will be harmed upon return." Kennedy noted that under the supremacy clause of the U.S. Constitution, "Congress has the power to preempt state law." States cannot regulate conduct in a field that Congress "has determined must be regulated by its exclusive governance," Kennedy added. "Federal law makes a single sovereign responsible for maintaining a comprehensive and unified system to keep track of aliens within the Nation's borders."

While states cannot refuse to admit refugees, they may make resettlement more onerous.

The *1980 Refugee Act* grants authority to the president to determine how many refugees may be admitted to the United States. The president must consider whether "an unforeseen emergency refugee situation exists" and whether "the admission of certain refugees in response to the emergency refugee situation is justified by grave humanitarian concerns or is otherwise in the national interest."

Obama said he will continue with his plan to admit 10,000 Syrian refugees in 2015, stating "many of these refugees are the victims of terrorism themselves ... That's what they're fleeing. Slamming the door in their faces would be a betrayal of our values."

"Our nations can welcome refugees who are desperately seeking safety and ensure our own security," he added, citing rigorous screening and security checks. "We can and must do both."

Republican presidential candidates, including Marco Rubio and Ben Carson, oppose the admission of Syrian refugees to the United States. Donald Trump says if he's elected president, "they're going

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4 • SYRIAN REFUGEES

back.”

Responding to Jeb Bush, who wants to focus assistance efforts on Christian refugees fleeing Syria, Obama retorted, “That’s shameful. That’s not American. That’s not who we are. We don’t have religious tests to our compassion.” In fact, in addition to Christians, Kurds, Yazidis, Alawites, Shiite Muslims and Sunni Muslims have been targeted for persecution by ISIS.

Refugee Screening and Resettlement

While states cannot refuse to admit refugees, they may make resettlement more onerous by denying resources, including housing assistance, to the federal government. If governors tried to block certain categories of refugees, they would be vulnerable to discrimination lawsuits.

Since 1980, none of the millions of refugees the U.S. has welcomed has committed a terrorist attack.

Security screenings for refugees are conducted by several federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, FBI, National Counterterrorism Center and National Security Council. “The vetting process now in place is already a dreadful maze—a Rubik’s Cube of bureaucracies practically guaranteeing that few Syrians will ever set foot on our shores,” according to James Jennings, president of Conscience International, a humanitarian organization that delivers aid to Syrian refugees in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Greece. “The process takes up to three years and requires 21 steps with numerous agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, all required to sign off. There is next to no chance that a terrorist could get in under the present system.”

Kevin Appleby, director of the Migration and Refugee Services Office of Migration and Refugee Policy at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, concurs. “These refugees are the most vetted, they go through more security screening than any arrivals to the United States,” he told the *Los Angeles Times*.

Muslims constitute the largest proportion of victims of terrorism, with those in Syria and Iraq leading the pack. [...]

Indeed, according to a 2012 report of the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center, between 82 percent and 97 percent of the victims of religiously motivated terror attacks during the previous five years were Muslims.

Sudden Proliferation of Anti-Refugee Legislation

Two GOP presidential hopefuls are introducing legislation to prevent or slow down the migration of Syrian refugees to the United States. Senator Ted Cruz is reportedly drafting a bill that would forbid Syrian Muslim refugees from entering the United States. It would, however, welcome Christians. Sen. Rand Paul will introduce a bill to place an immediate moratorium on U.S. visas, preventing refugees and “others from obtaining visas to immigrate, visit, or study in the U.S. from about 30 countries that have significant jihadist movements.” Paul plans to pay for the legislation “with a special tax on arms sales to any of these countries.”

Later this week, a subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee will take up security matters related to Syrian refugees. [...]

There is no evidence that refugees pose a security risk. The Paris attackers were not refugees, although one of them [reportedly] used a fake Syrian passport; they were born in Europe. Since 1980, none of the millions of refugees the United States has welcomed — many of them from the Middle East — has committed a terrorist attack. The 9/11 hijackers entered the United States legally on student or tourist visas. The Boston Marathon bombers were not refugees.

The charge that refugees are a threat to the United States is a tempest in a teapot. If we want to stop terrorism, we should stop killing innocent civilians in other countries.

Bombing Is Not the Solution

Western airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq and Syria have killed at least 459 civilians, including more than 100 children, according to the *Guardian*. French President François Hollande retaliated for the Paris attacks by bombing Raqqa, thought to be

the “headquarters” of ISIS. Raqqa is a city with hundreds of thousands of civilians. The bombs struck the electricity grid, a museum and clinics. Untold numbers of people have been injured or killed in the strikes.

The invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, and drone bombings in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Libya and Syria have not destroyed ISIS. [...]

