

Buffalo Forum



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

Workers of all countries, unite!

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Refuse Tests, Refuse Receivership I-9
- Defend the Environment 10-11
- Venezuela 12
- Buffalo State Protest 13-16

December 18, 2015

Vol. 19 #12

Standards and Raising the Quality of Education

Governor Cuomo and his Task Force have emphasized the need for “high-quality education standards and accountability in education,” and that “the current system needs to be overhauled.” In accepting the Task Force recommendations December 10, Cuomo stated, “Today, we will begin to transform our system into one that empowers parents, teachers and local districts and ensures high standards for all students.” He also stated that the receivership law, which further disempowers “parents, teachers and local districts” and relies on the existing testing regime, will stand. The two together make no sense, as receivership relies on testing.

There is a need for quality standards. To provide them it is first necessary to identify what constitutes a standard, its content and quality. Specifically, that it is something that is objective and can reliably measure, or assess

Standards and Raising Quality • 2

Actions Needed Now to Refuse State Tests, Refuse Receivership

Governor Cuomo and his Common Core Task Force recently announced a moratorium on having state testing used to brand teachers and students as failures. As his task force put it, the existing testing system needs to be “overhauled” and until that is done (by 2019-20 school year) testing results will “not be used to evaluate

the performance of individual teachers or students.” Given the admission that the current tests are not valid and need to be overhauled, their length and frequency reduced, why not eliminate them altogether? Why only a moratorium on consequences from the results? While this is the most

Actions Needed Now • 3

IRRATIONAL STATE ACTIONS

Common Core Task Force Moratorium Requires Repeal of Receivership

Governor Cuomo’s New York Common Core Task Force released its report on December 15, basically confirming objections by teachers, students and parents to the Common Core testing regime. The Task Force admitted the standards “may not be age-appropriate;” that they “do not adequately address” special needs and

Irrational State Actions • 4

REPEAL RECEIVERSHIP LAW

Parents Will Continue to Opt Out of Common Core Testing

New York State Allies for Public Education (NYSAPPE)

The Governor’s Common Core Task Force released a list of recommendations Thursday, December 10. The recommendations, while a reflection of the parent and educator voices around the state, do not alone restore trust in Albany. How

Parents Will Opt Out • 5

Stop U.S. Interference in Venezuela! Defend the Bolivarian Revolution!

The U.S. backed oligarchy in Venezuela took over the National Assembly in the elections December 6, 2015. *Buffalo Forum* condemns the U.S. interference in the election, providing funding and backing for the right-wing forces, while also imposing an economic war against Venezuela. We also extend our militant salute to the revolutionary workers and

people of Venezuela and their leadership as they organize to defend their revolution. We are confident that the Bolivarian process, which has seen the Venezuelan people affirm their rights against U.S. imperialism and the forces of privilege, will prevail.

As Venezuelan President Nicolás

Defend the Bolivarian Revolution • 11



Support the Building of the Communist Press!

Subscribe to VOICE OF REVOLUTION

The national paper of the U.S. Marxist-Leninist Organization. VOR works to raise the level of political discussion in society by taking stands that provide a way forward, oppose the chauvinism and racism of the U.S. state, and advance the interests of the working class and people. VOR also reports on the organizing work to build the alternative by Creating Politics of Empowerment. Together It Can Be Done! Read, write and distribute VOR.

office@usmlo.org
www.usmlo.org

Buffalo Forum

The local edition. Send us your views, comments, letters, and reports on activities. *Buffalo Forum* will respond to all serious letters to further develop political discussion with its readers. We want to know what you think!

716-602-8077
buffaloforum@usmlo.org

Join in this Vital Work! Help Build the Discussion!

Subscriptions:

One year: \$65
Sustainer levels start at \$100
(Monthly payment plans available from your distributor.)

**Send check or money
order payable to:
USMLO, P.O. Box 331
Buffalo, NY 14209**



I • STANDARDS AND RAISING QUALITY

a given quality, in this case of knowledge, of learning to think, of working together to solve problems, etc. It is necessary to assess the content and aim of public education as the basis for establishing the needed standards. This is something Cuomo and his Task Force do not even want to discuss. But is something parents, students and teachers are seriously debating.

The aim of education cannot be limited to being "career and college ready," as that leaves out the role of public education in training and arming the next generation to advance society by solving existing social problems. It eliminates the necessity for all-

round education, for enlightenment in service to society, her collectives and individuals. It eliminates development of thinking human beings, who affirm rights and take up their social responsibilities.

Standards can contribute to raising the quality of education. To develop such standards it is necessary to think about education anew — to address what education today should look like, including its curriculum, its connection to solving social problems of production, the environment, poverty, etc., its ability to produce thinking human beings capable of transforming society to meet the needs of humanity.

I • ACTIONS NEEDED NOW

minimum needed, it does not address the broad concerns of parents, students and teachers that continuing with the current state testing is harmful to children and to public education.

It appears Cuomo, in supporting the moratorium and overhaul, wants to disrupt the growing *Refuse the Tests* movement that saw more than 200,000 students refuse last year. It is likely every effort will be made by state officials to say that since the state test results will not be used against students and teachers there is no reason not to take them. This ignores the harm the tests, test preparation and testing curriculum impose on teaching and learning alike. It ignores the rejection by the public of state dictate, which has worsened inequality and the system of public education.

Common Core standards and testing have no place in our public schools and need to be eliminated. There are far better means to assess students, teachers and schools. It is students, teachers and parents that are the experts, that can best design and implement such assessments — not the state.

Further, Cuomo emphasized that his receivership law, “the *Education Transformation Act of 2015* will remain in place, and no new legislation is required to implement the recommendations.” This is clearly meant to cause confusion in receivership schools. If testing results are not to be used against teachers and students, how then can schools be rated as “failing?” It is interesting that neither the Task Force nor Cuomo specifically refer to schools — just “individual teachers or students.” But even so, state take over of 25 Buffalo schools is done based almost



entirely on state testing results. So how can Cuomo insist both will be done — no consequences to individuals, yet major consequences to all of those individuals if they are in receivership schools?

The state actions are irrational and unjust. A harmful testing system needs to be eliminated, not overhauled. State takeover using receivership, which vests powers in the Commissioner and her receiver, not parents, teachers and students, also needs to be eliminated. As one of the organizations stepping up efforts to *Refuse the Tests* put it “Until there is a halt of the Common Core standards, repeal of the *Education Transformation Act*, major changes to the state tests, a reduction of unnecessary testing, protection of data privacy, and local control restored, parents will continue to Opt Out in large numbers.”

Actions Needed Now

Cuomo is counting on the holiday season to proceed with receivership and the state

testing regime. He is counting on the confusion and apparent relief of a moratorium to further advance his agenda of imposing a “death penalty” on Buffalo schools. Those organizing to *Refuse the Tests, Refuse Receivership* cannot wait to see what comes next, or wait until April testing to act.

Our own independent program calls for strengthening the unity of those refusing the tests and refusing receivership. It calls for strengthening common thinking through joint actions to inform and activate parents, teachers and students. During the holiday season this can be done with house gatherings and small-group discussions. It can be done by initiating joint planning for a

January or February event to inform all concerned about Common Core testing and curriculum and more importantly, about our own proposals for alternative standards, curriculum and means of assessment.

Organizing by parents, students or others to speak in classes, or set up in school cafeterias, as part of mobilizing students to refuse is another immediate action. Informational pickets and leafleting at schools would similarly help inform and unite. Submissions about refusing the tests and receivership to the various alternative newspapers, like the *Challenger*, *Criterion*, *The Public*, *Karibu News* and *Panorama Hispano* are another means to inform and strengthen resistance.

