

Buffalo Forum



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

Workers of all countries, unite!

IN THIS ISSUE:

- International May Day I
- Education is a Right!
Refuse the Tests..... 3-10
- Fight for \$15..... II
- Free Mumia Now 12
- Dock Workers to Shut Ports13

April 24, 2015

Vol. 19 #4

Can Results be Separated from the Process Used to Get Them?

It is being said, by state officials and others, that it does not matter what the process for governing Buffalo public schools is, what matters is the results. According to Cuomo, a single state-appointed receiver will get results. Others are promoting mayoral control. Others join this direction, saying anything is better than the existing divided school board. The notion is that there is no relationship between governance — process — and gaining results.

There is no doubt that the quality of the Buffalo public schools needs to be raised and that the inequality that exists needs to be eliminated. The question is, can this be done without the public

Results and Process • 3

MAY DAY CELEBRATION

Join in Building the United Fight for Rights

Buffalo Forum urges all those fighting for rights to join the May Day celebration, May 2, 5pm at Lafayette High School. International May Day is a day of working class unity and struggle, celebrated worldwide. It is a time to salute the achievements made over the course of the year and to look to the future. This year let us together

envision a future where we decide, where the rights of all are recognized. Let us work today and tomorrow to strengthen the fight to achieve it. *Our Future, Our Rights, We Decide!*

Together we are now demanding the right to decide issues of education, a safe

International May Day • 15

SUCCESSFUL ACTION BUILDS RESISTANCE

More than 200,000 Statewide Refuse the Tests

Buffalo Forum salutes the more than 200,000 parents and students, urban and suburban united in refusing the harmful New York State Common Core tests. This is at least triple the number from last year, which was about 60,000, and figures are still coming in. Many districts had more than 50 percent refuse. West Seneca's

refusal was 70 percent, reflecting several years of organizing done in a manner that informed the public and united parents, teachers, students, principals, school board members and superintendent in refusing. Buffalo levels also increased, especially among seventh and eighth graders who

200,000 Refuse the Tests • 3

Minimum Wage Rally Demands \$15 and Nothing Less

On April 15, young workers, families and community organizers rallied to demand that the minimum wage be raised to \$15. This level provides a living standard above the poverty level and is the minimum needed for basic survival. For a city like Buffalo, one of the poorest in the country, raising the wage to \$15 would contribute to lowering those levels while also strengthening the economy. The marchers rallied at Main

and Bailey near UB South Campus and then marched down Main St., stopping at the McDonald's and Wendy's to raise their demands: *\$15 and Nothing Less! Supersize Our Wages! Wendy's Recipe: Inequality!* Many passing motorists honked in support. Participants also included UB and ECC students joining in the *Fight for \$15*.

The demand for \$15 is an effort to ensure minimum

Fight for \$15 • 3

BALTIMORE'S FREDDIE GREY

Protesters Demand Justice and an End to Racist Police Killings

A major protest is planned in Baltimore for April 25, as people, mostly youth, rally to demand justice for Freddie Grey. Grey, an unarmed African American, was killed while in police custody. The reason for his arrest has yet to be announced. While being arrested and held in custody, police basically severed his spine. Police then refused to call an ambulance and denied

him medical treatment, despite his repeated requests. Grey fell into a coma and died on Sunday, April 19 about a week after his arrest. Protests immediately erupted as news of his death at police hands spread. The actions have continued through out the week.

Saturday's demonstration is bringing together people from across the city, along with those

Justice for Freddie Grey • 12

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COMING EVENTS

MAY 17-23

**NATIONAL WEEK OF ACTION
AGAINST INCARCERATING OUR YOUTH**

ORGANIZED BY TEENS IN PROGRESS

Sunday May 17

Opening Day March and Rally

3pm, East Ferry Detention Center, 810 Ferry near Fillmore

Presented by Community Organizers and Buffalo Forum

Monday May 18

Buffalo Youth Bowl-a-Thon

5pm, Bowl Inn Bowling Center, 727 Bailey Avenue, near Clinton

Presented by Youth United of Buffalo

7-9pm: Film Screening: The Kenneth Young Story
CAO Masten Resource Center, Fillmore and Glenwood
Presented by Prisoners Are People Too

Tuesday May 19

Teach-In: School to Prison Pipeline, Restorative Justice and Community Schools

5-7:30pm, Merriweather Library, Utica and Jefferson

Presented by Erie County Restorative Justice Coalition

Wednesday May 20

Honoring Incarcerated Youth

5pm Unitarian Universalist Church of Amherst, 6320 Main St., Williamsville

Presented by Unitarian Universalist Church

Thursday May 21

Ending the School to Prison Pipeline and Creating a Culture of Peace in Our Schools

3-5pm, MST High School, 666 E. Delavan

Presented by WNY Peace Center and Buffalo Anti-Racism Coalition

Dancing at the Crossroads — Partnering with Youth to Make Change
5-6:30pm, Trinity United Methodist Church, 711 Niagara Falls Blvd.
Presented by Lorna MacDonald Czarnota, Sponsored by Crossroads Story Center

Friday May 22

Girls Matter — Empowerment Workshop

Church of Scientology, 836 Main St.

Presented by Paulette Chatman and Buffalo Forum

Saturday May 23

Citywide Speak Out and Rally for Youth

3pm, Houghton Park, off Clinton St., near the 190

Presented by Teens in Progress, Youth United of Buffalo and Team of Hope

I • 200,000 REFUSE THE TESTS

joined in organizing for refusal.

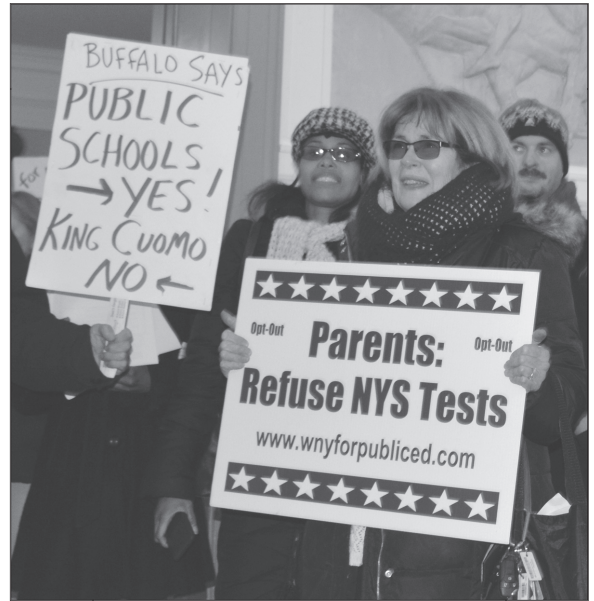
This growth and broadening of resistance occurred despite repeated threats by the state that parents did not have the right to refuse, that funding would be withheld, that the state would take over. Administrators called students' homes the day of testing to try and frighten parents into submitting to the tests. Many still said, "No," and their children organized to get more of their fellow students to join the refusal. Efforts at punishing students refusing, by keeping them crowded in small rooms, or forcing them to sit alone for the entire 90 minutes, also failed. Indeed, they generated more anger, as parents rejected such bullying and stood firm in refusing.

