

Buffalo Forum



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

Workers of all countries, unite!

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Refuse Receivership and Cuomo's Undemocratic Plans 3-6
- Refuse NY State Tests 7-10
- Albany Protest for Full Funding 11
- County Sheriff Spying on Civilians 12
- Hands Off Venezuela 13-16

March 20, 2015

Vol. 19 #3

The Claim that Resistance Harms Children

As students, teachers and parents continue to resist Governor Cuomo's attacks on public education, state officials at various levels are putting forward the claim that resistance — not testing, not lack of funds, not plans for receivership — is harming students. This claim is especially being used now, as the April standardized testing dates approach and the movement to refuse the tests and refuse Cuomo's attacks on public education is growing and including now even many superintendents.

Various lies are used to back up the claim that resistance is harmful. Students who refuse the tests will not be allowed into criterion schools is one such lie. Superintendents and districts that refuse will lose funding is another. Parents are told they do not have the right to refuse — another lie. Children who refuse are being forced to “sit and

Resistance • 3

JOIN THE FIGHT

Refuse the Tests! Refuse Receivership! Our Schools, We Decide!

There is a broad and growing movement in Buffalo and statewide for public control of public schools. The public — through numerous rallies, forums, petitions, letters, interventions at school board meetings, refusing state tests and more — is putting forward its right to decide.

GOVERNOR HOLDING EDUCATION FUNDS HOSTAGE

Cuomo's Undemocratic Plans for Public Education

In his 2015-16 Executive Budget proposal, Governor Cuomo highlights a number of changes he wants to make to public education, both K-12 and State University of New York (SUNY) and City University of New York (CUNY). He also makes clear that he will not provide public education funds without passage

Cuomo's Undemocratic Plans • 4

Such decision-making is necessary to improve the quality of public education and defend the equal right to education for all. As a whole, this public is emerging and acting to unite all: teachers, parents, students, staff, superintendents; urban and

Our Schools, We Decide • 3

Ken-Ton Resolution Demands Funding and Considers Refusing State Tests

We reprint below the draft resolution submitted to the Ken-Ton school board March 10, demanding that Governor Cuomo stop using student test scores to evaluate students, teachers and administrators. The resolution, like others statewide, also demands that Governor Cuomo end his undemocratic action to “hold students hostage” by refusing to provide state

Ken-Ton Resolution • 7

Hands Off Venezuela! No to Sanctions and U.S. Terrorism

President Obama recently declared Venezuela “an extraordinary threat to U.S. national security.” Obama also increased the unjust and illegal sanctions against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, all in an effort to overthrow her democratically-elected government — first of Hugo Chavez and now of President Nicolás Maduro.

Using an executive order, Obama claims he is targeting — in Venezuela, not

the U.S. — “actions or policies that undermine democratic processes or institutions; significant acts of violence or conduct that constitute a serious abuse or violation of human rights; actions that prohibit, limit, or penalize the exercise of freedom of expression or peaceful assembly.”

The genocide of mass incarceration of African Americans and torture of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons; police killings and brutality; the broad spying by

the Pentagon down to local police and infiltration and disruption of anti-war and pro-rights groups; the continuing drone warfare massacring civilians and Guantánamo indefinite detention without charges, all done with impunity, show it is the U.S. that is the biggest abuser of human rights at home and abroad. It is the U.S. that terrorizes and massacres civilians and interferes wherever and

Hands Off Venezuela • 16

**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!

602-8077
buffaloforum@usmlo.org
www.buffaloforum.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

COMING EVENTS

MOCK GRAND JURY TO INDICT GOVERNOR CUOMO

*Tuesday, March 24, 6pm, Kleinhans
at Symphony Circle*

A mock grand jury, with witnesses and prosecutors will be organized to indict Governor Cuomo on charges of depriving students of their New York State Constitutional right to a sound and basic education; brutalizing students by advocating standardized tests that have not been validated, provide no meaningful information to teachers and parents and traumatize students, especially English language learners and special needs students; undermining local control of schools, underfunding colleges.

Sponsored by Buffalo Teachers Federation



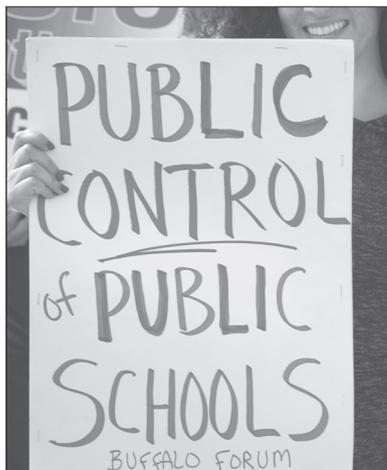
SPEAK OUT AT BUFFALO SCHOOL BOARD MEETING

Wednesday, March 25, 5:30, City Hall, Room 801

Join students, parents and teachers in demanding the School Board support parents refusing the state standardized tests and refusing Cuomo's plans for state takeover using receivership. Advance the pro-education movement under the banner, *Our Schools, We Decide!*

DEMONSTRATE FOR PUBLIC CONTROL OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*Thursday, March 26, 4:30pm, Bennett
High School, 2885 Main St.*



Buffalo joins statewide protests to:
raise the quality of public schools, fully fund schools; end high-stakes testing and support refusing the tests; keep public schools public; halt charter school expansion and have fair teacher evaluations. The action will unite parents, students and teachers, urban and suburban.

Come stand together to say,
Our Schools, We Decide!

**INFORMATIONAL FORUM ON COMMON CORE
AND HIGH-STAKES TESTING**

*Saturday, March 28, 2pm, Merriweather Library
(Utica and Jefferson)*

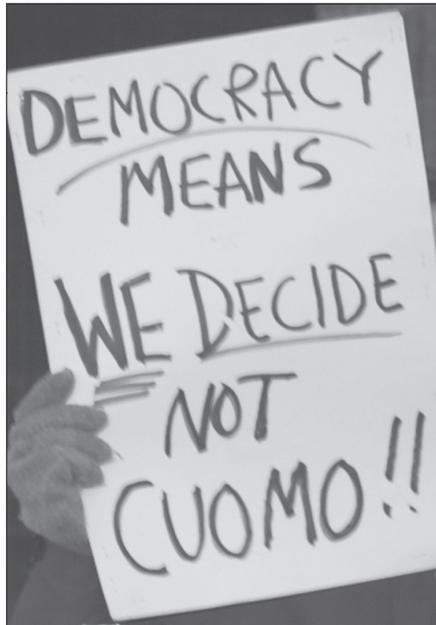
Parent panel from Western New Yorkers for Public Education to discuss current education policies, corporate reforms and how to refuse the tests

I • OUR SCHOOLS, WE DECIDE

suburban; and increasingly organizing under the banner, *Our Schools, We Decide!* This democratic stand, broadening of support and growing unity are important accomplishments of the movement and the basis for further advances.

It is this pro-public, pro-education movement that Cuomo is seeking to block and divide, using receivership and the Common Core testing regime as weapons. This makes strengthening and building the movement, under the banner *Our Schools, We Decide!* all the more important.

Concretely this means joining the various actions taking place, such as that March 24, 6pm at Kleinhans to have a mock trial to indict Cuomo. On March 25 speak out at the school board meeting to oppose Common Core testing and demand support for students and parents who refuse, not the bullying of punishment, like forcing students to sit and stare. On March 26, at Bennett at 4:30 Buffalo joins statewide actions to oppose Cuomo's attacks, demand full funding and public control of the schools — no receivership! (See p.2 for more details.) Informing and encouraging all to join



the Refuse the NY State Tests in April is another vital means to build the resistance and work for our own alternative, where we decide curriculum and student and teacher evaluations.