That is why the bombing by the United States and France must stop immediately. A diplomatic solution involving all players in the region, including Iran, Russia and China, should be seriously pursued.

Arms sales must be halted. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait have spent billions of dollars arming the opposition to the Assad regime but ISIS is a beneficiary of those weapons. The French have a \$10 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia, and Obama has concluded more than \$100 billion in arms sales to the Saudis during the past five years. [...]

The United States should welcome many more than the 10,000 Syrian refugees Obama has agreed to accept. We have a moral responsibility to provide refuge to those displaced by U.S. actions, which contributed to destabilizing the entire region with invasions and regime changes since 2001.



Buffalo rally of more than 100 people November 19 opposed attacks on refugees and welcomed plans for Syrians to settle here.

MISSOURI, ITHACA, EASTERN MICHIGAN

Students Take Action Against Institutional Racism

Students at the University of Missouri, Columbia, organized numerous actions recently, uniting students and faculty in a fight against the institutional racism of the University. Students built on the struggle in Ferguson, demanding rights and targeting government violence, including police killings and the militarized attack criminalizing dissent. Some of the things that stood out about Ferguson were the determined stand and independent efforts by youth to organize in their own interests.

The struggle in Missouri utilized these strengths. Numerous and repeated protests were organized over several months, including walkouts and a teach-in. They served to unite and strengthen the stand to address institutional racism and particularly to hold the University administration accountable for its refusal to address the problems. These included racist incidents on campus and one involving a Nazi swastika painted on a dormitory wall. Organizing also included student efforts to win support of faculty, which was accomplished. A Ferguson activist, Jonathan Butler, now a graduate student, held a widely supported and publicized hunger strike for days. All demanded the university authorities take action, and administrators refused. This refusal reflects the increasingly racist quality of government institutions, along with their refusal to address the serious concerns of the people.

Students then expanded their organizing efforts, to engage the football team in their resistance. The university is an NCAA Division I team and part of the Southeastern Conference, a major force in college football. The team brings in tens of millions of dollars and even forfeiting one game could cost the university \$1 million. The persistent and broad efforts by students and faculty secured the support of more than 30 members of the football team. They joined in calling for the resignation of the president,

announcing they would boycott all football-related activities, including upcoming games. Like other faculty, their coach supported them. This success was in part because a spirit of resistance and determination had been established and persistent efforts to build united action carried out.

Faced with the boycott of the football team and on-going resistance by students and faculty, the president was forced to resign. But the fight did not end there. Students are demanding more African American faculty and a corresponding strengthening of the curriculum.

Ithaca and Eastern Michigan Walk Out

Ithaca College students organized a walkout November 11, opposing institutional racism at their campus. These included invited speakers being subjected to racist remarks by a prominent alumnus and racist actions by one of the fraternities. University officials did nothing. The university claimed, "The College cannot prevent the use of hurtful language on campus." Hundreds walked out of classes and rallied on campus. Students emphasized the need to change the existing university structure to contend with the racism in the institution. They are demanding more of a say.

It is also well known that when students take their stands for rights, such as in support of Palestine, they



Hunger striker Jonathan Butler with other Missouri students opposing institutional racism

are subjected to sanctions, meeting cancellations and other attacks, all in the name of their stand being supposedly "hurtful." Yet when it comes to racist remarks by officials, nothing can be done. Such a double standard also reflects the institutional quality of the problem, where rights of students and faculty are violated while administrators and ranking alumni are protected.

At Eastern Michigan University (EMU) on November 12, students organized a walkout in support of the students at the University of Missouri. EMU students marched through buildings and campus chanting and holding printouts that read "I Stand in Solidarity with Mizzou." Chants of "Black Lives Matter" and "No justice, No peace" rang through the halls of Pray-Harold, Welch Hall and the Student Center, as students marched across campus. The march was one of several held by NAACP campus chapters around the country. "We open our arms in support and solidarity with you in the face of institutionalized racism and are committed to situating ourselves in the battlefields...until justice is served nationwide," students said.



I • UNITED AGAINST STATE DICTATE

by her local receiver, Dr. Cash. She did not. Instead she imposed them, saying her “Order” is effective immediately (November 8) and “need not be submitted to the collective bargaining unit members for ratification,” (see p.11 for more on the “Order”).

The spirited action on November 18 rejected this dictate and the harmful measures the Commissioner has called for, like involuntary transfers at any time and rejection of smaller classes. The united action brought parents and teachers from West Seneca, Iroquois and elsewhere. It built on the demonstrations to *Refuse Receivership* organized by the *BuffaloWeDecide* committee, which also brought many participants and signs to the rally.

