

Buffalo Forum



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

Workers of all countries, unite!

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Refuse the Tests and Receivership I-II
- Oppose U.S. War Crimes I2-I5
- Community Forum April 18 I6

March 24, 2017

Vol. 21 #3



To Raise the Quality of Education, Refuse the Tests!

The quality of Buffalo public schools and how to raise it is a concern of students, parents and teachers alike. This is especially true given the schools remain segregated and unequal. It is being said that the upcoming New York State standardized testing for grades 3-8 provides a means to assess how students are doing and thus provide a tool for raising quality.

The testing begins March 27 for English Language Arts (ELA). Testing for math will take place starting May 1. Since the tests are now untimed, it means many children will struggle for more than four hours each day to try and finish. Special needs students and English Language Learners all take the same test and are

Refuse the Tests • 3

Education Advocacy Organizations Join Forces Urging Parents to Opt Out of NYS Common Core State Tests

New York State Allies for Public Education

Across the state, grassroots education advocacy organizations including New York State Allies for Public Education (NYSAPE), Long Island Opt Out, New York BATs, NYC Opt Out and Stronger Together, are urging parents to

opt out of the NYS Common Core state tests. With New York State Common Core state tests in grades 3-8 set to begin March 27 hundreds of thousands of parents have notified school officials that

Parents Urged to Opt Out • 5

Opt Out 2017: Refusing Education as a Police Power

Dr. Mark Garrison, markgarrison.net

The Opt Out movement is more important than ever. Why? There are several reasons. First, despite what the New York State Education Department (NYSED) is saying, and despite promises that the federal *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* will reduce testing demands, this year's tests already have and will continue to negatively affect

students, teachers, principals and parents in numerous ways. The tests still narrow how and what teachers teach, and what students are supposed to learn. Test results will be used to determine school status under the state's receivership law. This will affect the fate of hundreds of schools across the state, including the possibility

Opt Out 2017 • 4

ORGANIZE ANTI-WAR ALTERNATIVES

Oppose U.S. War Crimes in Iraq and Yemen

It is estimated that at least 200 people, most if not all civilians, were killed in U.S. air strikes on the Iraqi city of Mosul in March, the 14th anniversary of the U.S. invasion. It is likely many more civilians were killed, as the

U.S. increases its bombings in the area, terrorizing the population in the name of "saving" them from terrorists. The bombings have also forced more than 180,000 people, mostly families, to flee the area and join the

many hundreds of thousands of refugees the U.S. aggressive war has created. The years of war have solved no problem while imposing massive death, destruction and chaos.

These most recent war

crimes, like the unjust and illegal war itself, are to be condemned and punished. Yet even though the majority of people in the U.S. oppose the war in Iraq and all the many crimes, there is no

Oppose U.S. War Crimes • 12

Support the Building of the Communist Press!

Subscribe to VOICE OF REVOLUTION

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

office@usmlo.org
www.usmlo.org

Buffalo Forum

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

716-602-8077
buffaloforum@usmlo.org
www.usmlo.org/buffaloforum

***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

END THE VIOLENCE OF POVERTY AND WAR

\$15 Now

MARCH AND RALLY

Tuesday April 4, 3pm

Gather at Best and Main

March to MLK Park for Rally

Organized by: Fight for \$15 and Black Lives Matter

INDIGENOUS WOMEN: HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTIONS AND ACTIVISM

**Thursday, Mar. 30, 2017, 8:30-4:30
Erie County Public Library, Main Branch
1 Lafayette Square**



Two very current topics will be explored during the day-long symposium:

The first is human rights activism around the hundreds of murdered and missing Indigenous women from First Nations in Canada, also known as the Stolen Sisters.

We are honored to have as our keynote speaker, Beverly Jacobs, Mohawk, Six Nations of the Grand River. She is an activist, an attorney, and the former head of the Native Women's Association of Canada. She was the primary researcher for the 2004 Amnesty International report, "Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada."

I • REFUSE THE TESTS

scored the same as students without these difficulties.

Education Commissioner Elia, on a recent visit to the area, claimed the tests are a critical way for school districts and parents to evaluate the progress of students. A March 15 letter from Superintendent Cash similarly stated, “The tests are designed to measure what students know and are able to do...” Neither provide any factual basis for these claims.