It is not an accident that Cuomo has taken the undemocratic action to withhold public funds until he gets his way. This is consistent with the anti-democratic

character of his whole plan. Such executive action to hold public funds hostage is not a modern arrangement suitable to the needs of today. Cuomo is going backward, acting like a King, with an appointed receiver his enforcer.

For Cuomo, the public treasury is to be completely taken from the public and its need to serve the public good. It is all to be handed over to the rich and serve their narrow interests. This includes narrowing education to solely serve “commercialization opportunities,” as Cuomo puts it, paying private monopolies hundreds of millions for harmful standardized testing and paying private charter schools run by hedge fund billionaires.

The modern innovation of public control and decision making is needed to raise the quality of public education and redesign education to serve the public interest to advance society. Collective action, by students, teachers, parents, and the public as a whole is vital for a modern democracy to flourish. This is the direction needed and all should join in making a contribution to the pro-education movement that declares, *Our Schools, We Decide!*

I • RESISTANCE



stare” during the lengthy exams, as a form of punishment for resistance. Instead, their stand is an example of rejecting bullying and standing for rights, something to be applauded.

A few facts are in

order. First, New York State education law (section 1.section 305) specifically states that “The Commissioner shall provide that no school district shall make any student promotion or placement decisions based

solely or primarily on student performance on the state administered standardized English Language Arts and Mathematics Assessments for grades three through eight.” Districts are required to use “multiple measures” and the tests cannot be “the major factor,” in such decisions. The state and local officials are obligated to tell parents this, but instead are threatening to act against the law and punish students who refuse. Resistance then not only protects the children from the abuse of testing, it also defends them from efforts by the state to illegally punish them. Parents who stand up to such illegal actions and expose them are an example for the students and school officials.

Secondly, while the State Education Department, like those across the country, has repeatedly threatened to withhold funds if schools and districts refuse the tests, there is not a single example of them doing so.

Most consider it would be illegal to punish schools in such a manner, given that parents have the right, as the ones responsible for their children, to refuse the tests. Teachers also have the obligation to oppose child abuse and defend the quality of education. The Common Core testing has been shown to harm children and education alike. So it is resistance that serves the interests of the students and public as it stands against the harmful actions of government officials, from the top down.

As these examples indicate, it is resistance that enables all those faced with brutal attacks to keep their dignity as human beings. It is refusing to submit to actions that we know to be wrong, such as the Common Core testing regime, that enables us to have a clear conscience and carry forward that fight for what we know to be necessary. Resistance is not the problem, it is the solution!

I • CUOMO'S UNDEMOCRATIC PLANS

of his legislative proposals. This is stated directly: "The Budget makes sure that the State's significant investment in education results in the reforms that our children deserve. A year-to-year increase of \$1.1 billion is contingent on the implementation of improvements to the systems for teacher preparation, evaluation, certification and tenure, as well as providing authority to truly improve failing schools and providing increased support and accountability to charter schools," (p.335).

Cuomo has made clear that the "authority" he is calling for is state takeover of entire school districts, using an appointed receiver. This individual receiver will have complete control, of budget, hiring and firing, curricula, discipline, length of school day and year, etc. Using the Lawrence, Massachusetts School District model that Cuomo supports, the receiver will act to destroy the district — which is a means to weaken collective district-wide action of teachers, students and parents.

The receiver has complete control to dole out funds or withhold them. He can require and approve or deny individual school plans, and all must be based on the Common Core curricula and testing regime, which is widely opposed. We have already gotten a taste of this in Buffalo, with the state repeatedly refusing school redesign plans supported by the public and withholding funds from schools most in need, like Lafayette. A receiver will make such matters far worse.

A receiver will act to replace the Buffalo School district with a collection of individual schools, each competing for funds and approval from the receiver for its individual school plans. In this situation, district-wide parent groups will no longer have a place, as there is no district. Collective action is to be replaced by "leadership teams" at each school, handpicked by the receiver. And even these teams do not decide, the receiver does.

The ability of unions to take collective action also is greatly weakened, as the district as a collective entity is eliminated. The receiver also has authority to change and eliminate contracts. Collective actions

by students are also more limited, as conditions in each school will vary and over time the concept that there is a school district will be replaced by competition among the individual schools.

Conditions of competition and division do not serve the public interest, which needs conditions of cooperation and unity. Decision making by a single appointed individual, accountable to Cuomo, does not serve democracy, which today requires enhancing and expanding decision making by the public.

Performance Based Funding

Another undemocratic feature of Cuomo's plans is use of "performance" based funding, for SUNY, CUNY and K-12. Currently, funding for all levels of education is far below what is needed. However, it is based on enrollment and formulas that take into account additional funding for students with special needs, English Language Learners (ELL) etc. Now Cuomo wants to shift funding to what he terms "performance," and again each school is to devise its own "metrics," to be approved by the state.

In part 2 of his "Opportunity Agenda" dealing with education Cuomo states, "SUNY and CUNY colleges will each develop a Performance Management Plan. These will include metrics to determine baseline performance and goals for growth to improve access, completion, academic and post-graduation employment or transfer success, research, and community engagement. Further, these plans will drive new initiatives and become the mechanism for the allocation of new funding to support experiential learning as a requirement for graduation, a Master Researcher Program in partnership with the SUNY and CUNY Research Foundations to pay bonuses to successful professors who generate the greatest research and development and commercialization opportunities, and financial incentives for campus presidents who provide proven leadership in commercialization of research through the STRAT-UP NY program," (p.215) Similar "performance" based bonuses for administrators and teachers are proposed for K-12, to replace what

Cuomo calls "automatic funding."

Several things stand out here. One is that it is divisive and undemocratic to impose such "performance" based funding. State executives and/or their appointed receivers will no doubt determine what is and is not "performance." Competition will be increased. Funding will target not education for enlightenment, for solving social problems and advancing society, which is what is needed today. Rather, yet more funding will be used for "commercialization opportunities," that is to serve the monopolies. University presidents who provide such opportunities are the ones to get bonuses.

In this manner, public funding of SUNY and CUNY is to directly and more fully serve the narrow, immediate commercial needs of the monopolies. Funding is not for raising the quality of the public institutions, for the theoretical developments and research society requires, but for ensuring these institutions, and their public buildings, labs, students, and funds are given to private interests.

Further, given existing experience with arbitrary use of standardized test scores, including the arbitrary setting of cut scores to ensure the majority of students "fail," one can predict that such "performance" based funding will greatly increase favoritism, punishment, cheating by top officials and more. Use of bribes to professors, university presidents and school administrators is part of this "performance" based funding.

More generally, equating "performance" with providing "commercialization opportunities," goes directly against the concept of public education to arm the next generation to advance society, to solve social problems. Instead it is to be narrowed to the self-serving interests of the monopolies and their drive for world empire and domination. The concept that government is duty-bound to provide the equal right to education for all (automatic and full funding) is to have no place and instead, only that which provides "commercialization opportunities" and hence performance for the monopolies is to become the norm. Such a plan is undemocratic, anti-education and anti-public.

Visit our website: usmlo.org

Receivership is Not the Answer

Dr. Nevergold, Buffalo School Board Member

(We reprint below comments by Dr. Nevergold at a press conference March 5 by Citizen Action to defend the right to education. Teachers, parents, school and union officials spoke, demanding full funding now for the public schools. A study released at the event brought out that the state owes \$5.9 billion in funds to public schools as part of a 2007 court agreement to increase equality in schools statewide. Buffalo schools, like others, are owed additional tens of millions of dollars that the Governor is refusing to provide. Instead, Cuomo is proposing a widely denounced and insufficient increase of \$1.1 billion in yearly education funding and demanding that it will only be provided if the legislature submits to his various attacks on education, such as state receivership, more testing and state control of hiring and firing of

teachers.)