These are among the immediate actions that can be taken and are needed to ensure a pro-active stand. Our job is not simply to react and wait, it is to organize based on our program and demands: *Our Schools, Our Rights, We Decide!*

Visit our website: usmlo.org

I • IRRATIONAL STATE ACTIONS

English Language Learners (ELL); that the state “failed to include meaningful input by educators,” and the widespread view that “the curriculum does not allow for local district input, lacks breadth, and is too one-size-fits-all,” (Task Force Report, p.8).

However, unlike hundreds of thousands of students, parents and teachers statewide who have and will continue to refuse the Common Core testing, the Task Force did not call for the “standards” to be abandoned and the tests eliminated. It recommends instead continuing the existing testing regime, while working to “overhaul” the standards and tests. It also called for a transition period until 2019-20, to do this. But, given the serious existing problems with Common Core, the report said, “State-administered standardized English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics assessments for grades 3-8 aligned to the Common Core or updated standards shall not have consequences for individual students or teachers,” until all changes are complete. The report adds, “Any growth model based on these Common Core tests or other state assessments shall not have consequences and shall only be used on an advisory basis for teachers,” until the start of the 2019-20 school year. In other words, a five-year moratorium for any consequences to students and teachers.

Given this statement, it would appear that state takeover and the various powers related to receivership would now no longer hold, as certainly these are consequences for students and teachers based on the tests. However, the press release from Governor Cuomo’s office states: “The *Education Transformation Act of 2015* (which imposes state takeover) will remain in place, and no new legislation is required to implement the recommendations of the report, including recommendations regarding the transition period for consequences for students and teachers.”

This is an irrational statement. The receivership law relies entirely on the state standardized tests to determine “improvement” and more commonly, by design, school “failure.” Test scores are used to justify state takeover of schools, currently 25 in Buffalo and 144 statewide. They are used to put great powers in the hands of

the local receiver and state Commissioner, while eliminating the role of local elected governance and more importantly, the role of the public. Among the immediate consequences are transfers of teachers at any time for basically any reason. The recommendation for a moratorium on consequences is rendered meaningless for receivership schools without the repeal of the *Education Transformation Act*.

Eliminate Testing Regime

Instead of eliminating the testing regime and recommending the many other means available to assess students and teachers and schools as a whole, the report called for “a comprehensive review” of existing standards. As the Task Force chairman, head of a private equity investment firm put it, “building upon the foundation established by the Common Core Standards, high quality New York State Standards must be developed... Thereafter, new State curriculum resources and tests must be developed in a manner to better reflect the revised standards.” That is, the starting point is the existing Common Core standards, whereas the public is calling for their elimination and developing completely different mechanisms for assessments, without testing at the center.

The Task Force did say the “comprehensive review” should include “significant input by educators, parents, local districts and other education stakeholders, with careful consideration of the appropriateness of these standards in early childhood, and for Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners.” However, it still left all final decision making in the hands of Cuomo and the New York State Department of Education (NYSED). This is despite the fact that NYSED is the one responsible for the problems the report addresses and the misuse of the testing regime against teachers and schools.

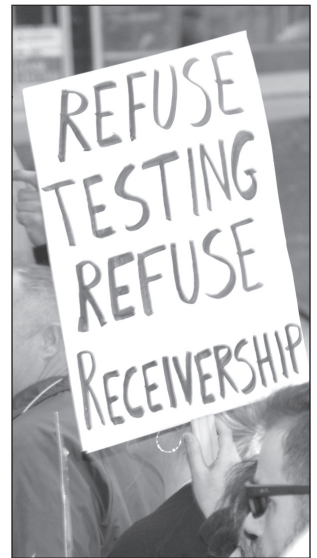
The public has repeatedly rejected the very limited “input” allowed by the state. There are not sufficient public meetings, the state severely limits public comment (both amount and time given) and most importantly, the state routinely rejects the key content demanded by the public — like

eliminating the testing.

It is also despite the fact that various other indicators, like grade point average and class participation, and working together on projects and participation in music and art, etc. are much more reliable as a means to assess how students are doing than a single state test.

Further, according to the Task Force, “After the comprehensive review of the Common Core Standards, there must be modification, elimination, or creation of standards to form rigorous New York-specific standards... After the standards are finalized, the State must engage educators to create and disseminate sample curriculum units.” These units, decided by the state, are used as a means to restrict curriculum, as has already occurred, and often impose software requirements for schools to purchase. While the report’s recommendations include “ensuring that local educators have the flexibility to tailor instruction to the needs of their students,” there are no recommendations for regulations that would guarantee this. And again, no standard that the state must abide by that will measure educator “engagement.” Given the experience with the state’s Community Engagement Teams (CET) under receivership, few think that any serious engagement will occur, and certainly there will be no decision making by those with the right to decide — teachers, parents, staff and students.

Additionally, the Task Force did not address a main concern of the public, which is that a list of skills for students, such as those for Common Core, are *not* standards



I • PARENTS WILL OPT OUT

the recommendations and other issues get addressed is the key and parents are watching this very closely.

Until there is a halt of the Common Core standards, repeal of the *Education Transformation Act*, major changes to the state tests, a reduction of unnecessary testing, protection of data privacy, and local control restored, parents will continue to Opt Out in large numbers.

The recommendations deliberately state that Governor Cuomo's 'signature' legislation that enforces many of these harmful policies does not need to be touched. On the contrary, this law is the prescriptive blueprint to these harmful policies that was passed by the legislature as part of the budget last spring.

One of the Task Force recommendations to put a 4-year moratorium on evaluating teachers based on the flawed Common Core state tests was officially voted into emergency regulations by the Board of Regents at its December 15 board meeting. Until the law is repealed, this moratorium does not reduce testing it actually does the opposite, increases testing and further puts a strain on school districts' budgets to comply.

NYSAPe is calling on parents to *Opt Out* of state tests and any local tests that are linked to this corrupt and invalid



evaluation system that clearly does not provide value for the students, educators or schools.

"The task force recommendations have opened the door to change. Much of these harmful policies came in through our legislature when they passed the *Education Transformation Act* against the will of the people they serve. Our State Assembly and Senate must now reverse this harmful legislation so that changes will be meaningful and substantial. Parents will be vigilant in following these changes every step of the way. We will continue to refuse to allow our children to participate in this system until *ALL* harmful reforms are removed from our classrooms," said Jeanette Deutermann, Long Island public school parent and founder of Long Island Opt Out.

"Until specific laws and policies regarding standards, student assessment, teacher evaluation and school ranking are changed, parents will continue to boycott any system that ties high-stakes to standardized assessments," said Chris Cerrone, Erie County public school

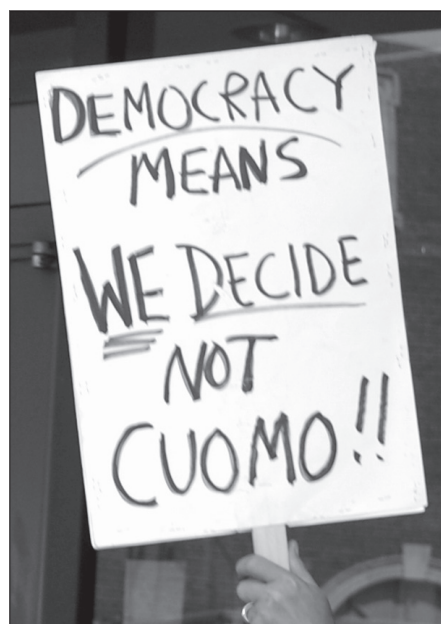
parent, educator, and school board member.