Together demonstrators stood up for the *Equal Right to Education for All* and the responsibility of the state to stop attacking rights and start providing for them instead. It was brought out that the power given to the Commissioner to dictate working conditions with no vote by teachers is dangerous to all public workers, statewide and nationwide. Her actions mean any contract that is agreed to can be violated and

changed arbitrarily, by the Commissioner. This is not negotiation it is dictate that is harmful to public education and to the public as a whole.

The Commissioner is not accountable to the public. Her local receiver is also not accountable to the public, but rather to the Commissioner. Both are acting against the interests of teachers and students. Both are contributing to the trend, here and nationwide, to remove the public from governance of public matters, like education.

The demonstrators said NO! As a Bennett teacher and rapper brought to the fore in leading the crowd in chanting, *Whose Schools? Our Schools! Who Decides? We Decide!* Teachers, students and parents have solutions, beginning with Public Control of Public Schools, and by public it is meant Buffalo’s teachers, parents, students and public at large, not an appointed State Commissioner! (For MC ZiLL the rapper’s latest video see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7nMDvbyYWQ&feature=youtu.be>.)

A new public authority that is made up of and fights for the people themselves

is critical, today, not tomorrow. The demonstration was representative of what is needed. It made clear that conscious united action for rights and participating in decision making are necessary for thinking and contributing to the well-being of all. State takeover is directly aimed at blocking such participation in governance and in blocking thinking itself, by our children and adults. It is serving to take our public schools backward and using punishment and undemocratic methods to do so.

United we say *NO! Refuse Receivership! Refuse Elia’s Dictate!* Now is the time to prepare immediate actions for the very first involuntary transfers receiver Cash attempts to make. Teachers, students and parents in the five schools should be on alert and alert others. Fourteen more schools will likely also soon fall under the “Order.” Legal action is not enough! Now is the time for more united organizing, like emergency phone-banking, informational meetings and pickets at the schools, mobilizing more students, parents and teachers in each building district wide. Let us together make clear, these are *Our Schools, We Decide!*



FIGHT FOR THE EQUAL RIGHT TO EDUCATION FOR ALL



Refusing the Tests Helps Receivership Schools

The state takeover of 25 Buffalo public schools is based entirely on student test scores on New York State tests in English and math. These state Common Core tests are given yearly in April to 3-8 graders. The privately designed and owned Common Core tests are also being used for high school and will soon replace the Regents exams. In addition, there are numerous pre and post-tests, now and in the spring, including those for Student Learning Objectives (SLO's).

All of these state tests are used to brand children as "failures." And they are used to then brand teachers and schools as "failures," which then justifies state takeover. All of it diverts from the actual problems that exist and need to be solved, such as lack of funding, smaller classes, increased staffing and modern curriculum. All of it is also used to remove the public from governance of public schools and give sweeping powers to appointed individuals,

as has occurred with state takeover of public schools in cities statewide. The most recent dictate by the Commissioner Buffalo schools shows that these powers are being used to worsen conditions for teaching, which are the conditions for learning (see p. 11).

Further, given that the state tests are not diagnostic tests, which assist teachers, students and parents in identifying strengths and weaknesses, they are educationally unsound. They are not designed to strengthen the quality of thinking and thus learning. Rather they are designed to block thinking and creativity and learning that comes from collective efforts and joining in problem solving. This is done both through the content and the endless hours spent testing rather than teaching. Everyone is being forced to do as they are told, when they are told and how they are told. And to do so while directly seeing children harmed, teaching harmed and the quality of

education wrecked even further.

As teachers and students alike have brought out, this is not education to serve youth and society, but to produce non-thinking drones.

Connected with this, state testing is also used for public humiliation. Test scores are used to brand children as 1, 2, 3 or 4s, with 1 the lowest. Student scores are then posted publicly for these young children. How does such humiliation on a collective and individual basis assist learning? How does it contribute to encouraging and engaging all children?

Further, the Commissioner has mandated that receivership schools specifically pay attention to improving the test scores of 2s, and is requiring principals and teachers to focus on that. Nearly all the "improvement metrics" have this content. Teachers, students and parents, on the other hand, are demanding more quality

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I • QUALITY, TRANSFERS AND SMALLER CLASSES

are critical. That is what he says, not what he does.

The Commissioner did impose the demand by her local receiver to immediately begin *involuntary transfers* of teachers, at *any time*, from any of these five schools. An additional 14 receivership schools will likely soon come under the same "Order." This means teachers from any of these schools can be transferred at any time, regardless of what parents and students think, regardless of the positive roles they play in their buildings, regardless of the disruption and uncertainty such transfers create. How does imposing such uncertainty and removing loved and respected teachers who know their students, who collaborate with their fellow teachers, who put **quality teaching** before a state test score — how does transferring them assist students? Is this actually the aim?