Actual experience by students, parents and teachers has shown that the state tests are not a valid measure of students, their knowledge or their progress. Much of the testing is not developmentally appropriate, including reading passages and questions often 2-3 grade levels higher than the grade being tested. The testing does not engage students in applying what they have learned. They also include several answers that could be right, but only one that is acceptable.

In this manner, students are being taught to submit to the arbitrary dictate of the test-makers, without even being able to raise questions and explore content. Indeed, teachers are not permitted to even see the test or discuss any of its content, with most forced to sign a waiver agreeing not to talk about the test to anyone. Students, teachers and parents do not get the tests back or even any specific information back so they cannot assess what content was considered wrong, or why, or how to further strengthen a student’s ability in a given area. Teachers only get general information at the end of the school year, when it cannot be used to assist students. How then is this a means to assess progress?!

Further, students are subjected to the humiliation of being a number, a 1, 2, 3, or 4, with 1 the lowest. These rankings are



often posted publicly in the schools, in the name of shaming students into doing better. Everyone is supposed to accept talking about the students as numbers, that “1s are hopeless and 2s have to be raised to 3s and 4s can be ignored” or “all we have are 1s and 2s.” Students’ abilities in music, art, sports, working together, investigating, finding solutions, resolving conflicts, engaging discussion, none of this is even considered. And it is African American and Latino students that are most hardest hit by this ranking of students by number. They are the ones branded as failures most often, while it is the state and its institutional racism that is the failure.

Our children are not numbers, they are human beings with rights! A single test, especially those as flawed as the state tests, cannot assess progress or knowledge. Teachers, parents and students themselves are far more able to make such assessments, based on a wide variety of means over a

period of time. They also recognize that learning and teaching are collective activities that testing cannot measure.

No musician or writer or artist or athlete or scholar or organizer is assessed based on a single concert or game or book or protest — and none would accept such assessment. Yet that is what is demanded by the state.

The tests are not a means to assess progress or knowledge. They *are* a means to punish, to brand children, especially minorities, as failures and their teachers as failures. They are a means to force all concerned to accept and enforce what they know to be unfair and arbitrary tests that harm students. They are a means to eliminate the collective character of teaching and learning and an attempt to reduce them to individual matters of individual scores.

Testing is a means of control, of policing, not educating.

To counter this injustice, defend the rights of students and direct attention to raising the quality of education — Refuse the Tests! By refusing the tests students and parents can take a stand that they are to be decision makers in all matters concerning education, including how to assess progress and what knowledge is needed. Addressing such matters requires deciding on the aim of education more generally, and the content, methods, curriculum, assessments needed to meet that aim. Students are striving to be thinkers, innovators, problem-solvers, contending with today’s social problems so as to build a bright future. Education needs to arm students to change the world and move society forward. Testing is designed to do the opposite, to turn students and teachers into good and willing slaves. *Refuse the Tests! Demand to be Decision-Makers! Demand Education to Change the World!*

UNDEMOCRATIC STATE TAKE OVER**Say No to Receivership**

New York State testing begins March 28 for grades 3-8. Test results for a given school are the main way the state uses to take over public schools, using receivership. Buffalo currently has 15 schools in receivership. At the end of the school year, these schools are subject to being turned over to an independent receiver and pos-

sibly privatized, including by giving the buildings to private charters. The decision to do so is entirely up to State Education Commissioner Elia. The school board, the public as a whole, the teachers, students and parents of these schools, do not decide — appointed Commissioner Elia does. The receiver for the schools is accountable to

her, not the public. Even if schools show what is called “demonstrable improvement,” Elia still decides if they are to remain in receivership, whether to turn them over to an independent receiver and whether more schools are to be put in receivership. This is undemocratic

Say No to Receivership • 10

I • OPT OUT 2017

of school closure or conversion to a charter school. Further, as NY's Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) still remains law, this year's scores could be used to evaluate educators in subsequent years, when the moratorium on the use of test data to evaluate educators is ended.

The undemocratic and harmful Common Core standards remain, and annual testing remains a main vehicle for their imposition. NYSED has also indicated that it plans to require a statewide computer-based testing system. Among other things, this is a means to facilitate the collection and sharing of individually identifiable student data (recall inBloom). Schools continue to be pressured to teach to the test, and some teachers and administrators are pressuring parents to have their child(ren) take the tests.