Jamaal Bowman, Bronx public school parent and middle school principal said, "...Until we know how the recommendations will be implemented, and by whom, and until the law tying teacher evaluations to test scores is revised or repealed, we will not be able to move forward and properly meet the holistic needs of our children."

"While there is much talk of high standards, there is little discussion of the non-curricular resources required to ensure that all students can succeed in the face of poverty and lack of adequate funding. It is disappointing that the task force failed to raise the question, if disadvantaged students were struggling prior to the implementation of the Common Core, how will simply raising the bar increase student achievement," said Bianca Tanis, Ulster County public school parent, Rethinking Testing member and educator.

"After so much time and money has been wasted in forced implementation of flawed policy, students and educators of New York have been hurt and trust has been broken. We must repeal the APPR imposed by politicians who did not understand the domain. Scholars in schools of education and professional educators should design the best systems to achieve goals for public education," said Katie Zahedi, Dutchess County, principal.

Marla Kilfoyle, Long Island public school parent and 25-year educator said, "Teachers and parents do not trust NYSED, the 'Tisch' Regents' majority, the legislature, or the Governor to be in charge of education. What they have done to our public education system and to our children is unconscionable." NYSAPe, a grassroots organization with over 50 parent and educator groups across the state, is calling on parents to continue to Opt Out by refusing high-stakes testing for the 2015-16 school year. Go to www.nysape.org for more details on how to affect changes in education policies.



FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Cuomo Common Core Task Force Recommendations

New York Common Core Task Force

Establish New High Quality New York Standards

Recommendation 1: Adopt high quality New York education standards with input from local districts, educators, and parents through an open and transparent process.

Recommendation 2: Modify early grade standards so they are age-appropriate.

Recommendation 3: Ensure that standards accommodate flexibility that allows educators to meet the needs of unique student populations, including Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners.

Recommendation 4: Ensure standards do not lead to the narrowing of curriculum or diminish the love of reading and joy of learning.

Recommendation 5: Establish a transparent and open process by which New York standards are periodically reviewed by educators and content area experts.

Develop Better Curriculum Guidance and Resources

Recommendation 6: Ensure educators and local school districts have the flexibility to develop and tailor curriculum to the new standards.

Recommendation 7: Release updated and improved sample curriculum resources.

Recommendation 8: Launch a digital platform that enables teachers, including pre-service teachers, and teacher educators, to share resources with other teachers across the state.

Recommendation 9: Create ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers, teacher educators, and administrators on the revised State standards.

Significantly Reduce Testing Time and Preparation and Ensure Tests Fit Curriculum and Standards

Recommendation 10: Involve educators, parents, and other education stakeholders in the creation and periodic review of all State standards-aligned exams and other State assessments.

Recommendation 11: Gather student feedback on the quality of the new tests.

Recommendation 12: Provide ongoing transparency to parents, educators, and local districts on the quality and content of all tests, including, but not limited to publishing the test questions.

Recommendation 13: Reduce the number of days and shorten the duration for standards-aligned State standardized tests.

Recommendation 14: Provide teachers with the flexibility and support to

use authentic formative assessments to measure student learning.

Recommendation 15: Undertake a formal review to determine whether to transition to untimed tests for existing and new State standardized tests aligned to the standards.

Recommendation 16: Provide flexibility for assessments of Students with Disabilities.

Recommendation 17: Protect and enforce testing accommodations for Students with Disabilities.

Recommendation 18: Explore alternative options to assess the most severely disabled students.

Recommendation 19: Prevent students from being mandated into Academic Intervention Services based on a single test.

Recommendation 20: Eliminate double testing for English Language Learners (Common Core state tests and the NYS English as a Second Language Achievement Test, NYSESLAT).

Recommendation 21: Until the new system is fully phased in, the results from assessments aligned to the current Common Core Standards, as well as the updated standards, shall only be advisory and not be used to evaluate the performance of individual teachers or students.

4 • IRRATIONAL STATE ACTIONS

and the tests are not a valid measure of anything — not the quality of education, not the school, not the teachers, not the students.

Standards are a reliable means to measure and compare a quantity or quality. They are objective, and thus must be the same for all, like a ruler measuring inches. They are not something subject to the arbitrary whims of a Governor or Commissioner of Education, for example. And the means of measuring if such standards have been achieved are also not based on arbitrary tests, where the “score” for

passing is constantly changed. That is like constantly changing the goalposts on a football field — the measure consistent for all, by which a touchdown or field goal is achieved.

Students, teachers and parents already have experience with NYSED, where it is said the standards and tests do not dictate curriculum, but in fact they do. State modules are said to be voluntary, but in fact are required for test scores to be improved. So many are very doubtful that the ability to “tailor instruction to the needs of their students,” will be a reality as long as a NYSED

mandated testing regime is in place.

The response of many to the report and Cuomo’s statement is to demand repeal of the receivership law, the *Education Transformation Act*, elimination of the Common Core fake “standards,” testing and assessment regime, and empowering teachers, students, staff and parents, in each school, district and statewide, to *decide*. The people themselves are much better suited to solving the problems of raising the quality of public education and doing so by starting with defending the equal right to education for all.

SURVEY OF 12,000 STATEWIDE

New Yorkers Overwhelmingly Reject Common Core Standards, Tests & Evaluation Policies

In response to New York State Education Department [NYSED's] AimHighNY survey on the Common Core that many parents and teachers found excessively complex and not open to general comments, the New York State Allies for Public Education (NYSAPE) created a user-friendly survey and posted it online between November 23 and November 30. Close to 12,000 New Yorkers filled out the NYSAPE survey in just a week's time. According to Commissioner Elia, only 5500 completed the NYSED survey in three weeks' time. Governor Cuomo's Common Core task force has received 1,798 submissions since December 2, according to Politico.

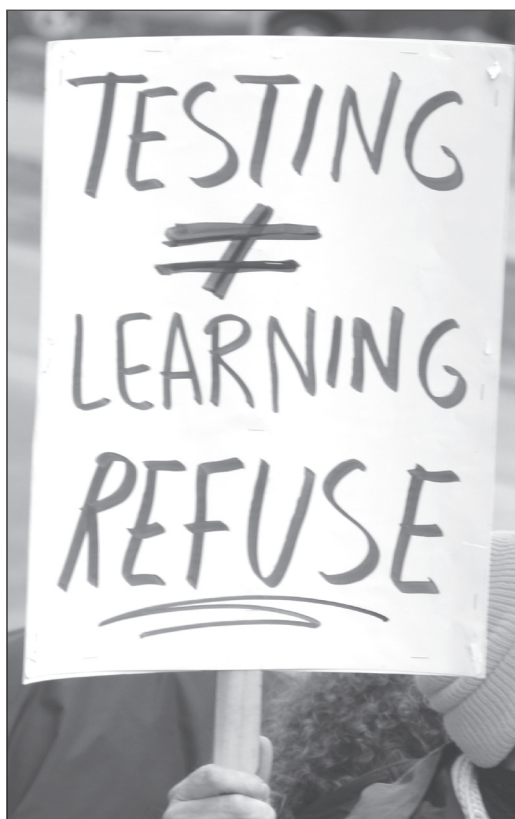
The respondents to the NYSAPE survey overwhelmingly reject the Common Core standards, believe the state exams and test-based teacher evaluation system are flawed, and that these reforms have worsened instruction in both English Language Arts (ELA) and Math at the classroom level.