* * *

We are here today in solidarity with parents, community members, teachers and board members across this state who are calling on the Governor to support public education. Last week Governor Cuomo released his report on “Failing Schools,” his reform agenda to fix our schools. The report is filled with errors, indicative of the erroneous conclusions the Governor has reached about our so-called failing schools and how to fix them. We are here to say to the Governor: Support Public Education.

Charter schools are not the answer, many of them perform no better than our public schools and in fact many of them perform worse; more standardized tests are not the answer Governor! We are testing our children to their detriment and the scores from *one* test

do not define learning. Governor. Tying those tests to teacher evaluations and developing an evaluation system that is an unproven measure of teacher competence and then threatening teachers with termination is not the answer.

Governor, setting up schools to be taken over by a receiver is not the answer. Has anyone told you of the New York State Education Department’s takeover of the Roosevelt School District for 10 years? That did not work! Receivership is not the answer. Finally Governor, withholding school funding and using it as the carrot or the stick to get what you want is not the answer! Governor, help us create smaller classes, enhance learning spaces, better use testing as a diagnostic tool. Give teachers professional development and recognize teaching as an honorable profession — do not demonize it...

The Governor’s Agenda has Nothing to do with What is Good for Kids

Dr. Bill Cala Superintendent, Fairport Central School District

The State of the State address by Governor Cuomo was what most of us expected. It was an all-out assault on public education, teachers, children, families and local control. It appears that breaking teachers is his solution to poverty, income inequality and inadequate school funding.

As we have experienced on a first-hand basis over the past few years, the APPR system is indeed a fatally flawed proxy for genuine evaluation done at the local level. The governor’s solution is to up the ante by increasing the tenure period to 5 years and making state test scores 50 percent of a teacher’s evaluation. Given the already bogus cut score setting process for the state exams, we are assured of a whole new wave of unreliable ratings designed to crush teachers, close schools and open the door to his other “reforms,” such as lifting the cap on charter schools and creating a tax credit for private schools and charters and increasing the amount the state gives charters per pupil.

This last item of increasing charter aid is especially interesting as there are no strings attached. The regular public schools will

only get an increase in aid if the legislature approves all of his draconian measures mentioned above. Two major studies have demonstrated with great clarity that charters perform worse than public schools and only 17 percent of charters perform equal or better to publics (CREDO 2013). Apparently, that is fine — they get increases in spite of their failing performance.

Let us be clear that the governor’s agenda has nothing to do with what is good for kids. Far from it. It is what is good for his financial supporters: the corporations who are making billions of dollars on the tests, the texts, the technology, the corporate professional development and the data collection, retrieval and distribution. As this country gets poorer and poorer and the few get richer and richer the pride of our nation, its public schools, are being disassembled while Bill Gates, The Walton’s, The Koch Brothers, Eli Broad and other scavengers are feasting at the table of greed.

While the situation may seem hopeless, I believe parents are able to bring this tyranny to a screeching halt. Assessments

should be used only for the benefit of students...nothing else. Last year over 60,000 parents in New York refused the 3-8 tests. This year it is expected that number will triple. The refusal movement will indeed collapse the evaluation system and the governor’s plan to dismantle public education. Parents will play a critical role.

What role will we [administrators] play? How will we speak out? This is our profession. These are our children. This is our responsibility. Action and activism takes courage. Last week I spoke of my hero Rosa Parks. Let her courage and actions inspire us. I will close with the wisdom and inspiration of Frederick Douglass.

“Where justice is denied; where poverty is enforced; where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them; neither persons nor property will be safe. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground.”
Time to start plowing.

Clarence Superintendent Opposes Governor Cuomo's Assault on Public Education

(We provide below a letter from the Clarence Superintendent to Governor Cuomo opposing his assault on public education as divisive and demanding full funding for the schools. It is one of many letters from superintendents statewide opposing Cuomo's plans. Parents and teachers are in the forefront of these efforts to stop Cuomo's anti-education and anti-public actions by demanding, Our Schools, We Decide!)

* * *

Dear Governor Cuomo:

I write to you today with an urgent message regarding your proposed 2015-16 Executive Budget.

I consider your budget an assault on public education as well as an affront to our students, teachers, parents, and local school boards. Your rhetoric regarding public schools and the teachers and leaders who work in those schools is divisive, inaccurate, and inflammatory.

Public schools in New York State are not a monopoly to be broken, nor are the overwhelming majority of public schools failing. [...] Public education is the centerpiece of our democracy and a ladder to opportunity and success for all New Yorkers. Attacking teachers and public schools with empty platitudes is not an effective strategy for promoting continuous improvement nor is it a substitute for failing to deliver on the State's constitutional obligation to adequately fund education.

Putting aside your criticism of public schools, the 2015-16 Executive Budget does not contain a school aid proposal.

While the Executive Budget proposes sufficient appropriation authority to fund a total year-to-year increase in aid for education of \$1.03 billion, there are no school aid formulas to allocate these funds. Your proposal also dictates that no school will receive any increase in constitutionally protected and court ordered school aid, unless your entire package of ill-conceived education reforms are passed by

the Legislature. The political maneuver of holding state education aid hostage, and by proxy holding New York State students' hostage, unless you get your own way is unprecedented, undemocratic, and morally unacceptable.

In addition, school districts are required to submit a 2016 proposed tax levy to the state by March 1st in order to calculate a district-specific tax cap figure. Establishing a proposed tax levy is impossible without knowing projected state revenue.

Adequate funding must include removing the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) from the budget formulas. With the state's finances gaining strength, it is no longer possible to justify the continued existence of the GEA that is reducing total state aid by over \$1 billion this year. The GEA was born with the Great Recession when the state had to close huge deficits. Schools shared in the painful choices that effort required, but now that the gap in the state budget has been eliminated, it is time for the GEA to end as well.

Adequate funding should also include honoring the state's obligation to fund school districts at a level sufficient for a sound basic education pursuant to the New York State Court of Appeal's decision in 2007. If New York State had merely increased school aid by the rate of inflation since that decision, districts would have \$2 billion more to support students and programs than they have today. Most of the school districts in New York are still receiving less school aid than in 2008-09, six years ago.

Your proposed reforms to the APPR are wrong-headed. There is no credible scientific evidence that increasing the weight of standardized tests to make judgments of teachers will be a more valid or reliable teacher evaluation methodology.

Likewise, studies from the American Statistical Association found that teachers account for about 1 to 14 percent of the variability in test scores and that the majority of opportunities for quality

improvement are found in system-level conditions.

Equally disturbing is the proposal for independent evaluators to conduct the majority of teacher observations. The proposal for independent evaluators would increase costs and administrative demands for schools and likely diminish the efficacy of APPR as a feedback tool by reducing the interaction between teachers and their direct supervisors.

The purpose of an evaluation system has to be greater than merely accurately sorting educators into performance levels.

The system needs to help school districts make sound personnel decisions and provide feedback to help educators improve their work, both with an ultimate goal of raising student achievement.

All thoughtful parties in the education arena agree that some reforms are necessary. We know how effective legislation is crafted and it isn't a "my way or the highway" approach that works. Effective legislation requires reasoned debate, gathering research, and framing compromises.

I urge you to properly fund schools first, then work on the legislative reforms without making school funding contingent upon passage of any specific reforms.

I also encourage you to seek the advice of experts in the field, including teachers and administrators, when considering reform legislation. Finally, I call on you to observe a moratorium on unfunded mandates. Newly created regulations for the instruction of English Language Learners, the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards, and the APPR represent three unfunded mandates that add significant cost to school districts budgets. These new programs must be funded or the costs associated with them allowed as an exemption to the levy limit within the property tax cap calculation.