All of this harms the quality of education and does nothing to solve the real problems that concern parents, educators, students and their communities. A summation of existing research suggests that test-based accountability systems do not serve to improve the quality of education; annual testing has not been demonstrated to help educators do a better job. Yet, state and federal authorities continue to pursue a direction that the vast majority of students, parents and educators have clearly opposed. Test refusal is an important means to block this undemocratic direction and for building public consensus regarding an alternative.

Testing as a Police Power

But there is something far more significant going on. The particular form of contemporary testing and the particular manner it is now being used reveals and is consistent with much larger governance changes.

As has long been recognized by students, parents and educators, the essence of test-based education policy is not accountability but *punishment*. Punishment is about control, about regulation; the right to punish is a police power. The governance of education increasingly takes the form of policing. More and more, school is about compliance, and more and more, this compliance is organized via tests (and "data") of some kind.

Tests are less about demonstrating what one knows, understands or is able to do,

and more about enforcement of a particular future that no reasonable person accepts or wants. For example, few will argue that schools should narrowly focus on preparing students for "college and career" — parents have long desired an educational experience that is well-rounded, preparing their children not only for work and future study, but for a wide variety of adult roles and activities, including art, music, sports, etc. Much of the opposition to the Common Core originated in the fact that it portended a future for youth limited (at best for most) to being a robot temp worker in the global economy.

Let us be clear: the issue is not whether or not educators should use data to make decisions regarding what is taught and how teachers should go about their work. The issue is that "the data" (whether test score, attendance record, or a student's "grit score") has become a means by which students and educators are *policed*. (Scientists do not use data to punish the subject of their investigation.)

Federal and state policy on use of data is in fact bad science. For example, *ESSA* demands that states rank their schools on the basis of data such as test scores, attendance, and teacher absenteeism. Mass confusion has been created by NYSED and others who render the issue as one of which indicators are most valid for ranking purposes. Yet, ranking is not nor can it ever be a form of measurement; ranking schools is both fraudulent and harmful no matter what indicators are used (e.g., some are proposing "opportunity to learn" metrics).

All this is a means to block students, parents, educators and community members from having a say and having an active role. This point is made very clear by the data-advocacy of the notorious consulting firm McKinsey & Company. Data and algorithms, they say, should replace human decision making.

Data as Behavior Enforcement

At nearly every turn, "the data" is not used to shed light on a situation, but rather to impose a view of the world consistent with



the "reformers' vision" (e.g., educators should ignore racism and poverty and instead focus on "achievement gaps" and "growth mindsets"). This "data" constitutes the stimulus to which educators are told they must respond. Those who do "what the data tells them" are promised (but frequently do not receive) rewards; those who do not comply face punishment and humiliation.

In other words, the "data" connected with all the testing — benchmarks, formative tests, end of course tests, state tests, nationally normed tests, common core aligned or not — is not about providing information. We are to be data managed, not data informed. In fact, the above pattern now applies to many spheres of life: credit card points and credit scores; health records and the various incentive schemes of insurance companies; the use of social media to regulate conduct. (And the metrics for each scheme are suspect.) All of these are forms of policing, and they are done outside the bounds of publicly legitimated law or public oversight. These are non-public means for regulating behavior.

Because "data" is not a person, emphasis on "the data" masks who in fact is behind all the policing by way of the data. Data appears as neutral and unconnected to forms of power. This hides the fact that more and more of education is being governed by private entities (e.g., technology monopolies) and various executive authorities outside the public sphere and thus unaccountable to the public. The practices now imposed on schools do not emerge from laws

Opt Out 2017 • 5

I • PARENTS URGED TO OPT OUT

they will refuse these flawed and harmful tests. Despite Commissioner Elia's claims that significant changes to these tests have been made in response to the concerns of the public, parents and educators know that nothing could be further from the truth.

Jeanette Deutermann, Long Island public school parent, founder of Long Island Opt Out and NYSAPE said, "We have made great strides over the past few years. As a result of the opt out movement, many agencies, organizations, and state leaders connected to education have either willingly or forcibly shifted towards a philosophy of whole child teaching and learning, recognizing the voting power that this movement possesses. However, this shift has not resulted in the legislative changes required to stop the misuse of test scores to rank, sort, and punish our schools. We must continue to refuse the tests until the NYS education law is amended."