While the state and monopoly media, like the *Buffalo News* (see p.4) claim it is the parents that are harming children, people who actually go into the schools and deal with public education know the Common Core testing is harming children and harming education. The testing, test preparation, curriculum and scripted teaching based on Common Core are narrowing education and particularly harming the ability of students to learn to think for themselves and investigate and argue out their views. This is evident in the elimination or restricting of music, art, literature, social studies, physical

education. This is done in the name of devoting more time to passing the English and Math Common Core tests and more funds to pay for the testing. It does not take much thought to know funding music is far more educational and beneficial to students than funding the testing. But the state refuses.

The attack on thinking is also evident in tests that, by design, have more than one reasonable answer, but only one deemed correct by Pearson (the private monopoly that creates the tests). Students are being trained to do what they are told and answer only as they are told by a private, outside monopoly — even though doing so is unjust and harmful, to themselves, their teachers and school. Training all to submit to this dictate is a main purpose of the testing, and a main reason the refusal is so significant and positive. It stands against such fascist measures and demands instead modern democracy where the people themselves decide.

The on-going threats by government for state takeovers and withholding funds are



a further indication of the undemocratic nature of the testing regime. They also bring to the fore that modern democracy requires modern education, designed to strengthen and enhance thinking, including reasoned argument, factual investigations, gathering and analyzing information and drawing warranted conclusions. Developing our own alternatives, with an education model of our own making, is an important next step to consider for all those who contributed to the success of the Refuse the Tests movement.

I • RESULTS AND PROCESS

playing its rightful role, which is to control public schools? Can the result of raising the quality of education and guaranteeing the equal right to education for all be accomplished without the involvement, support and deciding voice of parents, teachers, staff and students? To think so in this modern age is to think governance should go backward to the days of Kings and their enforcers.

King Cuomo is pushing for receiver-ship, a process that concentrates power in a few hands, because the result he seeks is removing the public from governance. The rich see public demands, such as increased funding for schools, and broad education including music, literature and

actual thinking, as obstacles to their drive to completely takeover public institutions and the public treasury. A mobilized and united public, such as that emerging in Buffalo — through the organized and united efforts, expressed at many rallies, the test refusal, meetings and increased role of students — is an even bigger threat to the rich. Hence the growing demands, repeated in the monopoly media, to remove the public, to blame parents and teachers, to claim they are the ones causing harm, not the government.

Results that serve the public require a democratic process. Results that serve the rich do not. They require concentration of power in fewer hands, just as is occurring

in the economy and in politics more generally. To raise the quality of public education, a process that enhances and expands the role of the public by putting them in the position of deciding, is needed. Parents, teachers, staff and students realize this, have direct experience with it and are refusing to accept the notion that dictate by the few brings positive results for the many.

Achieving the results of raising the quality of public education and the equal right to education for all requires a modern process, a modern democracy, where the people themselves decide. The two go hand in hand and marching in that direction today is the way forward.

RESPONSE TO BROAD REFUSAL OF STATE TESTS

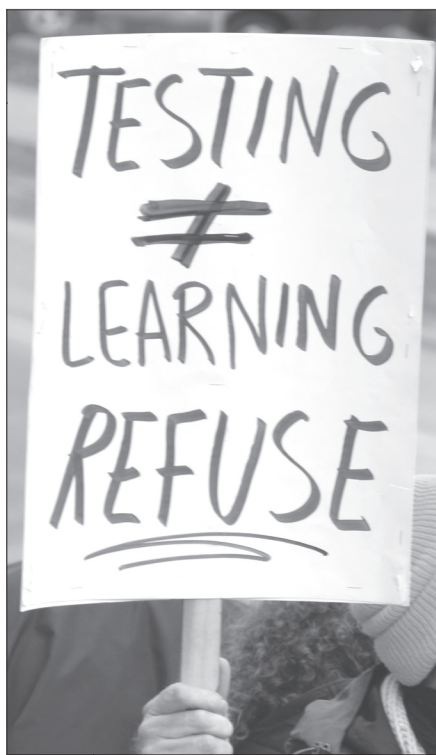
Buffalo News Claims Parents “Failing” to Help Children

A recent *Buffalo News* editorial addressing the broad and growing movement among parents, students and teachers to *Refuse the Tests* said the more than 200,000 refusals statewide document “a misunderstanding of purpose, disregard of consequence and a failure to help children cope with a kind of pressure that they are bound to confront as they grow.” It went on to quote a spokesman from the New York State Education Department (NYSED) saying the tests are necessary to assess how students are doing statewide. Then along with supposedly failing to help their children, the *News* said, “Parents may think they’re shielding their children from the stress of imperfect tests, but in fact, they are undermining their ability to fashion productive lives.”

It is evident that instead of addressing the many thoughtful and important comments by parents, students, teachers and principals at public meetings, school boards, in letters and petitions — that the testing is harmful to students and the quality of education, the *News* has chosen to attack parents.

Parents have raised important concerns about the tests that the *News* needs to address. One is that these tests are not diagnostic — they tell parents, students and teachers *nothing* about how students are doing. No one gets immediate results. No one gets specific results, indicating how students did, what they got right, wrong or why. This is what is required for a test to be diagnostic — for them to help determine where there are problems, exactly what those problems are and what to do about them.

The NYS Common Core tests do none of this and they are not designed to. There is no “misunderstanding of purpose.” Pearson, the private monopoly — not educators — that designed the tests keeps the test questions and specific results for each student private. Only months after the tests are given is any information released. Students find out only if they have been labeled a 1, 2, 3, or 4 (with 1 and 2 considered failing). Teachers



and parents get only general bar graphs. These results do not assist in assessing anything, while they do a lot of harm to children by falsely branding them as failing and falsely targeting their schools for closing.

Another concern is that the tests are developmentally inappropriate in terms of general content, especially for younger children, and in terms of the grade-level of questions asked. Teachers scoring the tests bring out that many questions are 2 and 3 grades above where the student is. The readings are often obscure, answers convoluted, and questions involve materials not covered in class.

Tests are a Weapon of Humiliation

Additionally, parents object not only to the unjust stress and frustration felt by students, but to the efforts at mass humiliation of students, both during and after the testing. Large numbers of students are being made to feel there is something wrong with them, that they are stupid, or cannot learn — all things well-known to stand in the way of learning. Parents and teachers report that

students generally doing well in school find themselves labeled as “failures” by the tests. The questions far above grade level also contribute to these efforts to humiliate.

Further evidence of this mass humiliation is that the imposed “failing” scores (1s and 2s) are put up on public data-boards with children’s names. Some schools keep the scores over the students’ lockers all year long. How does it assist students to constantly be reminded that they are supposedly failures and for everyone else to consider them as such? For whole groups of children to see themselves in this manner? The parents refusing are not only rejecting this bullying, they are protecting their children and schools from such humiliation.

The broad refusal, by urban and suburban districts, is serving notice to the state and federal governments that parents, students and teachers reject these attacks on the right to education and the use of bullying and humiliation against their children and schools.

The demand by parents is that all children get the best education society can provide and that education serve the interests of society. The tests instead serve the narrow purpose of the monopolies and their competition for world domination.

The youth have the responsibility to advance society, to be armed to solve social problems like poverty and inequality. Education needs to be broad and directed to society’s social needs. It is the government that should be assessed with how it is doing with its duty to provide such an education equally to all.