Sincerely,

Geoffrey M. Hicks, Ed.D. Clarence Superintendent

Poll Shows Voters Statewide Rejecting Cuomo's Attacks on Education

On March 18, the independent Quinnipiac University released a poll concerning Cuomo's approval ratings and issues of concern among voters. He now has his lowest job approval rating ever, 50 percent approve to – 39 percent disapprove. Among upstate voters only 39 percent approve and 54 percent disapprove.

Voters put education as their top concern, calling for the governor and legislature to make it their number one priority. Votes are split among various issues so none are a majority. Education secured 24 percent as the issue of greatest concern, followed by 15 percent for economy/jobs and 12 percent for taxes.

Education is also where voters think Cuomo is doing the worst job. More than a majority, 63 percent, disapprove of his

handling of education. Further, by a 55 - 28 percent margin, New York State voters trust the teachers' unions more than the governor to improve education in the state. This is true across all party, gender, age and regional groups surveyed.

Voters also reject use of test scores to evaluate teachers and tenure. By a 71 – 25 percent margin, voters say that teacher pay should not be based on how well their students perform on standardized tests and by 65 - 30 percent that teacher tenure should not be based on student test scores. Again this is true across all party, gender, age and regional groups surveyed.

Demonstrations in Buffalo, surrounding areas and schools across the state are calling on governments at all levels to stop use of state standardized tests, as they are not

valid. The whole testing regime is being called child abuse by parents, educators and students. The Buffalo Teachers Federation resolutions (see p.8) also express this widespread sentiment, urging all to stand against the tests, support those refusing and opposing other attacks on education by Cuomo.

Pickets at numerous schools in Buffalo and the region, including City Honors, Lafayette, McKinley, West Seneca, Hamburg, Lancaster, are all uniting in opposing Cuomo's attacks on education. A rally this week of 3,000 in Long Island, that included the superintendent of schools, did the same, calling on all to reject Cuomo's plans and to show the united stand of parents, teachers and students by refusing the state tests, which began in April.

I • KEN-TON RESOLUTION

funding until his legislative demands are met. Hundreds of people packed the board meeting and expressed support for the resolution and plans by many parents to refuse the tests. The board tabled the resolution to get more public input and will be discussing and likely voting on it on March 24.

* * *

Preliminary Draft Proposal

B. Dana, President, Ken-Ton School Board

FIRST:

Unless our Governor and State legislators begin to move towards suspending the current teacher and administrator evaluation regulations using student testing data for 20% of the total score. and...

Abandon the Governor's proposal to expand the use of student testing data to 50% for teacher & administrative evaluations. and...

Make significant progress towards establishing a commission comprised equally of representatives from the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA), New York State

Assembly's Education Committee, New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS), New York State Education Department (NYSED), New York State Federation of School Administrators (NYSFSA), New York State PTA (NYS PTA), New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA), New York State Senate's Education Committee, New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), and School Administrators Association of New York State (SAA-NYS). Their purpose will be to develop ONE fair, equitable, and efficient teacher and administrator evaluation system that will be used throughout New York State; thereby, replacing over 600 evaluation instruments currently in use.

The Board of Education of the Kenmore - Town of Tonawanda Union Free School District (UFSD) will, upon the approval and acceptance of the Kenmore Teachers Association (KTA) and Kenmore Administrators Association (KAA), seriously consider eliminating using student test data as part of our teachers and administrators evaluations.

Furthermore, it would be expected that the KTA and KAA would be receptive to recalculating the remaining portion of

their evaluations to a total 100 percent.

SECONDLY:

Unless the Governor releases the state aid information he is "holding hostage" in an effort to pressure the legislature to pass his aggressive public school agenda which school districts also require to make calculations towards developing a budget that is required by law. and...

The Governor and legislature establish a fair and equitable state aid funding formula that adequately provides funding for ALL school districts throughout the state so they can provide for the educational needs for every New York State child. and...

Complies with the court ordered removal of the Gap Elimination Adjustment thereby providing school districts with the necessary funding already owed to them and realizes that had he not taken our money, school districts may have been afforded an opportunity to balance their own budgets without a tax increase.

The Board of Education of the Kenmore - Town of Tonawanda UFSD will seriously consider not administering standardized testing in grades 3 – 8.

Buffalo Teachers Federation Opposes Common Core and Supports Parents Refusing Tests

The Buffalo Teachers Federation (BTF) recently passed two resolutions opposing Common Core and its testing regime and supporting parents refusing the tests. One resolution was initially passed unanimously by the BTF Executive Committee. At the Council of Delegates meeting March 19 an additional resolution supporting the right of parents to refuse and the right of teachers to freely discuss refusal was also passed. We reprint both below.

* * *

Resolution Passed by Council of Delegates Supporting Right of Parents to Refuse Tests and Teachers to Discuss Refusal

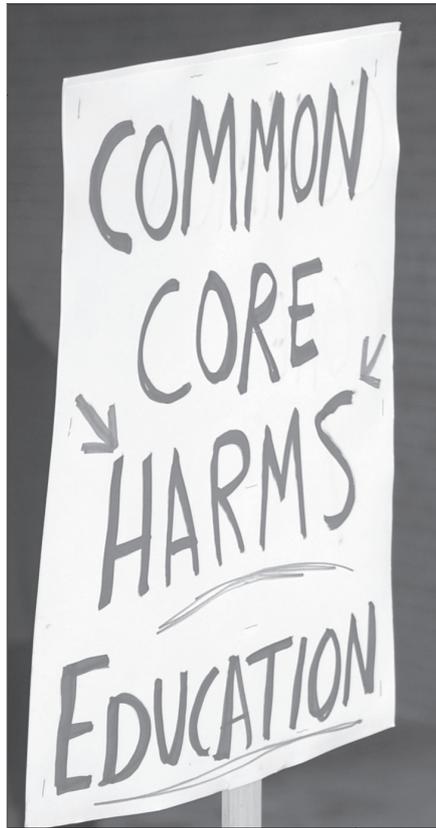
WHEREAS: the assessment practices that accompany Common Core Standards – including the political manipulation of test scores are used as a justification not only to fail students but also to unfairly evaluate educators.

WHEREAS: such tests fail to measure the more important qualities and characteristics that schools should develop in children such as: imagination, teamwork, collaboration, character, leadership, empathy, critical thinking and ethics, amongst others, and

WHEREAS: the commitment to state and federal standardized testing and evaluation diverts our precious resources from the educational needs of our students, including music, arts, physical education, other non-tested subjects, field trips, internships, vocational training, textbooks and any number of authentic and deep exploration learning opportunities, and

RESOLVED: that the Buffalo Teachers Federation supports the rights of parents and guardians to choose to Refuse their children from any and all state or federal mandated testing, and supports the right of teachers to discuss freely with parents and guardians their rights and responsibilities with respect to such testing, all without any negative consequence from the Buffalo Board of Education,* and

RESOLVED: that the BTF will



support, protect and defend members and others who may suffer negative consequences brought against them from speaking about their views of such testing or about the rights and obligations of parents and guardians with respect to such testing and,

RESOLVED: that the BTF calls upon the Buffalo Board of Education to inform parents and guardians, in a timely manner, of their right to refuse state and federally mandated high stakes tests.

(* Passed pending review by BTF's legal counsel)

Resolution from BTF Executive Committee Opposing Standardized Testing

WHEREAS: Standardized tests presently being inflicted on our students:

- have been found to be developmentally inappropriate.
- do not provide timely information that can be utilized by teachers and parents to assist with each student's education.
- are shielded from public scrutiny and

analysis thereby preventing educators, parents and the general public from uncovering serious and harmful inadequacies of said tests.