New York City [and Buffalo] schools are resorting to misinformation and scare tactics to discourage Opt Out in communities that have less access to information, especially in Title I schools. While our schools should be empowering parents to make thoughtful decisions on behalf of their children, what we are seeing instead is the usurpation of parental rights. To be clear, every parent has

the right to refuse the state tests simply by notifying their child's school officials," said Johanna Garcia, NYC public school parent and Co-President of District 6 President's Council.

"As always, there are those who wish to contain our influence and weaken our resolve. Sadly, misinformation meant to strip the rights of parents and quell Opt Out has been disseminated by organizations and school leaders charged with overseeing the education our children. Facts are our weapon. Information is our strength." Eileen Graham, Rochester public school parent and founder of the Black Student Leadership Organization.

Nate Morgan, President of Hastings Teachers Association and Vice Chair of Stronger Together Caucus said, "The tests are longer than ever with young students sitting for up to five hours per day for 6 days of testing and even longer now with the Commissioner's untimed testing policy. The common core standards remain essentially unchanged and the benchmarks used to determine proficiency continue to mislabel hundreds of thousands of students as failures. Teachers continue to have minimal input in test construction and in fact, are not even permitted to read the tests they are compelled to administer! Parents

and educators recognize the failure of both Commissioner Elia and Governor Cuomo to respond to our concerns. The Opt Out movement will continue."

"While Governor Cuomo is desperate to present himself as a progressive champion of education, his actions prove that his education platform is most closely aligned with that of federal Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos. Coupled with his failure to fully fund our public schools, Governor Cuomo's refusal to amend the Education Transformation Act — a law that requires the use of junk science, unfairly punishes schools serving the most vulnerable students, and supports privatization efforts — proves that he cares little for our children and the well-being of our schools," emphasized Marla Kilfoyle, Executive Director of BATs, NYS public school teacher, and parent of a public school child.

We are encouraging parents to reject harmful and developmentally inappropriate tests along with non-researched standards, the continued misuse of assessment data, and efforts to punish and privatize the most under-funded schools by opting out of the 2017 NYS Common Core state tests.

(More information contact: Lisa Rudley (917) 414-9190; nys.allies@gmail.com; www.nysape.org)

4 • OPT OUT 2017

legitimated on the basis of public opinion. Public opinion has long been opposed to the test and punish regime. Police power, it should be noted, is not legitimated on the basis of public opinion, as is law. Police power exists to protect the state.

The Next Phase of Opt Out

Already in the works are initiatives to move from annual testing to *continuous* testing via various digital online platforms (e.g., Chromebooks, iPads). The advocates of "personalized learning" and "competency based education" (all rooted in B. F. Skinner's radical behaviorism and ideas about "teaching machines") are poised to "transform" education via online courses, "flipped classrooms," and data "badges," motivating students with "scholar dollars" via online dashboards. Their goal is for all

students to be connected to a device, all the time (see the push for "one-to-one" initiatives subsidized by public dollars).

Various technology and entertainment monopolies (including Pearson and Disney), venture capitalists and even some major teachers' unions have signed on to this plan. These plans reduce the role of teacher to data watcher and data responder, where curriculum, homework, essay grades, etc., are assigned by the computer. For advocates of "personalized learning" education is characterized by constant and continuous data collection and manipulation — every keystroke, every mouse click is used by the computer to regulate teacher and student behavior. *ESSA* promotes "personalized learning" and the digital takeover of schools.

Opt Out needs to be ready. These powerful "reform" advocates are happy

to end the discredited and "one size fits all" testing regime. They are happy to end one-time, high stakes tests. Their rhetoric is emancipatory and seductive, and they have vast resources to push their agenda. It is key that everyone carefully examine the "personalized learning" movement. It is the data they want as it is their means of control. For Opt Out, test refusal will become *data* refusal.

The standard that the Opt Out movement should use to gauge its own progress in bringing about change is the degree to which students, parents, educators and the public have created alternative visions to those of so-called reformers, working out mechanisms for public deliberation, participation and democratic control of education with equal membership and rights for all.

A Real Example of Performance Based Education

Curmudgucation Blog, March 6, 2017

This afternoon the set was struck and the stage swept clean. We have come to the end of this year's spring musical. As always it was one of the highlights of my year, and as always, it reminded me of how inadequate so many of our educational models are.