It is parents, teachers and students together that have said the government is failing in this regard, that the tests are part of this failure and should be eliminated. They reject efforts by the state, with monopoly media like the *Buffalo News* chiming in, to blame parents and teachers for government failures. And their solution is clear: *Public Control of Public Schools! Our Schools, We Decide!*

SAY NO TO STATE DICTATE

Arbitrary Scoring of Tests Serves Take Over of Public Schools

One of the concerns raised by parents, students and teachers about the New York State (NYS) Common Core tests is that scoring of the tests is unfair and arbitrary. It is designed to ensure the majority fail. Pearson, a private monopoly was paid with public dollars to design and score the tests, and is not required to provide students, teachers and parents with the specific test

results. Further, it is Pearson along with the NYS Education Department (NYSED) that decide the “cut score” (what is to be considered a failing score) — *after* they have reviewed all the tests.

This scoring method means the state can arbitrarily decide who fails and who does not, regardless of how the students actually did. For example, it is estimated that last

year, students who scored 77% on the tests — normally a passing grade — were instead labeled as failing. Pearson and NYSED said in advance about 70 percent of students would fail, and then they did! Such scoring is like moving the goal posts after the game has ended and claiming the team actually lost instead of won.

This unfair cheating by government is then used to brand schools as failing and demand they be closed, as is occurring in Buffalo despite broad public opposition. The state and school board has also threatened to hand over public schools, built and modernized with public dollars, *for free* to private charter schools or other private interests.

Such actions, like the tests and the scoring, are weapons being used against students, teachers and schools, as the government acts to facilitate the private takeover of public institutions and public funds. Monopolies like Pearson, Microsoft, Walmart and others that fund and profit from the testing regime, are acting to eliminate public governance of public institutions. They are acting to eliminate even the notion that public education should serve the public good, such as educating youth to learn together and work to solve social problems. Instead, it is to be very narrow, designed specifically to whatever jobs the monopolies require and more generally to their competition for more power and world empire.

The important “job” of contributing to society and serving humanity by moving it forward to is to have no place. The equal right to education for all is to have no place either. Indeed, the public in general is to have no place or say in public schools, replaced instead by a single state-appointed individual, like Cuomo’s receiver. This is a backward, undemocratic direction that must be opposed and rejected.

The public is standing up for modern relations where students, parents and teachers together decide matters of education. Just as more than 200,000 refused the tests, the public here and statewide is saying to Cuomo and his plans for a receiver or mayoral control: *We Refuse!*

The Absurdity of Standardized Testing

I went to the doctor at least 5 months ago. I had hours and hours worth of tests, given over many days. I was told I would have to wait months for all the results. Finally my results came in today. Seems on a healthy scale I am a 2 out of 4. I asked my doctor what exactly is wrong with me and I was told that was confidential.



All I could know was my score and that I was healthier than 42% of the other people who took the same medical tests I did. So then I asked what she was going to do to help with my health problems. She told me she would practice doing similar tests with me over and over again. Then she would test me again next year and see if I showed any improvement. She told me to please take the test practicing seriously because if my health doesn't improve she could lose her job.



Poverty, Education and the Fight for Equality

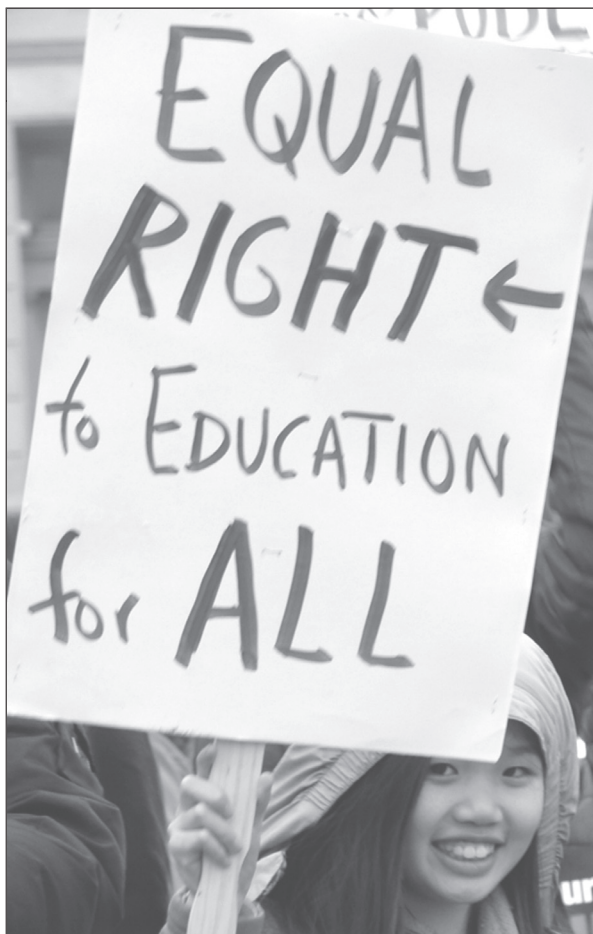
In a recent debate on MSNBC, New York State (NYS) Education Chancellor Merryl Tisch said, “If you talk about income inequality in this country, income inequality is directly tied to the achievement gap for our poor students. Those students, if they are not given access and opportunity to high-quality education, they simply cannot move along at a continuum.” The implication here is that poverty exists because of poor students and “failing” schools.

This turns things on their head. It is like saying people are poor because they have no money and schools are failing because they have poor students. It is a means to blame the people and divert from their just demands that the government guarantee the equal right to education for all and the right to a livelihood for all. Doing so would immediately change conditions for the better, especially in cities like Buffalo, one of the poorest in the country.

Poverty stems from a capital-centered economy that cannot provide for the rights of the people. It is reflective of a basic characteristic of the U.S. and all capital-centered economies that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. This is indicated in the growing inequality in the U.S., where the vast majority have seen lower wages and family and social wealth in their cities, while the super-rich grab more and more of the wealth for their own narrow interests.

Workers are producing far more wealth today, easily enough to eliminate poverty in the country and provide for high quality public schools for all. But workers do not control the wealth they produce. This absence of decision-making power is the problem.

The capital-centered economy also means that education cannot serve to bring about equality. For example, the number of African Americans 25 and older graduating college has greatly increased, from about 4 percent in 1970 to more than 20 percent today. Even so, poverty and unemployment



levels for African Americans have increased. About 56 percent of African American college graduates, for example, have high student debts to pay and are forced to work in jobs that do not require a college degree, or not work at all.

Despite the efforts of millions of students to graduate, the general conditions of inequality have worsened as the concentration of wealth and its control by the rich increases. Further, such a capital-centered economy has a government that serves capital, serves the monopoly owners in their global competition for world empire. This is evident not only in the economy, but in education as well.

Fund Our Rights, Not the Rich

The rich want to completely rob the public treasury and grabbing education funds and pensions are important parts of this. Tisch wants to hide the fact that there is a

connection between the quality of education and the levels of public funding for public schools. A city like Buffalo, with its high rates of poverty and health problems like lead poisoning, has greater funding needs. But these are not being provided, evidenced in such important matters as classes that are far too large, lack of supplies and resources, lack of counselors, librarians and school nurses, etc. — all cut from lack of government funding. While there is not funding for these matters, there is funding for the rich, such as the high rates to pay the debt. Buffalo, for example, hands over 14 percent of its budget, \$119 million, to the Wall Street banks.