Parents, teachers, administrators, school board members and concerned NY residents all took part in the NYSAPE survey. Of special note, 11 percent of survey respondents also completed NYSED's survey and 32.9 percent attempted to complete NYSED's survey but gave up.

Of those who responded to the NYSAPE survey, 70 percent oppose the Common Core standards, 4 percent support them, 23 percent have concerns with them, and 3 percent are undecided. An even higher percentage — 83 percent — believe the Common Core standards in both ELA and Math have worsened instruction. As well, 83 percent disagree with the shift to "close" reading strategies.

Over 80 percent of respondents indicated that they believe ELA and Math standards in grades K-3 are developmentally inappropriate for many students. Fewer than 4 percent of respondents say that the ELA and Math standards for grades 4-8 are well designed.

For grades 9-12, only 2 percent of



respondents approve of the ELA and Math Standards. Only 6.2 percent agree with the Common Core's quota for informational text versus literary text.

An overwhelming number — 91 percent — say that the Common Core exams in grades 3-8 are flawed, while fewer than 1 percent believe they are valid or well-designed. Among those who find the tests to be flawed, many believe the tests are developmentally inappropriate, too long, not useful for assessing students with disabilities and/or English language learners and that reading passages and questions are too difficult and confusing.

Of our respondents, 54 percent indicated that high schools should use the previous NYS Regents exams rather than new exams aligned to the Common Core standards, while roughly 40 percent believe that students should not have to pass any high stakes exams to graduate.

Those who took the NYSAPE survey are nearly unanimous, at 96 percent,

that test scores should not be linked to principal or teacher evaluations. About 86.5 percent say that the state should abandon the Common Core standards and return to New York's former standards until educators can create better ones.

The full results of the survey are posted here: <http://www.nysape.org/nysape-cc-survey-results.html>

"NYSAPE's findings are in line with the poll results and most of the testimony to the Governor's Common Core Task Force. There is no way around this; the Governor and the legislature must eliminate these Standards, revamp the tests, and reverse the harmful education laws," said Lisa Rudley, Westchester County public school parent and NYSAPE founding member.

One of the survey respondents said, "As a teacher who trained at Bank Street College of Education, I find the standards developmentally inappropriate. As a reading specialist, I find the kindergarten standards far too high in reading and writing. As a parent, I am very concerned because I have a child who hates reading because it was pushed so hard at his school."

"The results of the survey confirm that the vast majority of parents and teachers do not approve of the Common Core, and oppose the rigid quotas for informational text and 'close reading' strategies that have straitjacketed instruction throughout the state. They want to abandon these standards..." said Leonie Haimson, Executive Director of Class Size Matters.

"The tremendous response to NYSAPE's survey underscores that parents and educators are eager to be heard. The fact that Commissioner Elia could not create an accessible survey only fuels concerns about her competence and willingness to truly engage parents and practitioners," said Bianca Tanis, Ulster County public school parent, Rethinking Testing member and educator.

NEW PALTZ FORUM ON RECEIVERSHIP AND TESTING

Building Independent Forces that Provide Coherence and Orientation Will Turn Things Around

Kevin Gibson, Buffalo Teacher

The speech below was presented at a recent forum in New Paltz that brought together people from Albany, Poughkeepsie, the Bronx and Buffalo to discuss testing and receivership and the growing resistance to these attacks. It was significant in bringing together people from across the state and in providing a united stand for participants to join in rejecting testing and working to provide alternatives that contribute to raising the quality of public education.

* * *

[...] The views that I express tonight are my personal views – not necessarily the views or opinions of my employer or my union – although they should be. [...]

Friends, most of you know that parents from Hudson Valley to the Great Lakes have repeatedly given Governor Cuomo a failing grade when it comes to his Education policies. The Governor is the champion of receivership, the champion of charter schools, the champion of the Common Core, the champion of de-funding the neediest of public school children, the champion of death penalties for public schools, the champion of rating teachers based on junk science and the champion of abusive high stakes testing for children. These positions, his positions, have...robbed children of their dignity, demoralized professional educators and created chaos...

My friends the Governor has good reason to be worried today, for he has awoken all the moms and all the dads in New York state. He should be worried because dads and moms do not like it when the government abuses their children. The Governor should be worried because this spring there will be a Tsunami of test refusals in New York as dads and moms stand up and say stop abusing our children.

Our elected legislators hastily enacted Governor Cuomo's school receivership law, as part of a middle of the night deal for an on-time budget... When getting things done on time becomes more important

than getting things right, we are surely in trouble. When efficiency becomes the highest human value – we turn our backs on long established democratic principles. Receivership is part of a continuing trend that concentrates power in the hands of an executive while divesting power from our local school communities.

Sisters and Brothers: As part of his pro-charter school agenda, the Governor's Receivership law is more about demonizing teachers and destabilizing communities than providing improved outcomes for impoverished children. In Buffalo, 25 of our schools have been placed under receivership. Virtually all of them have already been through large disruptive staff changes in the past five years as a result of arbitrary state mandates.

As you know, the state has also changed the teacher evaluation law three times, imposed the irrational Common Core standards and associated tests that imposed historic levels of mass failure last year.... Even schools that had shown improvements in a variety of ways, like attendance and graduation rates, have been subject to the new receivership law.

Receivership is the latest in a string of efforts by corporate school advocates to concentrate power in executives so as to impose the will of corporate elites and their vision of an education system that prepares youth for submission to their rule while guaranteeing record profits. Public funds are increasingly transferred over to technology and publishing companies, real estate developers, financiers and others.

Receivership is, in fact, exactly what the governor promised when he spoke in Buffalo in 2013: a death penalty for public schools. It is about profit and it is about private control. Make no mistake about it. Receivership means dictatorship and it sets schools up for crushing failure. And this imposed failure is meant to justify and facilitate the completion of efforts to transfer control of education to private



interests, who decide in secret the fate of our schools and our children. It must be militantly opposed.

Like the test and punish agenda that scapegoats teachers based on test scores – the Receivership law uses the same test and punish agenda to brutalize students into failure and close or take over schools. Did you know that 97% of English Language Learners, over 90% of Learning Disabled Students, and 80% of African American and Hispanic students are labeled not proficient on Common Core tests?

The common denominator for virtually every one of the 144 schools targeted for receivership is a high percentage of students living in poverty. These schools also exist in some of New York's most chronically underfunded districts. The 17 districts with receivership schools are owed over \$2.6 billion in court-ordered Foundation Aid funding. The Buffalo Public Schools alone are owed nearly \$100,000 million in Foundation Aid.

My friends: The law does nothing to address the ongoing inequality embedded in the state's school funding formula and will exacerbate the already enormous resource disparity between wealthy and poor districts...

Build Independent Forces • 9

8 • BUILD INDEPENDENT FORCES

Democratically elected school boards have their powers usurped by the “receiver,” who has been provided sweeping authority over receivership schools. The Receivership law is designed to arbitrarily punish school employees by severely limiting their collective bargaining and seniority rights in these schools; it enables the receiver to impose mass firings. While profiteering defectors argue that these are good things, the truth is most communities support their teachers and want to have a voice in their schools.