Cash and Elia do not address these issues. According to both, the purpose of the involuntary transfers anytime is to "ensure that the persistently struggling schools are staffed with the most qualified teachers

to meet the needs of the students in those buildings." However, neither provides *any* indication of what such qualifications are. So far, there is no effort to inform teachers, parents or students as to who is and is not considered "qualified" and why.

Why is there no evidence presented to back up the claim that receivership schools are not staffed with qualified teachers? If the aim is improving quality, why exclude the role and voice of parents and students and fellow teachers? Elia and Cash provide no facts or evidence, only test scores on a state exam.

When students and parents assess teachers, they do not do so on the basis of the state test. They do so based on how well the teacher actually teaches day in and day out, how much their students are engaged, challenged to think, learning by questioning, investigating, being creative. These are all things that no test can measure, but are vital to assessing and improving quality. Parents and students also include sports, music, art, poetry, collaboration and much more.

To reduce everything to a state test score

is a means to reduce education, curriculum, and teaching to that narrow state test. It lowers the quality of teaching and learning.

There are no facts or evidence that teachers are the key problem, rather than large classes, insufficient funding, and unfair Common Core testing. There are abundant facts, research and evidence that smaller classes and expanding democracy to strengthen the role of parents, students and teachers together does improve quality.[1] Clearly, state takeover and the Commissioner's "Order" serve to block the direction and actions needed. This means parents, students and teachers will need to rely on their own efforts and step up organizing to defend rights, for the aim of improving quality to be achieved.

Note:

1) See for example, "Research Spotlight on Parental Involvement," National Education Association, 2015; and "Parental Involvement and Student Achievement: A Meta-Analysis," Harvard Family Research Project.

Say NO! to Commissioner Elia's Dictate Say YES! to Smaller Classes and YES! to Public Control

1) *It is Dictate, not Negotiation*

New York State Commissioner Elia has now imposed a separate "Receivership Agreement" on five of Buffalo's public schools, Burgard and South Park High Schools and BEST, Future's and West Hertel Elementary Schools. She did so without negotiation with, or a vote by, teachers and staff. Her "Order" states her decisions are "effective immediately and need not be submitted to the collective bargaining unit members for ratification."

In justifying her dictate she said she would not even consider proposals by the union, including smaller classes. She admitted class size is an issue that can be negotiated, but she would only consider it if "the superintendent receiver request[s] negotiation of such issues," (p.16 of the "Order"). He did not, so she refused. She did so knowing that smaller classes are one of the single most important measures to take to improve the quality of education.

It is not good faith bargaining when, from the very start, the receiver decides what will and will not be bargained and the Commissioner can impose the final agreement with no vote by teachers.

The imposed agreement is dictate, not negotiation, and should be rejected from the start as unfair and harmful to education.

2) *Involuntary transfers at any time, including for union delegates*

The Commissioner also imposed the demand by the receiver to make involuntary transfers at any time: "The Receiver shall have the discretion and ability at any time and for any constitutionally or statutorily permissible reason to involuntarily transfer teachers at the persistently struggling schools regardless of seniority or status as a union delegate," (p.57).

She states, without evidence, that such transfers are necessary for "accomplishing rapid improvement in student achievement," and that the education law permits it. It can be predicted then that Dr. Cash



will give "rapid student achievement," as a reason permitted by the law. Or perhaps providing a "sound and basic education" as one permitted both the Constitution. Neither are legitimate reasons. The receiver alone decides who is transferred. A Committee, of 3-5, with one union representative, decides the replacement.

Involuntary transfers at any time means constant uncertainty and instability, which is damaging to the calm and stable atmosphere required for learning. Removing teachers who play important roles in their buildings, as experienced and trusted leaders assisting younger teachers and fostering collaboration, also undermines working conditions. It is harmful to teaching and learning and does nothing to improve education. Specifically targeting union delegates, who are elected by their peers, is a means to disrupt resistance and organizing, especially at the building level where it is most needed.

The problem is not unqualified teachers. The problems are state dictate, state testing and lack of state funding. The solution is Public Control to provide the *Equal Right to Education for All*.

3) *Requiring technology instead of smaller classes*

The Commissioner's dictate also requires use of technology dictated by the receiver: "The receiver shall have

the discretion and ability to require teachers at the persistently struggling schools to use all technological tools necessary and appropriate to more effectively communicate with students and parents." Most of the technology being demanded is related to state testing and all the "number-crunching" involved in the testing-related "improvement metrics." It includes "Infinite Campus" which unfairly tracks students — only things considered negative can be included and positive activity is excluded!