Connected with this private takeover of public funds and institutions, there is a drive to increasingly narrow education and have a curriculum designed to narrowly train students to fill specific jobs. This means elimination of things like music, art, physical education, social studies, literature — all vital parts of providing the equal right to education for all.

It is not students, teachers or parents who are failing. It is a system that cannot provide for rights that is failing, with a government that repeatedly shows itself unfit to rule — particularly when it comes to such serious social issues as poverty and education.

Poverty, education and equality are issues of rights. They require a change in the direction of the economy and political affairs. A human-centered economy is one that puts human beings and their human rights at the center. This is the economy that is needed. Decision making by the people themselves, not the rich and their representatives, is needed. The fight for the equal right to education, reflected in the more than 200,000 refusing the tests statewide and the numerous rallies and speak outs in Buffalo proclaiming *Our Schools, We Decide!* are important steps in this direction.

OUR SCHOOLS, WE DECIDE

No to State Takeover! Education is a Right

A militant protest was held in front of Bennett High School March 26 demanding that there be no state takeover of schools and that the government uphold its responsibility to provide the equal right to education for all. Teachers, students, staff, parents and community organizers stood together to affirm the public's right to decide matters of education. *Whose Schools? Our Schools, Who Decides? We Decide!* was heard throughout the action as people stood firm against efforts by Governor Cuomo to eliminate local governance of the public schools. Parents and teachers from the suburbs joined those from Buffalo in demanding *No State Takeover! Public Control of Public Schools!*

The action was held at Bennett to reaffirm the stand of the public to defend the Bennett redesign plan and continue demanding that it be implemented. Development of the plan involved teachers, staff, parents, students, alumni and the public in general and reflected the public demand for similar efforts on all matters of education.

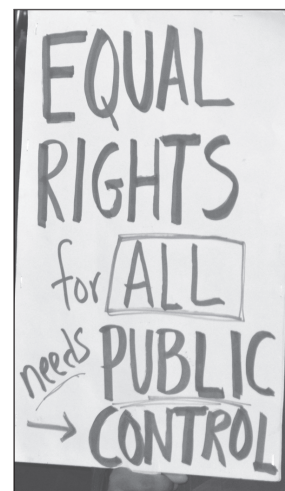
The action was organized by a group of Buffalo teachers from various schools who are fighting to increase democracy by extending and expanding the role of

the public. This was evident in the press conference held inside Bennett. Teachers and parents spoke, from Buffalo and the suburbs. Those from Bennett had their place, as did union representatives and Dr. Nevergold from the school board. Students were present in sizeable numbers and vocal through out the action. Various speakers emphasized that Cuomo's plans have nothing to do with raising the quality of education but rather with removing the public from governance and turning education into a private business serving private interests. The stand of participants instead was to loudly affirm, *Education is a Right! Our Schools, We Decide!*

Teachers also spoke out against the state standardized tests coming up in April, joining parents in urging all to *Refuse the Tests!* Doing so is a way to reject efforts by Cuomo to marginalize and intimidate parents and teachers alike. It is a means to affirm the public right to decide and reject the testing regime as anti-education and harmful to students. The public, as seen in Ken-Ton, West Seneca and Buffalo has made clear that they oppose the Common Core testing regime and increasing the numbers who refuse is another means to say, *We Decide!*

The hundreds present at the action made clear that whatever decision is taken by Cuomo and the legislature, organizing to strengthen the unity and fighting actions of the public

demanding their right to decide will continue. One form this is taking is on-going pickets at schools in Buffalo and the region. Another is the work to expand efforts to Refuse the Tests. A third is strengthening organizing among the students through efforts to build a student union. A fourth is initial discussions for a joint project over the summer for developing our own school, with our own alternative for curriculum, teaching, assessment — where we all learn together through collective work and organizing based on the content, *We Decide!*



Restore Music to All Buffalo Public Schools

Karen Saxon, African American parent

(Presented at a recent school board meeting, as part of the stand by the public to raise the quality of education and play their role in deciding educational matters)

Good evening Dr. Ogilvie, ladies and gentlemen of the Board of Education. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you tonight about the value of music education and the necessity of advocacy to restore music education to all Buffalo Public Schools.

I speak as a concerned citizen because I am a product and graduate of the Buffalo Public Schools. I speak as a parent because this June I will graduate the last of three children from the Buffalo Public Schools. Two of my children are currently in college and doing very well, having been well prepared in the Buffalo Public Schools. Finally, I am also a teacher in the Buffalo Public Schools here to join my voice with those who advocate for the restoration of music programs in our schools.

I would first like to share a portion of an article published in "Homeroom," the official blog of the United States Department of Education: "Nina Kraus, Hugh Knowles professor of neurobiology and physiology and director of the Auditory Neuroscience Laboratory at Northwestern, is the principal investigator. One research question she is trying to answer is 'Can music offset the ever-widening academic gap between rich and poor?' Preliminary results of her research suggest that it can. According to Kraus, many scientists have written about a link between music and reading. In learning to read, the learner must have an auditory representation of a sound if it is going to be linked to a visual



image (letter).

"The research scientists in this study have measured the nervous system's activity in response to sound. When people hear sounds, neurons fire, and those neural events can be measured. This measurement shows that musical training has a positive effect on biological processes important for auditory learning, memory, and hearing speech in challenging listening situations (e.g., noisy classrooms), which appear to translate into better language learning results. Northwestern's findings have the potential to provide valuable information for educators, clinicians and policymakers interested in the potential of music to nurture academic success, particularly among students from low-income homes."

In addition to this research, I am most compelled by my own experience as a student in the Buffalo Public Schools. I

stand before you as evidence that music education in the Buffalo Public Schools works. As a child, music was my refuge, my hiding place from low self-esteem. As a result of my preparation, I have become a world class musician. I am competent, qualified and comfortable in every musical situation I have encountered. I have performed as a solo artist with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra. I have performed at Shea's. More importantly, my students have done the same.

When you speak of low-income students in challenging socio-economic situations from single-parent homes, you are speaking of me. I am who I am today because there were qualified music educators in my classrooms throughout my education in the Buffalo Public Schools who did not allow the reality of my daily situation to be a barrier to

my success. I am who I am today because music educators inspired me to pursue my own passion and transfer it to my classroom. I am who I am today because I realize that I am teaching myself in some cases. Some of my students look like me. Some of my students come from low-income homes like me. Some of my students need the same refuge I found in music. Yet while my story is impressive, even inspiring, it is not possible in the schools where there are no music programs.

Please do not eliminate the possibility of my story in any school! I appreciate the difficulty of the decisions you make on a daily basis in the best interest of our students. I beg you to please take these things into consideration as you make your difficult decisions and find a way to restore music education to every school in the Buffalo Public Schools. Thank you.

Music is Crucial to the Education of All Students

Elise Golove, Buffalo teacher and parent

Good evening board members and citizens. I am a long time resident, parent and Buffalo vocal music teacher. In my school, International School 45, we have not had an instrumental program for almost ten years. If we want to help our struggling students, our English language learners, our at-risk, in many cases severely traumatized and poverty-stricken students, please restore instrumental music, with regular rehearsal time in the schedules of *all ensembles* (that goes for Chorus, Orchestra, and Band).