Instability is the hallmark of Receivership. It is meant to destabilize, break unity, and introduce incoherence at every turn... Receivership will lead to massive disruption in already vulnerable, deformed, fatigued school communities. Tremendous anxiety, fear, and worry has been imposed on the City of Buffalo as Commissioner Elia’s hand-picked, corporate backed Superintendent/Receiver Dr. Cash takes off the gloves, attacking teachers at every turn. He recently called teachers at Buffalo’s Receivership schools “dregs,” claiming the schools were in receivership because the teachers were the “worst human capital.” No mention of the unfair, abusive testing regime.

Under receivership, he reports to the Commissioner, and her alone. The latest “Order” dictated by Commissioner Elia allows her receiver to begin now to transfer any teacher, any time, without regard for seniority or union delegate status in the building. This starts with 5 schools but will soon include 14 more. This is an attack on all and especially harmful for the young children it will impact. It is also an effort to suppress the growing resistance, but it is failing — as it has already served to anger and mobilize more to refuse receivership.

The gullible chase the Receivership law’s impossible and arbitrary targets. The rest of us organize!

Sisters and Brothers: the governor’s Receivership law is...the weapon designed to turn over our public schools to the charter gangsters. It is a weapon to impose executive authority and an even more brutal inequality.

Instead of more ill-conceived chaos, instead of closing and re-branding schools, instead of partnering our public schools with EPOs and private industry, instead of turning our public schools over to the unaccountable exclusionary policies of charter schools, instead of last minute budgetary grabs at local governance -- our public schools need stability not top down legislative gimmicks that do not work. Our most vulnerable students immediately need smaller classes and wrap around services that truly address students’ needs in meaningful ways. [...]

What should we do?

We must swim in the deep waters, be creative and not be distracted by the timid or the critics in the shallow end who will try to drag you down.

Test Refusal has caught the imagination of a variety of people and organizations; it was unexpected by many of the politicians and it has become something they must now contend with. Tests are the lynchpin of both receivership and the imposed method of failure used by the anti-public education/ pro Cuomo forces. Test refusal emphasizes peoples’ agency in that it calls attention to the fact that people, parents and students together, do not consent to Cuomo’s anti-public education agenda.

I think educators have a role to play and they should Refuse their own children – it makes sense (2015 NYSUT Representative Assembly resolution, passed unanimously in Buffalo, asks all NYSUT members to refuse their own children from these high stakes tests. And even though teachers are limited in what they can say to other parents – my advice would be to have parents watch some of the Modules on Engage New York and then the parents will refuse their kids without the teachers having to say a word.

We should focus on broad informational campaigns — organizing and informing parents and students. An emphasis must be made in the urban areas where refusal numbers are low and students are most likely to be forced to fail, schools are most likely to close and Receivership is most prevalent. We must organize the youth

to help educate other youth about why refusal is the right decision...By informing the public those doing the informing gain legitimacy and credibility; they come to be seen as reliable agents of public interest. I believe that a youth movement is an important next step in the refusal movement. An important part of this is having your own children who are refusing speak to their fellow students. I would further encourage the refusal of SLO related pre-tests and or post-tests and most other test prep that distracts from the proper education that our children deserve.

Schools of Education have an important role to play in ensuring future teachers are fully informed about Common Core and receivership and their role as weapons against public education. Pass resolutions against receivership, using that passed by Buffalo and Port Jefferson Station as a guide. Write letters, as a department, or as Education faculty members to Commissioner Elia, opposing the Common Core testing regime and state takeover as harmful and undemocratic.

We should organize a campaign that shines a spotlight on the gross and abusive disparity in funding that the Governor seems content with. We must demand smaller class sizes, music, art, longer lunch periods, Phys-Ed, an end to Teach for America, full accountability for Charter Schools, and an end to co-location models among a few things. [...]

Nearly all New Yorkers are sick and tired of the lies, gossip, slander and disinformation. Those who can provide information, orientation and coherence – those who have actual knowledge, wisdom, courage and can apply it to solve problems – those forces will be in a position to lead and influence. Building independent forces is what, in the end, will turn things around. Getting too caught up in electoral politics puts power back in the hands of a system, a process and elite influence making it impractical as a means for turning the tide. Power must come from the outside. Power must come from the citizens, from the people, because these are our schools and it is we who must decide.

Ban Fracking Everywhere!

Ban Fracking Infrastructure and LPG Facilities in New York

New Yorkers Against Fracking

Members of New Yorkers Against Fracking recently returned from the climate negotiations in Paris, where we brought the story of our victory over the shale gas army here in New York to gatherings of climate activists from around the world. [Activists from around the world joined in demanding that fracking be banned everywhere as it causes great harm to the environment and serves war. — BF. Ed Note.]

The final agreement in Paris underscores the urgency of addressing climate change, and we are mindful of our unfinished battles here at home. New York has banned fracking, but related infrastructure for transporting and storage of fracked gas continues to threaten our communities, and the world, through its contribution to climate change.

In order to meet the stated goal of the Paris agreement of no more than 1.5 degrees increase, action must be taken swiftly. We simply cannot allow the building of any more fossil fuel infrastructure. Hence, we are working against such projects, including asking for your signature on an important petition against one such infrastructure project. Look for more such requests in the future from the many projects that communities are fighting across New York State.

In the Finger Lakes region of New York, we are fighting plans to store dangerous, explosive liquefied petroleum gases (LPG, otherwise called butane and propane) in abandoned, unlined salt caverns beneath the shores of Seneca Lake. Like methane, butane and propane are the products of fracking and highly damaging and explosive.

The facility, located near Watkins Glen in the heart of New York's wine country, poses unacceptable risks of catastrophic accidents, injuries, air pollution, and contamination of Seneca Lake, which is the largest body of freshwater within New York State and the drinking water source for 100,000 people. It would also undermine the economy of the entire Fin-



ger Lakes, which is built on the region's beauty, tourism, and wineries. [According to the New York State Sustainable Business Council, "Like a Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) facility off Long Island's southern shore or oil trains on the Hudson River, allowing the Northeast's largest natural gas hub to be developed in the heart of the Finger Lakes is not worth the risk to the local economy, community character, and precious water resources. Investment should instead be directed to supporting innovation and job growth in the energy efficiency and renewable energy sectors." — BF Ed. Note]

Adding to these many dangers: transportation of the LPG to and from the salt caverns will send bomb trains rolling through Watkins Glen State park, putting at risk its 750,000 annual visitors. LPG tankers traversing a 175 ft-high train trestle over a gorge filled with hikers is a terrible combination.

It is hardly surprising, then, that 31 Finger Lakes municipalities representing 1.2 million New Yorkers — have signed resolutions of opposition. Over 350 businesses have joined them. Thousands of citizen comments have been sent to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) through

the regulatory process. Gas Free Seneca, Seneca Lake Pure Waters Association, Seneca Lake communities, Finger Lakes Wine Business Coalition and two Schuyler County legislators presented expert testimony about the instability of the geologic caverns, risk assessment, hydrology, and impacts on noise, community character, and economic development.

The completeness of the permit application is currently under review by an administrative law judge. Once he decides that there are no further issues to be resolved — in an announcement that may be made any day now — the decision to permit or prohibit the gas storage facility rests with the NYSDEC Commissioner.

We now wish to make very clear to Governor Cuomo and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation that New York should not take risks with LPG storage and transport any more than it did with fracking. Please join this effort.