There are weeks of rehearsal, learning music, learning choreography, working on blocking and lines and the underlying character work that goes with all of that. We have a cast of students in 7-12 grade in very many levels of skill and experience.

Used properly, a portal to a world of learning

That means that in the course of assembling the show, each student learns a different set of lessons that depend a great deal on what roles they receive and what skills they bring to the table, as well as their ambition and adventurousness of spirit.

So this educational experience is extremely personalized, and that means far more than I have twelve lessons to choose from and a computer picks the next one based on how the last one turned out. My lead actor may need to learn about comedic timing, while one of my chorus folks may need to learn about the importance of the chorus in a show. My leading actress may need to learn about how to flesh out a character when the writers have not given you much to work with. But the list of lessons will be different for every different role and every different cast member.

The lessons also vary with directors. This program is a co-op that allows my school to join in with a school just across town, and I split directing duties with an old friend who heads up the other school's program. We've divided up duties many different ways over the years, and it works because we work well together. Every theater production is a collaboration of some sort, and that collaboration is always shaped by the approaches of the people involved. Some directors have a very specific vision for the actors to bring to life, while others like to leave spaces for the actors to fill in with their own choices. We tend toward the latter, but some actors are more comfortable with the former and all sorts of combinations can get good results (and the requirements of the script itself also

make a difference). All of which means that if you showed up with a specific program for exactly how a director should put together a show, I would laugh at you. Here we are with a performance-based task that literally comes with a script — and yet only a fool would claim that the script is all you need to produce a great show.

Likewise, putting on a show is the very definition of a performance-based learning experience. Yet if we were to follow the Performance-Based Learning (PBL) model currently favored, we would break the show down into a checklist. Does the actor know the lines? Check. Does the actor know the blocking? Check. Can the actor put on her costume? Check. And on and on and even if I have checked off every micro-credential on the list, that is not the same thing as actually performing the show. Nor do we build toward that performance capability by working down the list one separate performance task at a time, because they are all part of a greater whole.

And those tasks would be performed for an evaluator, an assessor of some sort, which is not the ultimate goal. Our show was performed in front of an audience, and because it was a comedy, the audience reaction was a critical part of performance (in fact, on our second night, I saw something I have never seen in school or community theater before — the show was stopped by audience laughter). Unlike competency-based education, which presumes that competencies can be approached as separate, discrete skills that can be measured through proxies, tasks that are not the real thing. There is no checklist that would have substituted for dress rehearsal, no assessment more valuable than audience reactions in performance.

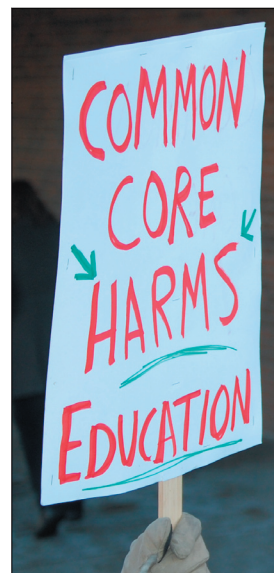
And speaking of assessments — at no point in the eight-week process of preparing the show would a multiple-choice standardized test have been useful. At no point in the process did anyone think, "Hey, we need to do some assessments here to make sure that everyone is on track for a good performance." It would have been a pointless, useless waste of time.

In fact, standardization of any type is useless in this process. I have no idea how many

productions of The Addams Family have been put on in community and school theaters at this point, but I will bet you the farm, the rent money, and a full box of donuts that not one of those productions looks exactly like any other. It is true that nobody who

saw our production would have mistaken it for Hamlet or Oh Calcutta, but every production exists at the intersection of a specific cast, director, school, community, and stage (ours has no fly gallery, so that affects set design considerably). School theater in particular has to make adjustments for things as simple as language and as substantial as character gender (I can tell you, for instance, that interesting things happen to the subtext of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* when Belle's crazy father Maurice is replaced by Belle's crazy mother Marie). It is those specific variations that most often give the special flavor and quality to the local production; the deviations from the standard are a source of excellence, not a treatment-demanding flaw.