Instead of using funds for smaller classes and other needed staffing, they will be used for more testing and unneeded technology that benefits corporations, not students.

4) *Refuse Receivership and Demand Public Control of Public Schools*

The Receivership "Agreement" is a major attack on the rights of teachers and thus the right to education. It is being imposed undemocratically, through dictate, in order to silence the voices of the teachers, students and parents alike. State takeover is a way to undermine public education and increase privatization, for the benefit of the rich, not the students. We need more democracy not less! We need to empower the teachers, students and parents to decide. This agreement will be imposed on 14 other schools very soon.

Now is the time for united action of all to demand *Public Control of Public Schools*! Refuse receivership, refuse testing, and demand smaller classes and all-round education for all. Buffalo is the only place so far where a receivership agreement has been imposed. The fight we wage will impact people statewide. So Join In NOW!

Speak out at school board meetings, hold meetings and informational pickets at your school to inform students and parents, join emergency actions as soon as the receiver begins the involuntary transfers. (All quotes taken from Commissioner Elia's November 8, 2015, "Decision and Order.")

Receivership Serves the Dismantling of Public Schools

A Buffalo Teacher and Parent

(The following speech was one of several denouncing receivership and Commissioner Elia's dictate against Buffalo schools at the recent November 18 School Board meeting. The Board and receiver Cash refused to move the meeting to a larger room despite more than 60 people being left outside the packed board room. Receiver Cash also refused to respond to the concrete concerns raised and alternatives to plans to transfer teachers involuntarily at any time. As these actions indicate, the Commissioner and her receiver are not acting to improve the quality of education but rather to undemocratically keep the public from having the decision making role required.)

* * *

Receivership is the law. This month Commissioner Elia imposed a receivership agreement on 5 of our schools.

If carried out, her "Order," including the right to involuntarily transfer teachers at any time, will be disruptive and even detrimental to students and staff not only in the 5 schools, but other schools who will lose their "best" teachers.

While there are a number of changes that can be imposed, the Commissioner rejected outright one of the surest ways to

meet the needs of our students: lowering class size. Why?

Receivership law is the direct result of education "reformers" working to dismantle public schools, break unions, and privatize public education.

Daniel Loebe, a billionaire hedge funder, and Chairman of the Board of Success Academy charter schools, donates millions of dollars to the Political Action Committee (PAC), New Yorkers for Putting Students First. This PAC supports education reform candidates running for school boards across our state. Thousands of dollars were contributed to the successful campaign of one of our very own Board members. But how can you find fault with folks who say they want to put students first?

It is no secret to those of us familiar with the education reform playbook that Commissioner Elia was selected by Governor Cuomo to carry out the education reform agenda across our state.

Commissioner Elia made it clear that she would take measures into her own hands to remedy our schools if we did not do it ourselves. She wasted no time bringing in her handpicked choice for Superintendent, and this Board welcomed him to Buffalo.

Our Superintendent, in turn, wasted no time talking about hard hats and placing our

schools under construction. Our students don't need an environment with hard hats; they need more educational supports and consistency provided by educators who choose to be with them because they love them. Our Superintendent took a page right out of the ed. reform playbook and denigrated teachers in front of parents during a Buffalo parent-teacher organization meeting.

Our Superintendent has put forth "innovative" plans to improve some schools while working with Commissioner Elia to dismantle others. There are educators, parents, community members, and District personnel sitting in this room who already developed innovative plans for their schools last year.

If educators were freed from the mandates imposed on them by politicians backed by education "reformers," and were given the resources they need, they could work with stakeholders to create the schools our children deserve.

Receivership is the law, a destructive one that must be overturned. Those that this law has forced to abdicate their responsibility to the people who elected them should at least be speaking out against it. This Board's silence is deafening, but speaks volumes.

I O • REFUSING TESTS

teaching for all students and elimination of the state tests.

Students and parents in receivership schools are being told that if they refuse the state tests, they will be punished even more. In fact, refusing the tests is a way to oppose receivership and contribute to improving the quality of education. If just 5 percent of students and parents in each school refuses, the scoring is rendered invalid. It cannot be said the school did not improve, because, by the state's own admission, there is no data to confirm it. Plus it is a way to reject scoring that is rigged and unfair to start with, as the state can arbitrarily put the cut score for failing wherever they please, as has been occurring. The state scores are not valid or in any way useful in assessing the quality of students, teachers or schools.