All over the world, as we awake to the emergency of climate change, the refrain is "leave fossil fuels in the ground!" Aiding and abetting fossil fuel extraction by using our beloved lake as a warehouse for the products of fracking is exactly contrary to that message. A massive gas storage depot at Seneca Lake, owned by a Houston-based fossil fuel company, is contrary to the vision of those activists who gathered in Paris, and it is contrary to the vision of Finger Lakes residents about what kind of future, energy solutions, and economic development we want. It is a bad idea whose expiration date has passed. Wrong place, wrong time!

Please add your voice to our strong opposition by signing our petition. To safeguard our health, drinking water, and the economic vitality of the Finger Lakes, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation must deny Crestwood's proposed permit to store LPG at Seneca Lake.

(See gasfreeseneca.com for more information)

US Fund to Fight Global Climate Change Is Less Than Annual Payout to a Single For-Profit College

David Halperin, *Republic Report*

Last week, at a critical point in the Paris negotiations on global climate change, Secretary of State John Kerry announced that the United States would commit \$800 million annually to help developing nations adapt to a warming climate and move to cleaner energy. \$800 million doubled the prior US pledge, and the announcement may have helped seal the deal.

\$800 million is a great deal of money. But it is actually less than US taxpayers provided in the past year to each of five major for-profit college companies — all of which have been under investigation in recent years by federal and state law enforcement agencies for deceiving their students, lying to government regulators, and other abuses.

According to data from the US Department of Education, the following companies received these amounts in federal student grants and loans in the 2014-15 year:

Apollo / University of Phoenix: \$1.99 billion

Education Management Corp.: \$1.47

billion

DeVry: \$1.47 billion

Kaplan: \$877 million

Career Education Corp.: \$803 million

These figures do not even include additional tens of millions per company in federal education aid for military service members and veterans from the Defense Department and the Veterans Administration. And all of these for-profit college companies were in fact receiving much more in federal aid until a few years ago, when the truth about their abusive practices finally filtered down to prospective students, and enrollments plummeted.

The University of Phoenix was until recently getting as much as \$3.7 billion of your tax dollars in a single year — 4 1/2 times what the US now proposes to spend to fight global climate change. Corinthian Colleges, which collapsed this year under the weight of numerous charges of fraud and abuse, was receiving as much as \$1.4 billion annually, and ITT Tech, which is facing comparable charges and is struggling to survive, has been getting as much

as \$1.1 billion.

As a *New York Times* investigation recently reported, using Department of Education data analyzed by the Center for American Progress, 152 for-profit colleges under law enforcement investigation took about \$8.1 billion in federal student aid last year.

Not every one of these dollars is wasted. There are good teachers and programs within these companies, and some students are able to get solid training and build careers. But there is strong evidence that these companies have deceived students about things like the cost of tuition, job placement rates, and likely starting salaries, and left students across the country jobless and buried in student loan debt.

When you think about all the taxpayer money going to for-profit colleges that scam students and taxpayers, the \$800 million committed to fight global climate change starts to look pretty small. And the urgency of curbing the abuses of predatory for-profit colleges comes into sharper focus.

I • DEFEND THE BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTION

Maduro said, “It’s not a time to cry, it’s a time to fight.” He emphasized that Venezuela’s struggle for socialism is just beginning and that there is a need to start afresh to defend the country against the forces of counter-revolution. Various rallies and other activities are underway as the Venezuelan people and their prepare to defend themselves and their revolution in the context of the state terror the oligarchy and U.S. finance capital are planning to unleash. In factories, schools, neighborhoods, the people are organizing with revolutionary optimism.

Buffalo Forum urges all to oppose the continuing economic war the U.S. has imposed and continuing U.S. efforts to bring about regime change in Venezuela, something they attempted

against former President Hugo Chavez. The U.S. and other reactionary forces are already threatening major attacks against the workers, women, youth and Indigenous peoples of Venezuela. These include the repeal of Venezuela’s Organic Labor Law, which protects the rights of workers, and the Law of Fair Prices, which has worked to defend the people against economic terrorism. The oligarchy has pledged to go further to illegally oust elected President Maduro and destroy the Venezuelan Constitution. The Constitution, with broad input from the people and ratified by them, is an historic achievement in defense of the rights of the people.

The U.S. no doubt hopes to use the elections to justify further interference and efforts at regime change, which

must be condemned by all. Previous efforts to stir up divisions caused violence and deaths in Venezuela and cannot be permitted. It is up to the people of Venezuela to solve their problems, without foreign interference, so that solutions that serve the Venezuelans and not those of the U.S. and the oligarchy, go forward.

People of the U.S. stand as one with all Venezuelans in our common struggle for rights and for a new direction for all the Americas. The Bolivarian Revolution contributes greatly to this new direction and to defeating U.S. imperialism and the undemocratic dictate of the monopolies. As Venezuelans act now to defend their revolution, we here in the U.S. act to bring forward our revolution here.

BACKED AND FUNDED BY U.S.

Oligarchy Captures Majority in Legislative Election in Venezuela

The preliminary results of the December 6 Venezuelan legislative election were announced by the President of the National Electoral Council (CNE), Tibisay Lucena, early December 7. The “Roundtable of Democratic Unity” (MUD), a coalition of right-wing opposition parties, won the majority of seats in the National Assembly (109). The Great Patriotic Pole (GPP), a coalition including President Nicolás Maduro’s United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) now holds 55 seats and there are three indigenous representatives. The CNE announced that 13,742,974 (74.17%) of the 19,540,000 registered electors participated.

A simple majority gives the MUD authority to remove or censure vice-presidents and ministers. With more than two-thirds of the 167 seats they would have authority to modify laws, remove Supreme Court magistrates and convoke a Constituent Assembly.

One hundred and thirteen seats in the National Assembly are elected in a first-past-the-post system from Venezuela’s 87 electoral districts, while 51 are elected from a closed list by proportional representation based on the country’s 23 states plus the Capital District. The three seats reserved for Indigenous peoples are elected by those communities.

Venezuelan President Maduro spoke early December 7 and praised the country’s electoral system and the large turnout. “The constitution and democracy have triumphed, we recognize and accept these results,” said Maduro. “We have lost a battle today but the fight for a new socialism has barely begun. We see this as a slap to wake us up to act,” he said, adding “It’s not a time to cry, it’s a time to fight.”

The President called for “a new stage of the revolution” with “leadership from the base.” He stated that “a counter-revolution won, not the opposition” but that the “struggle for socialism is just beginning.” Maduro pointed out that the Venezuelan people are “experts in starting over. We came from the streets; we are the people of difficulties,” he said.

December 6 was the twentieth occasion



Final election rally of the patriotic forces before the election, Caracas, December 3, 2015

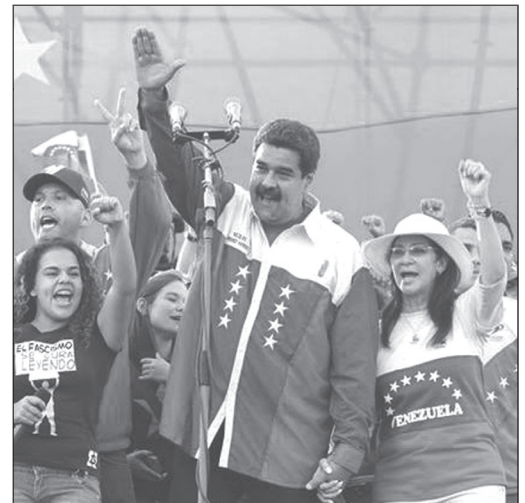
on which Venezuelans have voted since the beginning of the Bolivarian Revolution, and one of the few cases where the movement, founded and led by Commander Hugo Chávez, has suffered an electoral defeat. After the results were announced, many pointed out that previous election results with victory for the Bolivarian forces were called frauds by the U.S. imperialists and Venezuelan oligarchy but that this result was not questioned. This time too U.S. officials and Venezuelan opposition figures had said they would consider any result on December 6 not in their favour fraudulent. Venezuelans have been defending themselves in a long-term economic war waged by the U.S. and regional oligarchy to destabilize Venezuela and protect the historical privileges of the imperialist bourgeoisie and local ruling elite.