- have not been validated, and;

WHEREAS: The Common Core standards that said standardized tests reflect, have also not been field tested or validated for their alleged purposes, and;

WHEREAS: Students speaking little or no English and those coming from countries where they never attended school are being cruelly subjected to said tests, and;

WHEREAS: Schools are being falsely classified as failing based upon New York State imposed standardized tests even though many Buffalo Public Schools have a student population where twenty (20) to forty (40) different languages are spoken, and;

WHEREAS: Fifty percent (50%) of an Elementary School's score is wrongly based upon the 3rd through 8th grade State mandated English Language Arts standardized tests, the second 50% of an Elementary School's score is based upon the 3rd through 8th grade Math tests in which questions require reading English and most, if not all, of a High School's score is based upon New York State standardized tests that require reading English and;

WHEREAS: Students with disabilities are also being cruelly subjected to said tests, and;

WHEREAS: The preparation of students for said standardized tests eliminates weeks of instructional time, and;

WHEREAS: Some students are not intimidated by and do well on standardized tests while others fear them and do not do well, and;

WHEREAS: Curriculum decisions should be validated, developmentally appropriate, designed to enhance creativity, critical thinking, and also foster a student's love of learning and a teacher's joy of teaching and most importantly be made by practicing teachers, and;

WHEREAS: Assessments of student

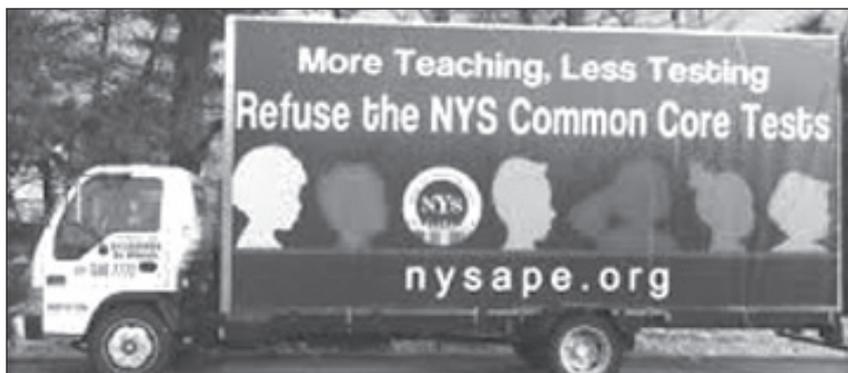
BTF Resolutions • 9

Did you know?

- You have the right to refuse New York State (NYS) Common Core Tests in grades 3-8
- If large numbers of students opt out, your school district will NOT lose funding
- By law, NYS Common Core Test scores in grades 3-8 may not be used as the sole or even the majority of the basis for placement decisions
- If your child does not take NYS Common Core Tests in grades 3-8, he or she may NOT be denied access to enrichment or academic support services
- Teacher evaluations will not be negatively impacted by large numbers of test refusals
- A focus on state test scores de-emphasizes untested subjects such as art, music, social studies, and science
- The majority of educators in NYS do not support the Common Core Learning Standards
- The NYS Common Core Tests squander valuable learning time
- An emphasis on NYS Common Core Test scores makes it more difficult for a teacher to meet the needs of both high performing and struggling students
- The Common Core Learning Standards have never been piloted or tested. They are a set of copyrighted, experimental learning standards that carry a liability waiver and have not been shown to improve student achievement
- Governor Cuomo has proposed a significant increase in the use of test scores to evaluate teachers and schools despite parent outcry over the current emphasis on high stakes testing

Learn more at nysape.org

New York State Allies for Public Education is a coalition of over 50 grassroots groups committed to reclaiming the promise of public education in NYS.



Refusing the Tests Unites Us and Calls for Alternatives

A teacher and parent



Refusing the New York State standardized tests affirms that the public decides. Refusing the tests exposes the invalid, unreliable tests and makes the educationally poor modules teachers are supposed to use and makes the Common Core standards irrelevant. Refusing the tests stands up for our students as more than a score, stands up for our teachers, stands up for our schools. Refusing the tests unites us and reveals the government's privatization schemes. Refusing the tests calls on us to build an alternative vision, one where teachers, students, and parents — the experts on childhood, development and education — decide, and where education serves to solve social problems,

8 • BTF RESOLUTIONS

progress should be developed by teachers to provide them and parents with timely information to assist with each student's education,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That while educators have been advised of possible negative consequences to them if they advise parents to refuse to have their children harmed by the current High Stakes tests, Buffalo teachers will not be covered into continuing to allow our students to be brutalized by the current High Stakes testing (junk science), but will continue to use all appropriate means to assist parents who wish to prevent that which in our opinion amounts to

a form of child abuse. To that end the BTF:

- will continue to have a policy of opposing High Stakes standardized testing of students,
- will support and provide information on its website for parents wishing to prevent their children from taking High Stakes Standardized tests,
- will encourage its members to utilize the information on the BTF website to prevent their own children from taking High Stakes Standardized tests,
- will defend and seek NYSUT/NEA/AFT support and defense for any member disciplined for exercising their rights to

speak publicly on this issue, and;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The BTF will continue to seek a Board of Education policy against "sit and stare," and;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: The BTF will publicize this resolution to its members, the media, the Board of Regents, Buffalo Board of Education, Western New York Delegation, supportive community organizations and all persons who should receive copies, and;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the BTF will submit this resolution appropriately modified to the NYSUT, NEA and AFT representative assemblies.

ALBANY PROTEST DEMANDS

Full Funding Now! Our Schools, We Decide!

On March 11, students, teachers, parents and delegations from across the state rallied and marched in Albany, demanding that Governor Cuomo provide full funding now for education at all levels. The delegations included those from schools, parent-teacher associations, unions, athletic and community organizations, as well as cities from across the state. Buffalo brought about three busloads, despite efforts by school officials to block students and teachers from going.

Marching bands and drill teams added to the spirit of the rally at the armory and the march to the capitol building. Through various signs and chants, demonstrators defended the equal right to education for all and denounced Governor Cuomo for holding *our* public dollars hostage to his destructive and anti-democratic legislative demands. One banner from young students reflected their anger with unfair testing and its result of pushing many students out the door. It read: *1, 2, 3, 4, Push Cuomo Out the Door; 5, 6, 7, 8 Give Us Our Money Today!*

Teachers and students took their stand against Common Core and its anti-education testing regime, with calls to *Opt Out!* of testing and that student success does not exist under Common Core testing. Signs and chants also brought forward the right of the public to decide issues of education: *Buffalo Says: Public Control of Public Schools! Democracy Means Student, Teachers and Parents Decide; #We Can't Wait for Full Funding Now! Whose Schools? Our Schools! Who Decides? We Decide!*

Organized mainly by Citizen Action and the Alliance for Quality Education, along with other organizations, the march went from the armory to the capitol building, where some lobbied legislators while others rallied at the Senate staircase. The action concluded with all rallying at Cuomo's office in the Senate building. *We Can't Wait!*



was the call, for full funding now and equal rights for all. *We Can't Wait!* for physical education, art and music for all. The strong spirit was to resist Cuomo's anti-democratic action of trying to blackmail all into accepting his destructive anti-education plans.

Cuomo states in his budget proposal "A year-to-year increase of \$1.1 billion is contingent on the implementation of improvements to the systems for teacher preparation, evaluation, certification and tenure, as well as providing the authority to truly improve failing schools and providing increased support and accountability to charter schools."

Among Cuomo's plans are having the state — not teachers and education professionals in the schools — take over hiring and firing of teachers. This includes having the Common Core student test scores account for 50 percent of teacher evaluations. The tests are notorious for being unfair and designed, as the state admits, to guarantee high levels of failure. They are a means to punish students and teachers, especially veterans, who resist and defend the right to education. State control will lower quality, not raise it.

Cuomo also wants to impose the bribery of "performance bonuses," where the state decides what "good performance" is and is not, for teachers and schools alike. Such bonuses are known to impose a culture

of competition, favoritism and punishment, when what is needed is cooperation and fairness. What is needed is action to defend the equal right to education for all. This includes having Cuomo immediately pay the almost \$6 billion owed since 2007! And as many youth brought out, *We Want the Money Now!* School boards, superintendents, teachers and parents across the state are all making clear that the \$1.1 billion increase Cuomo proposes is not even close to what is required.