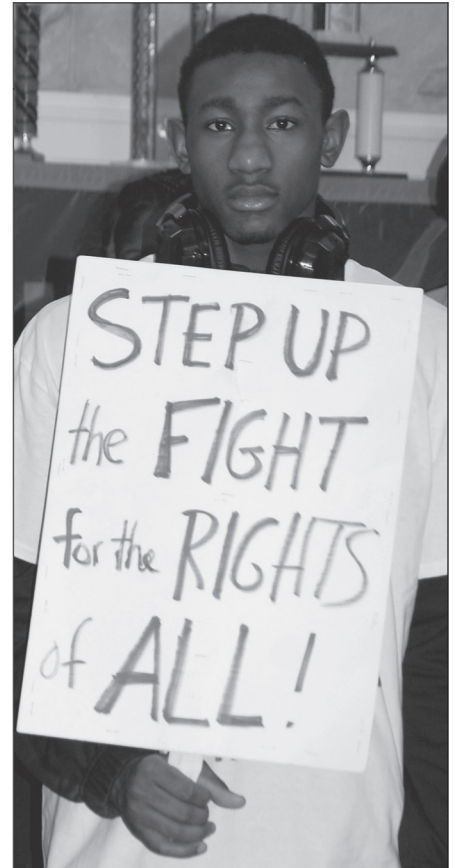
Music is crucial. There is now a growing body of scholarly evidence telling us students must play, sing and otherwise process music for optimal brain function. Researchers at Harvard University's Center for the Developing Child and the Auditory Neuroscience Laboratory at Northwestern University, among others, have measured the neurological effects of music training in students. I am here to say that if we want to help our struggling

students, music holds tremendous potential for cross-wiring the brain and building connections, more than anything we know.

Here is an image from the research. These are brain scans of children taken while they were involved in complex problem solving, they call it Executive Functioning. The orange areas indicate brain activity. We see more areas of activity in the top row than the bottom row. The students in the top row have participated in an after school music program for one to two years.

It turns out that playing an instrument develops a type of brain activity called Executive Function. Executive function skills are the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully. The brain needs this skill set to filter distractions, prioritize tasks, set and achieve goals, and control impulses. These are not only the basis of mathematical reasoning and literacy, but the foundation of *all* learning. For these functions, *music* changes the brain more profoundly than *any* other intellectual, creative, or physical endeavor.

Playing music creates more pathways between the hemispheres, allowing messages to get across the brain faster and through more diverse routes. It does this at all ages, but especially if started in childhood. Playing music is the brain's equivalent of a full-body work out, because it engages practically every area of the brain at once — especially the visual, auditory, and motor cortices, and if practiced regularly (that's important) it has the effect of strengthening these functions, allowing us to apply that strength

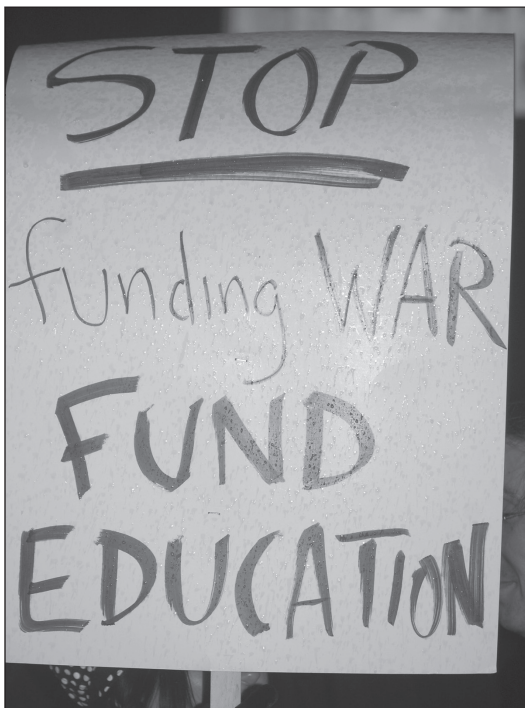


to other activities, both academic and in social settings. If we cannot find the money to fund a proper music program, we are doing our students a terrible disservice.

Finally,

The growing body of research finds that music instruction can help bridge the achievement gap with at-risk students. Here in our district, we have a 100% graduation rate for all students involved in instrumental music. Add to that it makes people happy, and students learn more when they are happy. Please restore Instrumental Music in every school, for our own sake as a responsible school system, and for the sake of our children.

Thank you.



Visit our website: usmlo.org

GROWING RESISTANCE TO TESTING AND RECEIVERSHIP

Hundreds Say Indict Cuomo for Crimes Against Students and Public Schools

A meeting of hundreds gathered at Kleinhans March 24 to hear charges against Governor Cuomo and then vote on whether to indict him for what many consider crimes against Buffalo students and the public schools. These included imposing the Common Core standardized testing, refusing to provide the funding needed and required by law and plans for state takeover. Through out the meeting the anger with Cuomo was evident, as people repeatedly applauded the stands taken against Cuomo's unjust attacks. The broad opposition to Common Core testing from all present was made clear when one of the teachers who spoke announced that, as a parent, she was having her children refuse the tests. This brought the loudest applause of the night, with many standing in support.

Several people gave facts and examples of why the Common Core standardized testing regime imposed on 3-8 graders is a crime against students. The tests are not valid educationally or for assessing students, which various studies have shown. Specific tests results (such as which questions were answered correctly and which not) are not even returned to teachers, students and parents. Instead, only general categories used to unfairly brand children as a number (1, 2, 3 or 4) are provided the following school year! The tests are not designed by educators, are developmentally inappropriate and especially brutal and damaging to the most vulnerable students — those with special needs and English Language Learners (ELL). The tests are also unfairly scored, with the "fail" score arbitrarily set after the tests are taken and with the aim of having the majority fail. In short, as testimony brought out, the Common Core testing is child abuse, a crime, and Cuomo should be indicted and punished for imposing such tests on students statewide.

Another charge involved Cuomo's plans to eliminate the elected school board in Buffalo and replace it with a Cuomo appointed receiver. A receiver would have

complete control, of budget, curricula, discipline, length of school day and year etc. He would be dealing with each school as an individual school, and acting to wreck the district. This also means district-wide collective action, by teachers, parents and students would be undermined, as each school competes for funds. It was brought out that there is no basis for the takeover and that the state does not have the right to eliminate people who have been elected by the people.

Another crime is Cuomo's refusal to fully fund the public schools and holding schools and students hostage until he gets the legislation he wants. For K-12 schools, Cuomo, by law, based on a 2007 court decision, currently owes \$5.9 billion, which he refuses to pay. Further, the public schools are not compliant with New York State law concerning physical education. Cuomo is directly breaking the law when it comes to education, but far from taking responsibility, he blames teachers and students for government failures.

Various speakers provided information and examples from their own experience of the devastating impact lack of funding has, especially for school districts like Buffalo, where teachers, aides, counselors and librarians have been cut. Class sizes for kindergarteners are at 30, far too many. Speakers also emphasized that poverty, unemployment, segregated housing, racism, inequality, are all problems confronting the students and schools of Buffalo, problems the state needs to address as part of raising the quality of the schools. The issue is not, as Cuomo claims, one of "throwing" money at the schools. Rather, it is government refusal to fully fund the schools and provide for the rights of the



people, such as the rights to jobs, housing, and the equal right to education for all.