Further, refusing the testing is a means to say it is we — the parents, students and teachers — that decide and we decide *NO!* We say *No!* to Common Core testing, *No!* to state takeover and *Yes!* to Public Control. Participation in decision-making is a critical part of developing the thinking necessary to contribute to learning and to a bright future for all. The state does not want to see such independent thinking and action and so threatens and punishes to impose its dictate.

More than 200,000 students refused the tests last year in New York. Increasing the number of refusals this year will be an important means to show Buffalo will not submit to state dictate and will instead stand out as a center of resistance. This is our history and tradition and now is a time when

that resistance is urgently needed.

Parents, students and teachers interested in having informational meetings/presentations, at their schools, in their classrooms, or through house or coffee shop meetings, should contact *Buffalo Forum* (716-602-8077; buffaloforum@usmlo.org) or New York State Allies for Public Education (nysape.org) or Western New Yorkers for Public Education (wnyforpubliced.org).



State Takeover Increasing Inequality

New York State has taken over 25 Buffalo public schools and 144 schools statewide, saying this is necessary to improve the schools. There is, however, no evidence or examples of state takeover improving quality. There are many examples, such as in Detroit, Newark, New Orleans and Philadelphia, all largely minority and impoverished school districts, showing state takeover serves to worsen the quality of education and increase inequality, including the mass closing of public schools and their privatization.

Buffalo schools are highly segregated and unequal, in large part because the state refuses to provide the increased funding required to meet the needs of all students. Yet the state takeover does not address these problems as part of improving quality and reducing inequality.

Instead the State Education Commissioner has dictated that the way to achieve improvement is by worsening the working conditions of teachers in the schools that most need improved conditions. This includes involuntary transfers of teachers at any time and more focus on state testing. Such a direction makes no sense.

The first schools being targeted - South Park, Burgard, BEST, Futures and West Hertel - already contend with great inequality. This is true not only in relation to meeting the needs of minority students, but also in terms of meeting the needs of students with English as a Second Language (ESL) and special needs students.

These five schools, and all schools in receivership, have significant numbers of students in all three areas. But nothing demanded by the Commissioner and her local receiver, Buffalo Superintendent Dr. Cash, addresses this reality. Nothing addresses



improving the quality of curriculum, such as increasing African American and Puerto Rican studies. Nothing addresses increasing school aides and guidance counselors and library staffing, the lack of which all contribute to inequality as compared to schools with such staffing.

The five schools each got \$2-4 million extra in funding to show "rapid improvement," within one year. But the Commissioner and local receiver, Dr. Cash, did not call for using these funds for lowering class size or providing more music and physical education, all of which do improve quality and lessen inequality. They did the opposite. They said funds could not be used for smaller classes. Funds could not be used for providing the all-round curriculum needed by all students. The Commissioner dictated funds had to be used for improving state test scores.

Consistent with this emphasis on testing, the Commissioner's latest "Order" also allows her local receiver to require schools to "use all technological tools necessary and appropriate to more effectively communicate with students and parents and

for the development of lesson plans." The "technological tools," such as that for the state testing, all cost tens of millions in public funds that go into the pockets of big monopolies, like Microsoft. Buffalo already has computer labs that go unused because of the lack of staffing. More testing also means libraries are endlessly used for testing, instead of exploring and investigating and other educational activities.

One computer program that already exists, "Infinite Campus," is designed not to inform parents of the accomplishments and contributions of their children, but rather to track only what are considered negative activity. It is already known that young African Americans and Puerto Ricans are singled out as "threats" and criminalized. The testing and other technology is being used to further brand them as "failures," as early as kindergarten. How will such measures in any way lessen inequality?!

Parents, students and teachers together have put forward solutions, including their demand for the *Equal Right to Education for All* and the duty of the state to provide it. They have also called for more music, physical education teachers and gyms, and a curriculum that challenges and engages students in contributing to solving social problems, including inequality and poverty.

The state takeover is mainly designed to block this direction, to block what is most needed, which is empowering parents, teachers and students to *decide* issues of education. It is designed to justify attacks on the rights of teachers, while imposing greater inequality. Joining the struggle to block these undemocratic and harmful state actions is what contributes to the fight for equality.

BTF Passes No Confidence Resolution Against Commissioner Elia

The Buffalo Teachers Federation at their Council of Delegates meeting November 12 unanimously passed a No Confidence resolution against State Commissioner Elia. The vote came as delegates one after the other expressed their anger at Elia's recent "Order" which dictates even worse working conditions on teachers. Many expressed their opposition to state

takeover of Buffalo schools while also urging their fellow teachers to organize at every building and mobilize greater resistance. A demonstration was organized for the November 18 school board meeting. Reflecting the just anger, hundreds participated, (see p.1, 7-8 for photos).