When Cuomo speaks of "providing authority" to "improve failing schools," what he has in mind is appointing a single individual with complete control. Called a receiver, or czar, or dictator, this individual would determine — for *each* school in a given district — budget, hiring and firing, curricula, discipline, testing, "performance" and related bonuses, length of school day and year, and more. The aim is to try and destroy school districts, unions, parent groups and collective action for rights. It is to remove the public from governance, when what is needed is expanding and enhancing that role — *Public Control of Public Schools!*

Buffalo is a main target for Cuomo, in part because through the organizing and united actions that have taken place, there is strong and broad resistance, which is advancing the demand *Our Schools, We Decide!* That is, there is a movement that demands funding and raising the quality of public schools AND puts forward how this is to be accomplished — *We Decide*. We, the people — parents, teachers, staff, students and organized forces defending rights — decide. We, the public, serving the interests of the public, decide. As all those who made the trip to Albany showed, we are not intimidated by Cuomo or local officials. We are stepping up the fight for the equal right to education for all. We urge all concerned to join in.

Erie County Sheriff Using Stingray Device to Spy on Civilians

The Erie County Sheriff's office has been using a Stingray device to spy on people guilty of no crime and not even suspected of one. The device enables the police to track and record the location of people using their cell phones. The mobile stingray devices can pick up signals from all cell phones and wireless devices within a given area, collecting information on the comings and goings of people in the process. Stingrays can also precisely track particular phones, whether people are in their own home, at a doctor's office, at a political protest or in a church. Some stingrays and similar devices are also configured to record private conversations.

The information gathered can be used

to give the appearance that individuals are associating with "known" suspects, even though this may not be the case. It can also be used to track who attends meetings or rallies at a given location, for example. The technology can also be used to spy on planning meetings a various kinds, such as those by unions, protest organizers, health or housing advocates, etc.

The New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) filed suit against the Sheriff's office demanding public disclosure of use of the stingrays and why they were being deployed. On March 17, a Supreme Court judge ruled that the Erie County Sheriff's Office must make public how, where and why it uses the stingrays.

NYCLU Staff Attorney Mariko Hirose, lead counsel on the case said, "The public has a right to know how, when and why this technology is being deployed, and they deserve to know what safeguards and privacy protections, if any, are in place to govern its use."

The spying, secrecy about it and refusal to provide information are consistent with the current militarist culture of police agencies here and nationwide. The public not only needs to know about its use, it needs to ban it altogether as contrary to protection of the public. The stingrays are designed to criminalize the public, particularly those who organize resistance.

Erie County Jails Still Inhumane

The Erie County Holding Center and Correctional facility in Alden are notorious for being inhumane, with horrific conditions for prisoners — so much so that suicide remains a problem, especially at the holding center. These problems continue despite on-going protests for prisoner rights and a Justice Department requirement for change.

The New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) recently got the first in a series of reports concerning the county jails. Conditions in them have been so severe over the years that a major struggle by various groups in Buffalo brought the Justice Department (DoJ) in to review conditions back in 2009. The DoJ issued findings in 2011 saying conditions were harmful and discrimina-

tory and entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the County Sheriff to correct them. Problems raised concerned inadequate medical care, violence by guards against prisoners and insufficient efforts to protect suicidal prisoners.

Anyone with actual experience with the holding center, through friends, relatives or otherwise, knows that conditions there are still horrific and suicides are still a problem. It is also the case that many are forced to do time in jail not because they have actually been found guilty of anything, but rather because they cannot afford bail.

The NYCLU, after a two year battle, was finally able to make public the reports submitted by the Sheriff to the Justice

Department. The reports show some minor improvements but mainly show that changes are inconsistent, very slow to materialize, and remain greatly insufficient. As one of the NYCLU lawyers put it, "Change on paper is different than real cultural change," inside the jail.

Protests and efforts by various groups here in Buffalo, such as Prisoners are People Too and the Erie County Prisoners Rights Coalition continue to demand changes and defend the rights of prisoners. Human rights abuse of prisoners, here and in U.S. prisons across the country are a major problem. Government impunity is the crime and all those guilty, from the top down, need to be held accountable.

II • LESSON IN HYPOCRISY

Buffalo was the only school district statewide that faced such opposition. This effort at blocking participation was likely taken because the Superintendent and other school officials have been confronted by an outraged and mobilized public, demanding to have a say in the public schools and refusing to accept school closures and attacks on teachers and students alike. This was seen in rallies and packed school board meetings of hundreds, with the unifying stand, *Our Schools, We Decide!*

The organizing for Albany this year,

given the broad organizing that has preceded it, included additional schools, like City Honors and McKinley. It included more organizing by the students themselves. It included students and teachers together participating and speaking out at the rallies and board meetings leading up to March 11. This unity and fighting spirit has school officials scared. But contending with a difficult situation and fear is precisely when one is supposed to have the greatest integrity. That is when it is tested. For the Superintendent and all those who opposed participation in the Albany trip,

they failed the test. They instead showed their hypocrisy and double standards.

We urge all to reject the actions by BPS officials and join in demanding that the Superintendent:

- 1) Publicly apologize at the next school board meeting for threatening and trying to stop students and teachers from participating in the March 11 Albany action;

- 2) Provide all those students who went with an excused absence and community service as appropriate;

- 3) Establish as BPS policy support for such actions in the future.

U.S. Aggression Against Venezuela: Fact, Not Fiction

Eva Golinger

The U.S. has a substantial history of aggression toward Venezuela.

Recently, several different spokespersons for the Obama administration have firmly claimed the United States government is not intervening in Venezuelan affairs. Department of State spokeswoman Jen Psaki went so far as to declare, “The allegations made by the Venezuelan government that the United States is involved in coup plotting and destabilization are baseless and false.” Psaki then reiterated a bizarrely erroneous statement she had made during a [recent] press briefing: “The United States does not support political transitions by non-constitutional means.”

Anyone with minimal knowledge of Latin America and world history knows Psaki’s claim is false...The U.S. government has backed, encouraged and supported *coup d’etats* in Latin America and around the world for over a century. Some of the more notorious ones that have been openly acknowledged by former U.S. presidents and high level officials include *coup d’etats* against Mohammed Mossadegh in Iran in 1953, Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954, Patrice Lumumba in the Congo in 1960, Joao Goulart of Brazil in 1964 and Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973.

More recently, in the twenty-first century, the U.S. government openly supported the coups against President Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in 2002, Jean-Bertrand Aristide of Haiti in 2004 and José Manuel Zelaya of Honduras in 2009. Ample evidence of CIA and other U.S. agency involvement in all of these unconstitutional overthrows of democratically-elected governments abounds. What all of the overthrown leaders had in common was their unwillingness to bow to U.S. interests.

Despite bogus U.S. government claims, after Hugo Chávez was elected President of Venezuela by an overwhelming majority in 1998, and subsequently refused to take orders from Washington, he became a fast target of U.S. aggression. Though a U.S.-supported *coup d’etat* briefly overthrew Chávez in 2002, his subsequent rescue by millions of Venezuelans and loyal armed forces, and his return to power, only in-

creased U.S. hostility towards the oil-rich nation. After Chávez’s death in 2013 from cancer, his democratically-elected successor, Nicolás Maduro, became the brunt of these attacks.

What follows is a brief summary of U.S. aggression towards Venezuela that shows a one-sided war. Venezuela has never threatened or taken any kind of action to harm the United States or its interests. Nonetheless, Venezuela, under both Chávez and Maduro — two presidents who have exerted Venezuela’s sovereignty and right to self-determination — has been the ongoing victim of continuous, hostile and increasingly aggressive actions from Washington.