Organized by the Buffalo Teachers Federation, the meeting brought together a solid and professional group of speakers with facts, information and direct experience in the public schools, including teachers, aides, including for ELL students, school psychologist, principal and more. Some of the participants had decades of experience. They brought to the fore that raising the quality of education and meeting the needs of students requires more teachers, aides and counselors, smaller classes, more art, music, and physical education. In short full funding now.

The meeting concluded with the charges against Cuomo being read and the audience asked whether to indict. On each one, there was a resounding INDICT! heard, along with signs raised high to emphasize people's determination to stop Cuomo's attacks. Participants left the meeting enthused with the firm resistance, with many planning to participate in the on-going organizing. This includes a demonstration at Bennett High School March 26, 4:30pm bringing together teachers, parents and students, from Buffalo and the suburbs — all standing as one to say *Our Schools, We Decide!*

I • FIGHT FOR \$15

wage workers make more than poverty-level wages. Currently, the federal government poverty levels are: \$11,770 for an individual
\$15,930 for a family of 2
\$20,090 for a family of 3
\$24,250 for a family of 4

Working full-time, at 40 hours a week on a 52-week year, the current \$7.25 an hour means about \$15,000 before taxes, or poverty level for a family of two. An annual rate at the proposed \$10.10 minimum wage is still only about \$21,000, again before taxes, which are often close to 25 percent of a worker's wages. This is still at or below poverty for these working families. At \$15, annual rate is about \$31,000, which would be above the \$24,000 poverty rate for a family of four.

Minimum Wage Myths

Big monopolies like McDonalds, Walmart and others often promote the idea that raising the minimum wage is harmful to the economy, will mean fewer jobs, etc. They also claim most minimum wage workers are teenagers, working part-time, who do not need an increase. The facts say otherwise.

According to the U.S. Labor Department, 88 percent of minimum wage workers are age 20 or older, and 55 percent

are women. About 53 percent of all minimum wage earners are full-time workers, and minimum wage workers contributed almost half (46 percent) of their household's wage and salary income. Many minimum wage workers are thus women working full time and raising families.

The Labor Department also reports that a review of 64 studies on minimum wage increases found no discernable impact on employment. More than 600 economists have signed a letter in support of raising the minimum wage. It is also the case that raising the minimum wage serves to strengthen the economy, as it contributes to putting money into the economy, with workers purchasing more goods. Other government actions, such as debt servicing, contribute to harming the economy, as it takes money out of the economy and into the hands of the rich.

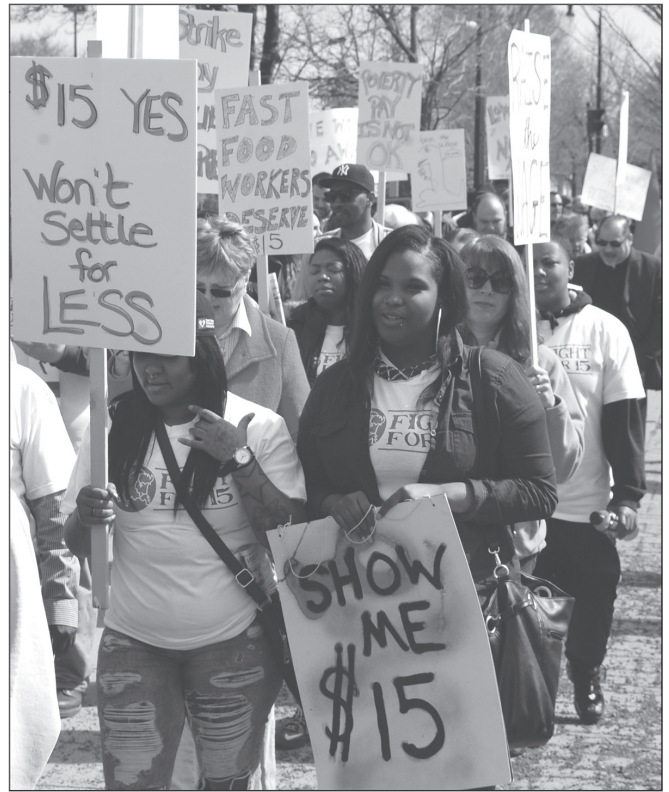
It is also claimed that raising the federal tipped minimum wage (only \$2.13 per hour, and has been since 1991) would hurt restaurants. Also shown to be untrue. As one example, in California, employers are required to pay servers the full state minimum wage of \$9 per hour — before tips. The National Restaurant Association projects California restaurant sales will outpace the U.S. average in 2014. This is an indication that the higher wages are contributing to the economy.

It is also the case that while a restaurant employer can pay

as little as the \$2.13 an hour to servers, they also must guarantee that the combined wage and tips equals the federal or state minimum wage, whichever is greater. As many working in restaurants know, this is often not the case and servers are forced to accept wages lower than the minimum wage and variable wages, as tips rise and fall.

The monopolies and their media also often claim that they are acting in the interests of smaller business, who cannot afford a higher minimum. In fact small business owners are often the ones paying higher rates and support an increase.

A June 2014 survey, for example, found that more than 3 out of 5 small business owners support increasing the minimum wage. Small business owners believe that a higher minimum wage would benefit business in important ways: 58% say raising the minimum wage would increase consumer purchasing power. 56% say raising the minimum wage would help the economy. In addition, 53% agree that with a higher minimum wage, businesses would benefit from lower employee turnover, increased productivity and customer satisfaction.



MEDICAL ATTENTION BEING DENIED

Free Political Prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal Now!

Mumia Abu-Jamal is a long-time African American political prisoner, framed and jailed in 1982 for his resistance to police brutality and killings and being an organizer for revolutionary change. He was put on death row and like many other political prisoners, such as Puerto Rican independence fighter Oscar Lopez Rivera, spent many years in solitary confinement. As a result of his undaunted stand and resistance, and that of a worldwide movement standing with him, he was removed from death row in 1995 and finally released into the general prison population in 2012.

He has long been a journalist and radio commentator, standing with the struggles of the peoples here and worldwide against imperialist war and for rights. His resistance is such that Pennsylvania passed the “Mumia Gag-Law” forbidding prisoners

from speaking out publicly. It is currently being contested in court.

Mumia is now facing execution by medical neglect. Since January he has suffered from a severe case of eczema. He did not receive the medical attention he required and grew steadily weaker. On March 30th, Mumia lost consciousness and was moved from Pennsylvania’s State Correctional Institution (SCI) at Mahanoy, a medium-security prison, to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at Schuylkill Medical Center. He was shackled to his bed, though he was in diabetic shock. His family was denied medical updates and visitation rights. The movement’s phone-call mobilization successfully forced prison and hospital officials to allow Mumia’s wife and brother to see him 20 hours after he was admitted.

His life threatening medical crisis continues and has now been labeled late-onset diabetes, which should have been identified and treated months ago. He is back in general population, extremely weak, unable to feed himself and could fall into diabetic shock or coma. His family reports he is gravely ill and getting worse. He needs 24-hour care and supervision.