TeleSUR reports, “Amid news of political infighting, on [December 10] the MUD published on its website a list of laws its lawmakers plan to overturn once they come into office Jan. 5, including revoking price controls that have kept basic goods affordable; privatizing key enterprises and services; giving foreign companies concessions for infrastructure works; strengthening local police forces; and making

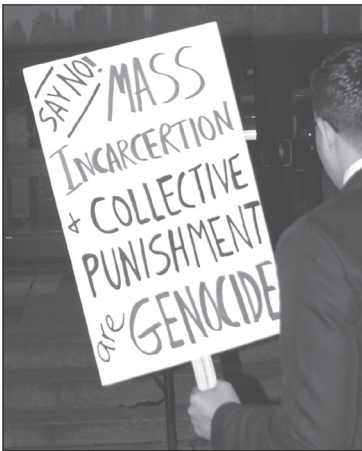
public media “independent,” or private.”

Representatives of the oligarchy have declared that major priorities include “attracting foreign investment” from global monopolies and repealing the Fair Price Law, which worked to defend the Venezuelan people from the economic war of the U.S. and Venezuelan oligarchy by limiting profits and punishing hoarding and price gouging. A leaked phone call in October revealed that Venezuelan opposition figures are calling for the return of the International Monetary Fund to Venezuela and “economic restructuring.”

(TML Weekly, *TeleSUR*, *Venezuelananalysis*, *Wikipedia*)



President Maduro speaking at the rally



16 • PROTEST DEFENDS STUDENTS' RIGHTS

your own program of what you are for, not just be reactive; the presidential elections and dangers posed by both Trump and Clinton; and the central role of the fight for decision making.

In elaborating on the importance of having an independent program, the examples of the protest and efforts to refuse receivership were given. Students could have just reacted angrily then given up. But because an independent program, with its own aims, such as developing political discussion on campus and uniting students to defend rights existed, a different stand was taken. The strength existed to carry on despite the difficulties. Similarly, teachers and students face serious attacks against the right to education. But similar independent organizing with definite aims also exists. Such a program enables people to be proactive, working together to advance their own interests.

For the elections, it was noted the Trump is presenting the most openly racist and

divisive face for the rich, in part to see how the public responds. It is also part of further discrediting elections and elected governance. Trump, presenting as an outsider and businessman, represents the possibility for the presidency to be sorted out among the billionaires, without the need for elections.

Trump is also serving to make it appear that he is the most dangerous. Connected with this is the notion that in order to stop him, it is necessary to support Clinton. In reality, it is Clinton that represents the most powerful and reactionary and racist, anti-worker section of the ruling circles. She is the more dangerous, in terms of invading Syria, Iran, genocide against Palestinians, and repression at home. She is the one better able to manipulate the movements of the people for rights, and misdirect and disinform them.

In terms of an independent program for elections, a key issue is to organize to change the set-up that blocks people

from selecting their own candidates and having an equal chance to get them elected. Funding the process, not the candidates, and ensuring it is a process that informs the public and provides equal space for all candidates to present their programs, is needed.

On all the different fronts, on campus, in the public schools and community, the issue of organizing to have the power to decide is critical. It is the ability of the rich to deprive us of this decision-making power, which belongs to us by right that blocks progress. Whether in organizing our club, our resistance, all our organizations need to take up the fight for decision making. Working together to take decisions is an important part of thinking and developing our common thinking. Blocking the ability to decide and collective efforts to learn to do so, is important to blocking the fight for rights. As we have said in the various battles, *Our Future, Our Rights, We Decide!*

Still Teaching

MC ZiLL, featuring Katie Ann

(A hip-hop performance was given by MC Zill as part of the protest of UPD canceling the planned event, One Humanity United Against Injustice. To watch the video and see other performances, see mczill.org. Lyrics below)

Whose schools? Our schools!
Who decides? We decide!
Need to realize
we always hold our own key to life,

Time to freedom fight against the
largest education heist,
We don't revolutionize then
they're taking all our rights,

Wish the option wasn't always in
conjunction
with making the biggest profits,
Wasting education, stop it,

Private companies banking market
robbing,
Hard to handle; My head starts
throbbing;
Man the Common Core is rotten,

The Gates Foundation is touted to
care about kids,
I doubt it,
Their wallets are clouded
funding Pearson's endowment,

Testing often has gotten students walking out early,
Stopping the PARCS in New Jersey; Refusing is news
worthy!

Any obstacle, probable, will swallow, devour you,
So I call in an audible whenever one is inaudible,

Giving in is never plausible, joining forces with every
molecule,
Any problem with education is solvable.

Open your eyes, time to revolutionize,
Open your eyes, time to revolutionize.

VERSE TWO:

Teachers are under attack uncover the facts,
So when they feed you bullsh--
feed real knowledge back,
Why is testing the norm?

So a handful of billionaires can get a little richer
by filling out some tax-break forms,

The connection to Charter Schools?
Start with the definition,
Getting funding from the public's money —
Yes that's the taxes division,

Must be a mistake, let me finish
wait,
Charter Schools don't have to
follow rules of the city or the state,

These quiet as kept secrets need to
be fixed,
Before Mr. G turns into a pissed
off Mr. T,

Then I pity the fool who's snatching
our kids education,
I've been burying hatred for the
duration of this operation,

The weather is rain, in my observa-
tion it's war,
Still Teaching; We're Teaching was
the calm before the storm,

Educators still breathing, still not
leaving,
Not listening to politicians words or
believing,

What the newspapers say anyway they're more biased,
Than questioning Christians who they think is the
most highest,

Say no to Governor Cuomo, no mayoral control,
Options more painful than,

Useless executive jobs on the payroll,
The developmentally inappropriate Common Core work
on the table,

ZiLL the education crime fighter willing and able,
Won't stop examining till I retire union enabled.

Open your eyes, time to revolutionize,
Open your eyes, time to revolutionize.

Whose schools? Our schools!
Who decides? We decide!



UPD CANCELS PLANNED EVENT AS "CONTROVERSIAL"

Buffalo State Students Welcome Participants to Action Defending Free Speech

A member of the Buffalo State Students for Revolution gave the remarks below at a recent event rejecting efforts by the University Police Department (UPD) to stop political discussion on campus of issues of concern, like mass incarceration.

Hello Everyone and Welcome!

Our event for today, **One Humanity United Against Injustice**, was canceled by the campus police (UPD) yesterday. They told us the content was controversial, and specifically mentioned Mass Incarceration and Genocide. They said four extra police were needed. The "controversial" content was on a photo we used to promote the event campus-wide, opposing collective punishment and mass incarceration as genocide. The photo was from a demonstration our club, **Buffalo State Students for Revolution** organized to oppose the genocide against Palestinians and African Americans carried out by Israel and the U.S. government, in the name of self-defense. *We said it is not self-defense, it is genocide.* Genocide is a government crime that needs to be punished.