I love working with students and theater (despite the giant chunks of my life that it demands) because it is an experience that, in an absolutely authentic manner, helps each student grow and learn and discover new greatness in herself. It is an absolutely real learning and growth experience, which is why I am always struck by how completely it does not match any of the assumptions about real learning made by the forces of education "reform." This is what real learning and growth look like, and they do not resemble the standard-driven test-centered punishment-fueled system that has been forced on us for the past fifteen years.



RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Demand Equality and Justice for All

Jesse The Walking Turner, Children Are More Than a Test Score, March 22, 2017

Walking Man why fight these NCLB, RTTT and ESSA education reforms?

Fight because, reforms pushing Charter Schools, Vouchers, the Common Core, and endless Standardized Testing harm our children.

Fight because, for 15 years these reformers have failed our children, parents, teachers, and our most needy public schools.

Fight because, these reformers provide cover for injustice and inequality in our public schools.

Fight because, these reformers have turned our children into data and profits for CEO vulture profiteers.

Fight because, placing emphasis on High-Stakes Testing labels and tracks

Black, Brown, Poor, and Special Education children into failure.

Fight because, education reform history and data have always demonstrated new rigorous standards and new high-stakes testing are merely more of the same old failed 100-year-old promises. Promises that have always done more harm than good.

Fight because, they limit imagination.

Fight because, they reduce a child's myths, dreams, and hopes to data.

Fight because, their push for endless rigor is killing laughter and love in our public schools.

Walking Man why are you fighting these education reformers?

I have fought against these reformers under three Presidents: Bush, Obama, and now Trump.

I have fought against the education reforms of the five United States Secretaries of Education, Page, Spellings, Duncan, King, and now Betty DeVos?

I fight because their "Achievement Gap Policies" are a moral rejection of that first and foremost fundamental truth to "Do No Harm."

We Americans need to start asking our leaders; why school choice policies without equity have become the core of their education reforms?

Demand Equality and Justice • 8

Test Refusal = People Power

Critical Classrooms, Critical Kids, March 14, 2017

In recent months, social media has been ablaze with talk of regular folk taking action to resist the Trump agenda. Protests are a daily occurrence, and even those who previously paid little attention to politics are now hitting the streets with cardboard signs to express their outrage... While I wish more people had been 'woke' under Obama, this new wave of activism – with the message of #PeoplePower at its heart – gives me hope.

Since 2013, I have been strongly encouraging residents of New York State – and beyond – to refuse the Common Core-aligned grades 3-8 state tests in math and ELA. I still have nothing positive to say about them, and at this point I have escalated to practically demanding that you opt out this year. Even Betty Rosa, the new chancellor of the New York State Board of Regents, said she would refuse the tests. Here is what Kate Taylor of *The New York Times* reported in March 2016:

"Dr. Rosa has suggested that the tests were designed so that many students would fail, giving policy makers a chance to point to a crisis in the state's schools. She said that if she had children in the grades taking the exams, she would have them sit out the

tests, as the parents of more than 200,000 students did last year."

People, we have power. Refusing the state tests sends the message that we reject the further privatization of public education in this country. Under this umbrella, we:

- Say NO to poorly constructed, highly flawed and developmentally inappropriate standardized tests.

- Say NO to the lack of art, music and culturally responsive curricula in our schools.

- Say NO to the over-testing of our youngest learners, particularly English-language learners who must also take the grueling four-part NYSESLAT assessment AFTER the state ELA and math tests.

- Say NO to school segregation and the argument that a school is "bad" because of low test scores.

- Say NO to uninspiring test prep curricula.

- Say NO to a one-size-fits-all education.

- Say NO to test scores being used to label schools, students and teachers as "failing," [and subject to state takeover and privatization].

- Say NO to data-mining.
- Say NO to fear and threats! NY students *are* getting into competitive middle and high schools without test scores, and schools with high opt-outs are not being de-funded.

Opting out is not just to protect your own child. It also sends the message that we are looking out for *all* children. Peter Greene, a highly respected educator and blogger, recently published a piece on test refusal, *Eight Reasons to Opt Out* (<http://curmudgucation.blogspot.com/2017/03/reasons-to-opt-out.html>). It gives even more reasons to opt out including "the value of non-compliance," my personal favorite. Greene writes, "In this day and age, it is never too early for a child to learn that sometimes people in authority will demand that you comply with dumb actions. Unthinking compliance is unwise. It's good for all citizens to learn to say 'no'."