People are now being urged to call prison officials and demand he get the medical treatment he needs. *No execution by medical neglect!* Call Pennsylvania Department of Corrections John Wetzel (717-728-4109) and John Kerestes, Superintendent SCI Mahanoy: 570-773-2158 x8102.

Everyone is also asked to call Pennsylvania’s Governor to demand
Free Mumia • 13

I • JUSTICE FOR FREDDIE GREY

from New York and Ferguson, all demanding *Justice Now!* People are bringing out that Grey’s death is not isolated but rather part of a pattern of systematic and systemic racist police violence and killings. And like many protesters across the country, people in Baltimore have little confidence that the announcement of yet another Justice Department investigation will solve this case or the growing problem of police violence and impunity it is part of.

As Department of Justice (DoJ) actions in Ferguson, Cleveland and elsewhere have shown, the DoJ sanctions and foments police violence, including arming and militarizing local police and organizing joint police actions against demonstrators. Ferguson showed the extent of this militarization and that it is not for purposes of defending the public but rather for purposes of suppressing public dissent and resistance.

The DoJ then ensures impunity for police by claiming there is not enough evidence, or there is a “high bar” to prove



racism. Racism is endemic to the system. This is increasingly evident, from the many racist police killings, racist mass incarceration, disproportionate numbers of African Americans on death row, and more. Police are part of the racist machinery of the state that increasingly says young African Americans and Latinos are not human beings with rights, but animals to be gunned down. The police shooting of Walter Scott, in the back as he was running away, and the clear expectation of the white officer

involved to easily get away with it, is further evidence of this machinery at work.

As signs at the many actions say, *Indict the System!* This is something the DoJ, as part of the racist state machinery, organizes to prevent. Clearly it is what is most needed. Police killings are a crime and government refusal to punish the guilty is as well. And as the actions show, stepping up organized resistance is key. As protesters emphasize, “We will not sit quietly.”

12 • FREE MUMIA NOW

Mumia's immediate release on humanitarian grounds: Tom Wolf, 717-787-2500.

Financial support is also needed to pay for his medical care. Organizers report that "In an unstoppable mobilization of solidarity, 414 supporters from around the world joined the Mumia Campaign and raised \$21,720 in 14 days! We need to raise double that to get Mumia the full medical care and legal assistance that he urgently needs. Please join us to defend Mumia's life by helping his Medical and Legal fund reach \$40,000, now!"

Organizers are striving to:

- Increase the legal and medical campaign to ensure Mumia gets the needed care and his family is kept informed
- Obtain Mumia's medical records for review (his records cost \$1.50/page)
- Cover costs for Mumia's family, friends and core organizers as they travel to the Medical Center in Pottsville, Pennsylvania and the prison in Frackville.

The campaign calls for:

- Demand that Mumia's immediate family be able to see him more than once per person per week by calling
- Share this campaign and encourage all of your networks, family, friends and coworkers to contribute and share
- Stay updated on Mumia's condition by checking back on Prison Radio's Facebook and Twitter pages.

For more information: freemumia.com
• prisonradio.org • bringmumiahome.com

Mumia's May Day Message: May Day is the People's Day

"As the Iraq war continues to lurch from disaster to disaster, from scandal to scandal, and from puppet to puppet, people are beginning to see the futility of this mad scheme to remake other nations in our image.

"As more and more people from more and more social strata see the futility of this imperial grab for lands and oil, it becomes clearer and clearer that people must join together and resist.

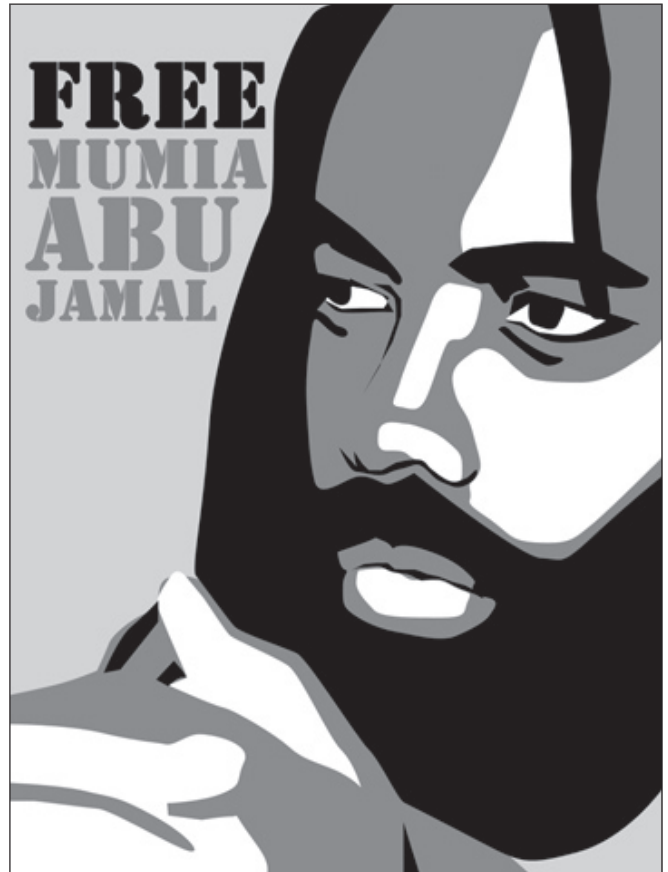
"May Day presents a perfect opportunity for us to do so. It is a time chosen by American workers over a century ago to

mark the triumph of an eight-hour workday with a full day's pay. The setting aside of May Day as International Workers Day reflected a real social gain of the workers' movement and the realization that the working class exists in all nations, and that the world was our home.

"It is precisely that sense of internationalism that is needed now, to reclaim that high water mark of social activism and to turn away young folks from the mindless struggle for empire. As capital is globalized under the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund, the poor and working people, the majority of the people of this earth must be globalized in internationalism, and in defense of the many not the few. What is necessary for this to prevail is the realization that this mad war in Iraq is in reality, [also] a war against the future generation here. A war against education. A war against decent health care. A war against decent housing. And a war against good jobs which pay living wages.

"The bombs may burst and the mortars may fire over there but the human wreckage, the social dislocation, the destruction of communities and the decimation of civil and constitutional rights is happening right here, in the heart of the empire. It is therefore imperative that we join together, across our perceived boundaries, against the empire of eternal war. It is in our own self-interest to do so.

"Millions upon millions of people took to the streets in a valiant and historic attempt to stop this mad cap dash to war.



They were right then, they are right now. It is time to come back together. To fight against the war against life. We can do it and we must do it. To change the course of this imperial messianic militarism.

"Let us give a new birth to the meaning of May Day as a day of wide and deep solidarity against the empire. Those who will follow us will one day look back to us and ask, "What did they do when the Empire went mad?" We must be able to say we did everything in our power. We organized ourselves, we worked together, we stood against the madness of empire. This is what we must say. And that is what we must do to insure a livable future for later generations.