2002-2004

A *coup d’etat* against Chávez was carried out on April 11, 2002. Documents obtained under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) evidence a clear role of the U.S. government in the coup, as well as financial and political support for Venezuelans involved.

A “lockout” and economic sabotage of Venezuela’s oil industry was imposed from December 2002 to February 2003. After the defeat of the coup against Chávez, the U.S. State Department issued a special fund via the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to help the opposition continue efforts to overthrow Chávez. USAID set up an Office for Transition Initiatives (OTI) in Caracas, subcontracting U.S. defense contractor Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI) to oversee Venezuela operations and distribute millions of dollars to anti-government groups. The result was the “national strike” launched in December 2002 that ground the oil industry to a halt and devastated the economy. It lasted 64 days and caused more than \$20 billion in damages. Nonetheless, the efforts failed to destabilize the Chávez government.

The “guarimbas” of 2004: On February 27, 2004, extremist anti-government groups initiated violent protests in Caracas aimed at overthrowing Chávez. They lasted 4 days and caused multiple deaths. The leaders of these protests had received training from the U.S. Albert Einstein Institute (AEI), which specializes in regime change tactics



and strategies.

The Recall Referendum of 2004: Both NED and USAID channeled millions of dollars into a campaign to recall President Chávez through a national recall referendum. With the funds, the group Sumate, led by multi-millionaire Maria Corina Machado, was formed to oversee the efforts. Chávez won the referendum in a landslide 60-40 victory.

2005

After the victory of President Chávez in the recall referendum of 2004, the U.S. toughened its position towards Venezuela and increased its public hostility and aggression against the Venezuelan government. Here are a selection of statements made about Venezuela by U.S. officials:

January 2005: “Hugo Chávez is a negative force in the region.” — Condoleezza Rice.

March 2005: “Venezuela is one of the most unstable and dangerous ‘hot spots’ in Latin America.” — Porter Goss, ex-Director of the CIA.

“Venezuela is starting a dangerous arms race that threatens regional security.” — Donald Rumsfeld, ex-Secretary of Defense.

“I am concerned about Venezuela’s influence in the area of responsibility... SOUTHCOM supports the position of the Joint Chiefs to maintain ‘military to military’ relations with Venezuela.” — **U.S. Aggression Against Venezuela • 14**

13 • US AGGRESSION AGAINST VENEZUELA

tary' contact with the Venezuelan military we need an inter-agency focus to deal with Venezuela." — General Bantz Craddock, ex-Commander of SOUTHCOM.

July 2005: "Cuba and Venezuela are promoting instability in Latin America. There is no doubt that President Chávez is funding radical forces in Bolivia." — Rogelio Pardo-Maurer, Assistant Sub-Secretary of Defense for the Western Hemisphere.

"Venezuela and Cuba are promoting radicalism in the region...Venezuela is trying to undermine the democratic governments in the region to impede CAFTA." — Donald Rumsfeld, ex-Secretary of Defense.

August 2005: "Venezuelan territory is a safe haven for Colombian terrorists." — Tom Casey, State Department

September 2005: "The problem of working with President Chávez is serious and continuous, as it is in other parts of the relationship." — John Walters, Director of National Policy Office for Drug Control.

November 2005: "The assault on democratic institutions in Venezuela continues and the system is in serious danger." — Thomas Shannon, Sub-secretary of State.

2006

February 2006: "President Chávez continues to use his control to repress the opposition, reduce freedom of the press and restrict democracyit's a threat." — John Negroponte, ex-Director of National Intelligence.

"We have Chávez in Venezuela with a lot of money from oil. He is a person who was elected legally, just like Adolf Hitler..." — Donald Rumsfeld, ex-Secretary of Defense.

March 2006: "In Venezuela, a demagogue full of oil money is undermining democracy and trying to destabilize the region." — George W. Bush.

U.S. officials try to link Venezuela to Terrorism:

June 2006: "Venezuela's cooperation in the international campaign against terrorism continues to be insignificant...It's not clear to what point the Venezuelan government offered material support to Colombian terrorists." — Annual Report on Terrorism, Department of State.

June 2006: The U.S. government

through the Commerce Department and U.S. Treasury imposes sanctions against Venezuela for its alleged role in terrorism and prohibits the sale of military equipment to the country.

July 2006: "Venezuela, under President Hugo Chávez, has tolerated terrorists in its territory..." — House Subcommittee on International Terrorism

U.S. increases its Military Presence in Latin America:

March-July 2006: The U.S. military engages in four major exercises off the coast of Venezuela in the Caribbean Sea, with support from NATO, and based at the U.S. air force base in Curaçao. A permanent military presence is established in the Dominican Republic and the bases in Curaçao and Aruba are reinforced.

The U.S. Embassy in Caracas establishes the "American Corners" in 5 Venezuelan States (Lara, Monagas, Bolívar, Anzoátegui, Nueva Esparta), to act as centers of subversion, espionage and infiltration.

U.S. Ambassador William Brownfield intensifies his public hostility towards the Venezuelan government, making frequent sarcastic and unfriendly comments in opposition-controlled media.

NED and USAID increase funding to anti-government groups in Venezuela.

2007

At the beginning of 2007, Venezuela is severely attacked in the international media and by U.S. government spokespersons for its decision to nationalize Cantv (the only national telephone company), the Caracas' electricity and the Faja Orinoco oil fields.

In May 2007 the attack intensifies when the government decides not to renew the public broadcasting concession to popular opposition television station, RCTV.

A powerful international media campaign is initiated against Venezuela and President Chávez, referring to him as a dictator.

Private distributors and companies begin hoarding food and other essential consumer products in order to create shortages and panic amongst the population.

USAID, the NED and the State Department via the Embassy in Caracas foment, fund and encourage the emergence of a right-wing youth movement and help to

project its favorable image to the international community in order to distort the perception of President Chávez's popularity amongst youth.

Groups such as Human Rights Watch, Inter-American Press Association and Reporters without Borders accuse Venezuela of violating human rights and freedom of expression.

September 2007: President George W. Bush classifies Venezuela as a nation "not cooperating" with the war against drug trafficking, for the third year in a row, imposing additional economic sanctions.

September 2007: Condoleezza Rice declares the U.S. is "concerned about the destructive populism" of Chávez.

2008

January 2008: Admiral Mike Mullen, Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the U.S. Armed Forces meets with Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, then Minister of Defense Juan Manuel Santos, U.S. Ambassador William Brownfield and the Commander General of the Colombian Armed Forces Freddy Padilla de Leon and declares during a press conference that he is "concerned about the arms purchases made by Chávez" and expresses that this could "destabilize the region."

John Walters, the U.S. Anti-Drug Czar meets with Uribe in Colombia, together with 5 U.S. congresspersons and Ambassador Brownfield, and declares Venezuela a nation "complicit with drug trafficking" that presents "a threat to the U.S. and the region." He also expresses his wish that the Free Trade Agreement between the U.S. and Colombia be ratified by Congress soon.

Condoleezza Rice visits Colombia, together with Sub-Secretary of State Thomas Shannon and 10 congress members from the Democratic Party to push the FTA and back Colombia in its conflict with Venezuela.

President George W. Bush in his State of the Union address emphasizes the importance of the FTA with Colombia alerts to the threat of "populist" and "undemocratic" governments in the region.

February 2008: SOUTHCOM sends the Navy's "4th fleet" to the Caribbean Sea (a group of war ships, submarines and aircraft
U.S. Aggression Against Venezuela • 15

14 • US AGGRESSION AGAINST VENEZUELA

carriers that haven't been in those waters since the Cold War).

The Director of National Intelligence, General Mike McConnell, publishes the Annual Threat Report, which classifies Venezuela as the "principal threat against the U.S. in the hemisphere."