We think these are important issues for students to discuss and that the university should welcome such discussion not prevent it. And we do not think we need police at our events. We are not the ones who are violent. We are the ones interested in discussing and solving problems.

Those of you who have joined us from off campus, welcome! UPD also said inviting people from the community was another reason we needed extra police. They kept saying we had plastered posters all over campus and the city, as if promoting our event is a bad thing! We think having this content of **One Humanity United Against Injustice** poster everywhere is important and positive. It helps create a more political atmosphere on campus. When the rich and their government are promoting racism and using collective punishment to brand



Muslims as terrorists, and refugees as threats and African Americans as threats, it is very important for us to speak out and stand united as one humanity.

As our posters also emphasized, *It is not Black vs. white, it is not Muslim vs. Jew, it is not refugees vs. native born, it is One Humanity United Against Injustice.* Forcing all Syrian and other refugees to have special screenings that take years is collective punishment. It is unjust and against their human rights. They should not be criminalized for conditions they did not create. It is not the Syrians who are the threat. It is the U.S. government and its wars of aggression and drones and terrorism against the peoples that are the source of the problem.

We think the best way to stop terrorism and lessen the number of refugees is for the U.S. to **Bring All U.S. Troops Home Now!** Let the peoples of the world solve problems in their countries themselves, without foreign interference. This is their right and we defend it.

We also welcome all the teachers who have joined us. As students we think issues of education are very important. We are particularly concerned about the content of education. Does this content help students to learn to think for themselves and be able to investigate and work together to contribute to solving social problems? Or is it stuck in the old way, of having us repeat whatever

we have been told? Since we are all taking exams now, we know this old way is the main way.

We recognize the importance of learning the human knowledge that exists, but we reject being drones able to repeat back what we are told. Events like this and other organizing we are doing is one way we are learning to **think** for ourselves — to recognize our interests and draw conclusions about the world, its problems and how to solve them.

We reject Common Core testing and assessments and curriculum for the same reason — they are used to produce drones, students

and teachers who submit to testing that is unjust, collective branding of students that is unjust, and more broadly the racism and poverty that exists in society. We are told these problems cannot be solved. We say they can and must be solved!

One reason our club exists is to oppose the drone producing content of education and fight for a new direction, where there is *education to change the world*, and we students together with teachers, professors, staff and parents have a role in **deciding** the content.

We are for changing the world so it is fit for all human beings. We know we have to work and learn together to take things in this direction. And we invite all of you to join us now and in the future as we organize for decision making, for our right to decide.

And now I would like to introduce you to our hip-hop artist MC Zill. We want you to know that another reason UPD thought we needed extra police was that we were having a hip hop artist perform! Of course, they did not know he is a white high school teacher! [...]

And now we welcome everyone to join us for food upstairs in the fireside lounge. We want to thank everyone who contributed food and invite everyone to socialize and discuss the issues we have raised and any other concerns you may have.

Protest Defends Students' Rights to Speak and Organize

Students and professors at Buffalo State were greeted with a protest in front of the Student Union December 16. The protest was organized by Buffalo State Students for Revolution and *Buffalo Forum*. An event co-sponsored by the two was unjustly canceled, at the last minute, by University Police (UPD). The main reason given was that content planned was "controversial" and needed four police at the event, staffing UPD could not provide (see article at right for more).

Despite the last minute effort to eliminate the significant political discussion planned, under the theme *One Humanity United Against Injustice*, the students were not intimidated. They were angered by this effort to silence them, after weeks of organizing and planning and publicizing the event had occurred. "College is supposed to be a place to debate controversial issues like genocide and mass incarceration," said one. "What are they afraid of?" said another. "Students uniting and speaking out and being political!" answered a third. But instead of just reacting, club members got together to discuss how to move forward despite UPD efforts to block discussion.

A protest at the student union was decided as the action to take. The hip-hop artist invited to the canceled event agreed to come for the protest (see p.14), as did teachers, high school students and others from the community. As part of mobilizing, a number of parents and teachers had been called on to provide food, so it was decided to still have dinner and discussion following the protest.

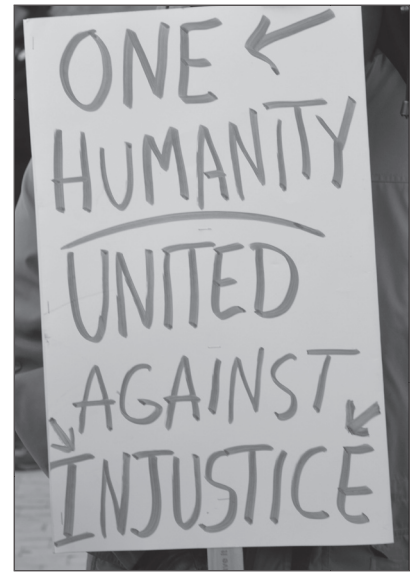
As part of the protest, people gathered in front of the student union to hear presentations and the hip-hop performance. With signs held high and chants of *Whose Schools, Our Schools, Who Decides? We Decide!* and referring to police killings and those in Palestine, *It's Not Self-Defense, It's Genocide*, several people joined in and many others stopped to hear about the UPD actions and the stand to defend the right to speak and organize. Hundreds received leaflets about the cancellation and many expressed their outrage. Participants then marched inside the Student Union, circling through the building and into the residential

dining area, where students expressed their interest and support.

The march then proceeded up to the fireside lounge for food and discussion on a variety of issues of concern, such as the recent government attacks against Muslims and refugees; the right to education and to content to meet the needs of today's modern society; the significance of resistance here and abroad and the united fight to win change that favors the people. And of course exams, and papers due and plans for the break!

In addition to presentations by students during the protest, Buffalo Forum gave a brief presentation inside. This focused on three main points: the importance of having

Protest Defends Students' Rights • 13



Are Mass Incarceration and Genocide Too Controversial for Students to Discuss? Should Police Decide?

Buffalo State Students for Revolution, December 16, 2015

(The leaflet below was distributed on campus December 16 as part of organizing to defend the right to speak and organize after UPD canceled our planned event)

Buffalo State Students for Revolution together with Buffalo Forum organized an event for today, to bring students together for political discussion, hip hop and dinner. As we described it, we would have "food for thought, food for the soul, food to eat!" Our theme was *One Humanity United Against Injustice*.

Campus police (UPD) decided yesterday that because the content of the meeting was "controversial" — specifically giving as examples mass incarceration and genocide, that they would require FOUR officers to be present at the event. They also said this was needed because we had "plastered posters" for the event "all over campus and all over the city." Evidently, promoting our event and inviting people from off campus also means more police are needed. Then there was also mention that a hip-hop artist would be performing. That too seems to require police. Police said they could not staff the event and therefore canceled it, locking the room and not allowing any

other to be used.

UPD also claimed that we did not "properly register" our event, saying our club did not exist. Buffalo State Students for Revolution does exist, we have been meeting on campus weekly, we have organized actions here on campus and off. But as a new group, we are not officially recognized by student government. And even though we got co-sponsorship from an official group at the college yesterday, UPD still canceled.

We think the real concern of UPD is that we are a political student group and together with Buffalo Forum, stand up for the rights of all. We are not intimidated by government or campus efforts to collectively brand people, including activists, as threats or terrorists or claim that because we want to discuss important issues like mass incarceration our events require police. They do not! We are not the ones who are violent. We are a diverse group of mainly women, including Muslims, Palestinians, African Americans, Puerto Ricans and whites, and we are political!

We are protesting today to defend our right to speak and organize. We think canceling the event was unfair and unjust.