"When we fight against this mad imperial enterprise, we fight for ourselves, our real selves, as workers, as builders, as fathers, as mothers, as brothers, as sisters, as the human family. Let us unite and fight against empire for May Day and everyday." (2005)

JOINING PROTESTS AGAINST POLICE KILLINGS

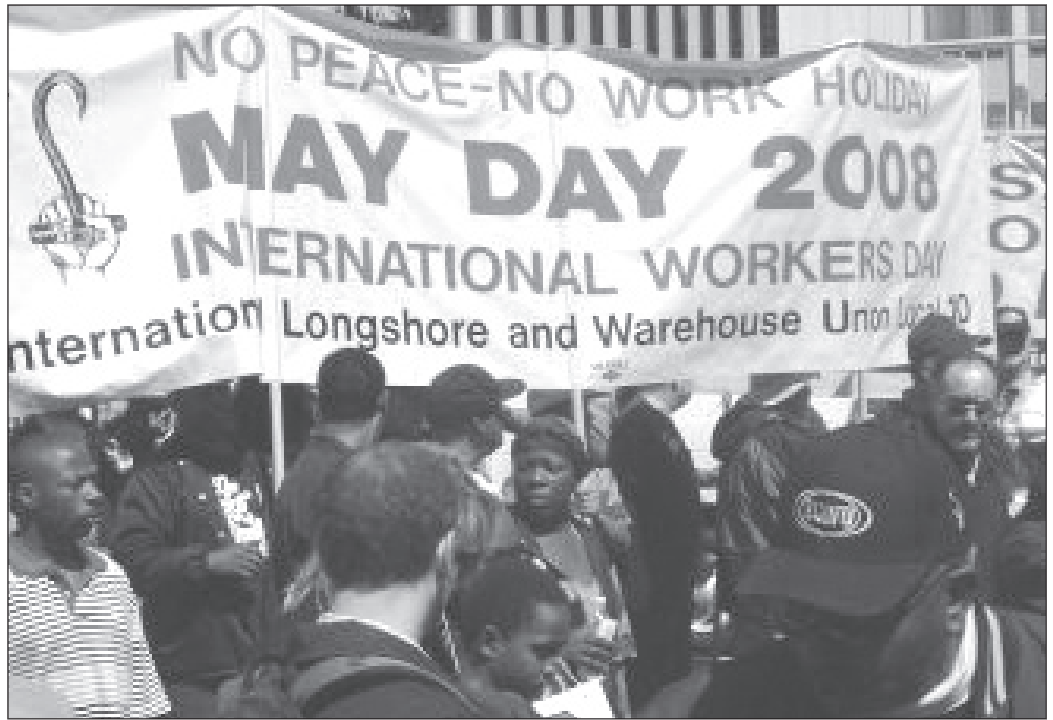
Dock Workers Shutting Down Ports on May Day

On Friday, May 1 — May Day, International Day of Working Class Struggle and Unity — dock workers in San Francisco and Oakland will shut down the ports. The April meetings of both the Executive Board and membership of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 10 unanimously endorsed a call for “Union Action to Stop Police Killings of Black and Brown People.” A unanimously approved amendment called for the monthly union membership meeting to be held on the May 1 day shift and conclude with a march and a rally at Oakland City Hall. The workers are taking their stand that racist police brutality and killings are unjust and an issue workers are fighting on.

The killing of yet another young African American in Baltimore, alongside that of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Eric Garner on Staten Island and Walter Scott in South Carolina, have been protested across the country. Youth and workers are together demanding justice for all those killed by police and for an end to government impunity. As nationwide actions April 14 and the on-going protests in Baltimore show, the people are united against the racist police killings — modern day lynching — and the genocide of mass incarceration.

That Local 10 dockworkers are taking their action on May Day is a reflection of their internationalist spirit, one that has brought actions against apartheid South Africa and with resistance in Palestine. It is a reflection of their consciousness of the importance of the working class playing its role in leading the fight for the rights of all.

Local 10’s resolution for the May Day action brings out: “The ILWU has



a proud history of standing up against racial injustice, like the 1984 anti-apartheid action and the 2010 shutdown for justice for Oscar Grant.” Oscar Grant was killed by a transit police at the Bay Area Rapid Transit’s Fruitvale station on January 1, 2009. In 1984, South African cargo sat in the harbor for 10 days as ILWU workers refused to unload it and community activists joined in picketing so a court order to unload the cargo could not be carried out.

Charleston Dock Workers Organizing Walter Scott, unarmed African American stopped for a broken taillight, was gunned down by a white officer in South Carolina. Police originally told their usual lie that Scott had attacked the officer involved who “feared for his life.” It was only when video of the event, showing Scott trying to run away and the officer shooting him in the back, then handcuffing the dying man, that action was taken against the police.

Protests were organized with the International Longshore Association Local (ILA) 1422 in Charleston playing

a leading role, including having the local’s union hall serve as a center for organizing.

Local 1422 president, said in a condolence statement issued by the ILA that Scott’s brother is a longshoreman and other Local 1422 members are relatives. “Local 1422 recognizes that we have a social responsibility to our community and we take that responsibility very seriously.” Explaining that the local took the lead in organizing for the City Hall protest, the statement adds, “Local 1422 will continue to stand up and speak out against injustice in any form, whether it is racial profiling, racial discrimination or, as in this case, racial homicide.”

The South Carolina AFL-CIO thanked ILWU Local 10 for initiating a May Day action against police killings: “You supply courage to the members of the South Carolina AFL-CIO as we continue to address the unwarranted killing of Walter Scott. We will share your message of solidarity and reach out to workers around the country to join with us on May 1 in actions to protest the continuing unjustified killings.”



I • INTERNATIONAL MAY DAY

environment, opposing racist police brutality, deciding how our public dollars are spent and fighting for equality. The efforts by New York State to divide and intimidate are not succeeding, as many more students, parents and teachers together are refusing to back down — refusing the standardized tests, refusing a state takeover, refusing mayoral control, refusing a day-time curfew and criminalization of our youth. When we say *We Decide*, we mean it!

Come join the fight. Hear students, teachers and community organizers speak out. Exchange experience with others who are fighting for rights. Come contribute to the international spirit of May Day and join us in songs, poetry and spoken word in Spanish, Arabic and English. Find out

about struggles here and worldwide, from Buffalo to Palestine. Everyone has a role to play in strengthening our united fight for rights.

In speaking of decision making and the future, we will be addressing demands now to develop our own alternatives. When it comes to budget issues, for example, we want to decide the budget, decide how the city, school, and Buffalo billion should be spent. These are our public dollars and it is our right to decide.

As one small example, this year's Buffalo school budget devotes \$119 million just for to pay interest on the debt — \$119 million to pay the Wall Street banks, when they are the ones who should be paying for our rights. Consider that restructuring

the debt in our favor, such as by freezing payments, means our public dollars can fund our public schools. Even just half of the \$119 million could fund physical education and music for all schools for several years.

It is also clear that we need to raise the quality of the public education system and redesign it so that it serves the public of today and the future. King Cuomo and other state and local politicians are taking governance, and education backward, imposing dictate by single individuals. *We Refuse!* We say moving forward requires an alternative of our own making. Come to the May Day celebration to find out about a summer project to create and run a school where we together decide!

Celebrate

International May Day



Our Future,
Our Rights
We Decide

Saturday May 2

March at 4pm

Meet at Grant and Ferry

Rally and Social: 5pm

Lafayette High School



International Celebration
Photos and Poetry, Music,
Spoken Word and Food
from Around the World



Buffalo Forum & Our Schools, We Decide Committee • phone: 602-8077