* * *

Moved: That the Buffalo Teachers

Federation Council of Delegates issue a Vote of No Confidence in MaryEllen Elia, Commissioner of the State Education Department, for imposing a "Receivership Collective Bargaining Agreement" in Buffalo and thus discarding due process and collective bargaining rights along with long established fair labor practice in the State of New York.

New Revolutionary Student Group Organizing on Buffalo State Campus

A Student Organizer

Buffalo State students who wanted to involve themselves in a new way of thinking came together to form a new group called the Buffalo State Students for Revolution. Meeting weekly, we talk about current events from here and around the world that impact the people and how the government plays a role in these events. Students that have formed the group felt that there should be an organized, conscious group that works together to develop common thinking and actions.

To get a sense of student concerns and develop our presence on campus, we conducted surveys. We focused on asking students questions that involved the incidents of sexual assault and robberies that were occurring on campus and solutions for this problem. We also asked what concerns students had about events occurring worldwide, as well as nationally and locally. Answers included issues about public education, like closing and privatizing schools; segregation in Buffalo; the presidential elections and role of Trump; and the large amount of homelessness throughout the country. International concerns were wars abroad by the U.S., the Syrian refugee crisis and environmental issues.

The majority of those surveyed were most concerned about elections and public education, including issues at Buffalo State. We had some initial discussion about the presidential elections and open racism of Trump, and brainstormed an event on campus to debate and analyze the elections, their significance and the alternative of political empowerment of the people.

On issues of education, we have been attending rallies and handing out fliers on campus and at McKinley High School to inform students about the state takeover of the public schools. This includes the impact on students and their teachers, and encouraging all to join the fight against it. Work with high school students to develop a student union is also being considered.

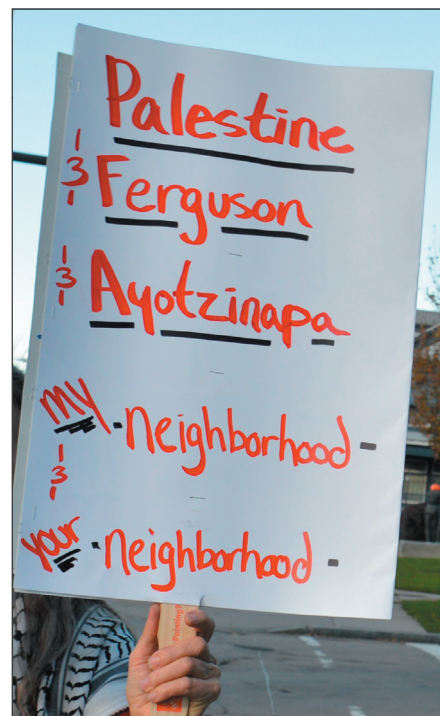
After a few discussions, the group together decided to call itself the Buffalo State Students for Revolution. To further develop our presence on campus we passed out fliers with our name on them, inviting students to our meetings.

Debating What it Means to Be Revolutionary

One important topic that we continue to discuss is “What does it mean to be Revolutionary?” Initially people voiced the importance of having convictions and speaking out for what is right. In further discussion, participants felt that a revolutionary way of thinking means to question and investigate why events are happening around the world, and not to simply agree with mainstream media. It involves challenging what we have been taught, especially when it comes to issues like revolution and communism. Revolution means to work together as part of learning to change our way of thinking and encouraging others to be open to doing the same. As a revolutionary student group, we must organize ourselves to decide for ourselves, to look into matters and analyze them so as to find solutions that promote and defend human rights. We want the content of our events and our messages to engage others to think for themselves and join in debate and deciding on how to build a bright future. This discussion is continuing and we invite students to send us questions and views (write to buffaloforum@usmlo.org, subject line Students for Revolution)

It's Not Jews vs. Muslim or Black vs. White, It's Humanity vs. Injustice

When the U.S.-backed Israeli terrorist attacks against Palestine increased, the Buffalo State Students for Revolution decided it would be important to have a rally against this genocide. We discussed the unjust attack on Palestinians, which also triggered discussion about unjust police killings in the U.S. Both are done in the name of self-defense, with both the U.S. and Israel acting with impunity — with no punishment for their actions. African Americans and Palestinians both know that the Israeli armed forces and the authoritative state of the U.S. justify their actions killing innocent people, saying that they are criminals or terrorists. There certainly are common themes underlying what happens to both groups of people. So we decided it was important to have African Americans and Palestinians stand united. The title of the rally was “It's



Not Self-Defense, It's Genocide!"