Exxon-Mobil tries to "freeze" \$12 billion of Venezuelan assets in London, Holland and the Dutch Antilles.

A Report on Present Threats to National Security of the Defense Intelligence Agency classifies Venezuela as a "national security threat" to the U.S.

A Department of State report accuses Venezuela of being a country that permits "the transit of illegal drugs," "money laundering" and being "complicit with drug trafficking."

The U.S. Department of Treasury classifies three high level Venezuelan officials as "drug kingpins," presenting no formal evidence. The head of Venezuela's military intelligence, General Hugo Carvajal, the head of Venezuela's civil intelligence force, General Henry Rangel Silva, and former Minister of Interior and Justice, Ramon Rodriguez Chacin are sanctioned by the U.S. government and placed on a terrorist list.

Rear Admiral Joseph Nimmich, Director of the U.S. Joint Interagency Task Force, meets in Bogota with the Commander General of the Colombian Armed Forces.

March 2008: The Colombian army invades Ecuadorian territory and assassinates Raúl Reyes of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and a dozen others, including 4 Mexicans, at a FARC camp in the jungle near the border.

General Jorge Naranjo, Commander of Colombia's National Police, declares that laptop computers rescued from the scene of the bombing that killed Reyes and others have evidence that President Chávez gave more than \$300 million to the FARC along with a quantity of uranium and weapons. No other evidence is produced or shown to the public. Ecuador is also accused of supporting the FARC. Venezuela mobilizes troops to the border with Colombia.

The U.S. Navy sends the Aircraft Carrier Harry Truman to the Caribbean Sea to engage in military exercises to prevent



potential terrorist attacks and eventual conflicts in the region.

President Bush states the U.S. will defend Colombia against the "provocations" from Venezuela.

Uribe announces he will bring a claim before the International Criminal Court against President Chávez for "sponsoring genocide and terrorism."

March 2008: President Bush requests his lawyers and advisors review placing Venezuela on the list of "STATE SPONSORS OF TERRORISM" together with Cuba, Iran, Syria and North Korea.

2009

May 2009: A document from the U.S. Air Force shows the construction of a U.S. military base in Palanquero, Colombia, to combat the "anti-American" governments in the region. The Palanquero base is part of the 7 military bases the U.S. planned to build in Colombia under a ten-year agreement with the Colombian government.

2010

February 2010: The U.S. Director of National Intelligence declares Venezuela the "anti-American leader" in the region in its annual report on worldwide threats.

February 2010: The State Department authorizes more than \$15 million via NED and USAID to anti-government groups in Venezuela.

June 2010: A report from the FRIDE Institute in Spain, funded by NED, evidences that international agencies channel between \$40-50 million a year to anti-government groups in Venezuela.

September 2010: Washington ratifies sanctions against Venezuela for allegedly not cooperating with counter-narcotics efforts or the war on terror.

2011-2015

Mass action in Falcon state, repudiates U.S. interference and affirms the Venezuelan people's dignity and sovereignty, March 21, 2014.

President Obama authorizes a special fund of \$5 million in his annual budget to support anti-government groups in Venezuela. In 2015, Obama increases this amount to \$5.5 million.

NED continues to fund anti-government groups in Venezuela with about \$2 million annually.

Each year, the U.S. government includes Venezuela on a list of countries that do not cooperate with counter-narcotics efforts or the war on terror. Also in its annual human rights report, the State Department classifies Venezuela as a "violate" of human rights.

Subsequent to President Chávez's death from cancer on March 5, 2013, new elections are held and Nicolás Maduro wins the presidency. Opposition leaders hold violent demonstrations that result in the deaths of more than a dozen people.

In February 2014, the violent protests resume, led by Leopoldo López and Maria Corina Machado, who openly call for the overthrow of President Maduro, and over 40 people are killed. López turns himself in to authorities and faces charges for his role in the violence. The U.S. government calls for his immediate release.

In December 2014, President Obama imposed sanctions on more than 50 Venezuelan officials and their relatives, accusing them of violating human rights and engaging in corruption. No evidence has been presented to date to support these serious allegations.

U.S. Aggression Against Venezuela • 16

I • HANDS OFF VENEZUELA

whenever it decides, all in the name of “security.”

Every day, at home and all over the world, the U.S. imposes insecurity as it acts as judge, jury and executioner. It brands people, groups and whole countries as threats, subject to assassinations, kidnappings, torture, drones, special forces and invasions. It has no right to do so. On the contrary, its obligation is to take responsibility for its crimes and stop its illegal and unjust interference and aggression.

Venezuela has invaded nobody and poses no danger to the United States. It is the U.S. that has a long history of invasions and crimes against humanity, including its use of nuclear weapons, carpet-bombing and use of Agent Orange and depleted uranium from Korea and Vietnam to Iraq and Palestine. It acts with brutal impunity, at home and abroad, but it accuses the Venezuelan government of “human rights abuses.”

Despite the most vicious interference by the U.S., including funding criminal forces inside Venezuela that hoard food and incite violence against the people, the Venezuelan government has consistently upheld rule of law. All those arrested for criminal offences linked to violent destabilization efforts will have fair trials.

In the face of the vicious and repeated U.S. interference in their affairs the Venezuelan people have stood firm.



They are organizing to build and develop their own democracy based on defending their sovereignty and rights. Time and again they have defended the Bolivarian Revolution and blocked every attempt by the U.S. and its agents to reverse the great achievements of the people since 1998.

Voice of Revolution salutes the firm and determined stand of the Venezuelan people and government and calls on the U.S. to end all sanctions and stop all interference now! We are confident that, as in the past, the Venezuelan people will continue, undaunted, in their nation-building project, a project to defend their dignity and rights as a people.

We urge all to stand against sanctions and join in defending Venezuela and her people. More sanctions and aggression are crimes. As people in the U.S., it is our responsibility to oppose U.S. aggression and build the anti-war movement with the aim of bringing about an anti-war government. Such a government would renounce the use of force, bring all U.S. troops home and stand with the peoples in their fight for rights.

*End the Sanctions Now! No to U.S. Interference and Terrorism!
Victory to the Bolivarian Revolution
of the Venezuelan People!*

15 • US AGGRESSION AGAINST VENEZUELA

The Commerce Department also expanded sanctions against Venezuela, prohibiting the sale of “any products” that could be destined for “military use” due to alleged human rights violations committed by the Venezuelan Armed Forces.

January 2015: Vice President Joe Biden warns Caribbean countries that the government of President Nicolás Maduro will soon be “defeated” and therefore they should abandon their discounted oil program with Venezuela, PetroCaribe.

State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki condemns the alleged “criminalization of political dissent” in Venezuela.

February 2015: President Obama unveils his new National Security Strategy

and names Venezuela as a threat and stresses support for Venezuelan “citizens” in a country where “democracy is at risk.”

Anti-government leaders circulate a document for a “transitional government agreement” which warns President Maduro’s government is in its “final stage” and pledges to overhaul the entire government and socialist system in place, replacing it with a neoliberal, pro-business model. The document is signed by Maria Corina Machado, jailed opposition leader Leopoldo López and Antonio Ledezma, mayor of Metropolitan Caracas.

Days later, a coup plot against President Nicolás Maduro is thwarted and 10 active Venezuelan military officers are

detained. Antonio Ledezma is arrested and charged with conspiracy to overthrow the government and the U.S. State Department issues a harsh condemnation of his detention, calling on regional governments to take action against the Maduro administration.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest denies any U.S. government role in the coup attempt against Maduro, calling such allegations “ludicrous,” but further reveals, “The Treasury Department and the State Department are considering tools that may be available that could better steer the Venezuelan government in the direction that we believe they should be headed.” (*February 25, 2015*)