To promote this event, students were invited to come and stand in solidarity with African Americans and Palestinians. Hundreds of fliers were passed out and posters put up throughout campus, at UB and elsewhere. Outreach was made to the various student clubs and fraternities on campus and to UB students.

The rally began on campus with students chanting in front of the Student Union and then making their way inside. Students then marched down Elmwood to the busy intersection with Bidwell, where they were greeted by other Palestinians, African Americans, teachers, UB students and revolutionary minded people.

After the rally, we discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the organizing and how we could improve for future events. One result was that more students joined our group, bringing more ideas. This group, which is already diverse and mostly young women, has already made progress in just a few short weeks. We expect to continue to strengthen and grow in the semesters to come and invite all interested to come and see for yourselves. We meet Tuesdays, 12:15 in the library study quad.



Organize for Education to Change the World

Many students do not like the fact that the existing education is not engaging and challenging and is not useful in solving problems like racism and inequality, poverty and violence and environmental destruction.

The actions by the state to take over the public schools and further remove students and teachers from having a say stands directly against dealing with this reality. The state is also emphasizing more state testing and more testing technology. The recent "Order" by New York State Education Commissioner Elia on five Buffalo public schools lets the state's local receiver, Dr. Cash, demand use of more testing and other technology — instead of using funds for staffing, music, physical education, etc.

The Commissioner made clear that broad demands by the public, for smaller classes and better teaching and learning conditions would not even be considered. Speaking to the demand for smaller classes she said, only her local receiver, Dr. Cash, can "request negotiation of such issues." He refused to do so and the Commissioner refused.

Elia has imposed her "Order," ("Receiver-ship Agreement") dictating that teachers can be transferred at anytime and without their consent. The school day and year can also be changed now, during the school year, at five schools: Burgard and South Park High Schools and BEST, Futures, and West Hertel Elementary schools. And each school can have different times, making conditions even more difficult for after school activities, parents, day care needs, etc. More schools will soon be added to the list (including McKinley and International Prep).

Students have no say, teachers have no say, parents have no say. Transfers at any time can be done solely on the say so of Dr. Cash. He alone decides which teachers, from any of the five schools (and 16 more soon) will be forced to transfer.

Students have no say, even though their education is directly damaged by the uncertainty and instability transferring teachers at any time creates. Parents have no say, even though teachers being moved could be those most loved and respected. Teachers can be forced to move, even if they play leading and

important roles in fostering collaboration and improving the quality of work in their buildings. Union delegates are also targeted, which is a way to target resistance and organizing. The state can dictate this separate agreement — without a vote by teachers or any input by students and parents. The change in school day and year is also done solely on the say so of Dr. Cash.

Forced transfer at any time means the collective efforts to strengthen the quality of education by all involved will be disrupted — without cause. This is harmful, undemocratic and will worsen conditions for teaching and learning.

The claim that this power will put more "qualified" teachers in the classroom has no basis in fact. If the Commissioner and receiver were interested in improving quality they would at least list the qualifications they want. They have not done so. So it is necessary to ask what qualities are they looking for — acceptance of the testing? submission to the state takeover? readiness to abandon the broad education students need?

Branding students and teachers and schools as failures is all based on unfair state Common Core tests. These tests do not in any way measure the quality of teaching or learning in a school. They are rigged against the students, with the cut score changed arbitrarily to ensure failure. They are also used to humiliate students and teachers and brand them as failures, when it is the state that is failing!

The Commissioner also dictated that these schools had to mainly use test scores to show "improvement." She did not include anything the schools do well, such as music, art, sports, or providing for special needs students, or how engaged and active students are, or if they are learning to think and work well together, etc. These qualities are more important than test scores.

To best improve quality, students, teachers, staff and parents, at each school and district-wide must decide.

More democracy is needed, not less. More equality is needed. Instead, teachers and students at these schools face unfair and unequal treatment. We say NO! *Refuse state*



takeover; refuse the tests and stand up for the equal right to education for all.

Students have an important role to play and can strengthen their voice by organizing a Student Union, in each building and citywide. Join with university students in demanding that students have the *Equal Right to Education* and a right to be decision makers in all matters concerning education.

Now is the time for students to stand with their teachers and also urge their parents to join in opposing transfers at anytime and the constant uncertainty this causes. Let your principal know you oppose these actions.

Now is the time for students to join actions. Organize students in your building interested in forming a student union. Work together with teachers to hold morning informational pickets. Plan emergency actions if your teachers are transferred.

Refuse the state tests! Refuse this undemocratic state dictate. The equal right to education for all requires public control of our schools.

Join fellow students to build a Student Union to organize for Education to Change the World! (text 602-8077)