The New York State tests begin March 27. Please visit these websites (New York State Allies for Public Education, nysape.org; to download your opt out letter. It is not too late to say NO, and do not let anyone tell you that you cannot refuse the tests.

7 • DEMAND EQUALITY AND JUSTICE

Walking Man, how can we recognize harmful education reform?

Any education reform insisting that school resources do not matter?

Harms our children.

Any education reform insisting that class sizes do not matter?

Harms our children.

Any education reform insisting that poverty does not matter?

Harms our children.

Any education reform insisting that classroom resources do not matter?

Harms our children.

Any education reform abandoning and forcing our nation's poorest schools to close; while giving billions and special treatments to private entities to replace those schools with for profit schools.

Harms our children.

Any education reform that supports programs that place new teachers with less training and preparation in our poorest and most needy schools.

Harms our most vulnerable children.

Any education reform that spends hundreds of billions on reform programs to promote higher test scores as the solutions to childhood trauma, inequity, poverty, and the "School to Prison Pipeline."

Harms our children.

Any education reform that fails to powerfully support Music, Art, and Physical Education for all in our public schools.

Harms our children.

Any education reform that blames children, parents, teachers, and local public schools as the problem.

Harms our children.

Any education reform that fails to stalwartly support our nation's public school "First Responders," Parents, School Nurses, School librarians, Counselors, Special Educators, Literacy Specialists, Classroom Teachers, Music and Art Teachers, Para-Professionals, Custodians, Principals and Vice Principals.

Harms our children.

Any education reform that tracks and labels children.

Harms our children. [...]



Are there education reforms we should fight for?

We should fight for education reforms that demand equality and justice for all children.

We should fight for reforms that demand art for all.

We should fight for reforms that demand music for all.

We should fight for reforms that demand physical education for all children every day.

We should fight for reforms that demand we reduce class sizes.

We should fight for reforms that demand special education services for every child in need.

We should fight for reforms that demand more Librarians, Media specialists, Literacy Specialists, Counselors, Math Tutors, and School nurses.

We should fight for reforms that demand that all schools be modern, clean and safe.

We should fight for reforms that demand wrap around services in poor public schools.

We should fight for reforms that demand summer education and recreational programs for all children.

Walking Man, have an idea in mind?

Let us all walk out.

Let us all Walk Out, Walk back in, and hold an all day Teach-in.

Imagine every parent, every student, and every educator walking out, then walking back in, and then skipping those old lessons, and holding a Teach-in Day across America in 2017.

What would such a Walk Out/Teach-in look like Walking Man?

First it means, no one stays home, no one abandons our public schools, or fails to educate our students. It would be a symbolic walk out, a walk right back in to teach about our nation's long struggle for equality and justice in our public schools. This walk out/teach-in requires parent organizations and community grass roots activist groups be deeply involved in the planning of all walk out, and the teach-in events. To be not just supporters, but active participants from start to end.

We should "Walk Out" again as the last school bell sounds, and go rally for education reform that respects children, teachers and our public schools at our state capitols. [...]

These education reforms that reduce children to data and profits would crumble. A simple democracy truth to power. The people hold the key to change not policy makers or legislators. When we the people act together our children win. [...]

Walking Man what can I do?

Coretta Scot King said: "I must remind you that starving a child is violence. Neglecting school children is violence. Punishing a mother and her family is violence. Discrimination against a working man is violence. Ghetto housing is violence. Ignoring medical need is violence. Contempt for poverty is violence."

You can reject the violence of:

Hunger,
Public school neglect,
Punishing mothers,
Discrimination,
Ghetto housing,
Lack of health care, and

Finally you can reject the violence of poverty at every step. [...]

Eight Reasons to Opt Out

Peter Greene

Depending on your state, it is that time again — time to waste students' school time on the Big Standardized (BS) Test. Whether it is the PARCC or the SBA or whatever mutant offspring of the testing industry that your state prefers, it is headed your way like a hungry wildebeast.

Maybe you have opted your child out in the past. Maybe you have thought about it, but ultimately decided not to. Maybe you have even become comfortably numb about test-driven education. Consider opting out this year.

If you want to find out the specific mechanics of opting out in your state, just google "Opt Out" and your state. For instance, if I look for "Opt Out Pennsylvania," I find the basic instructions for the steps I must take to opt my children out of testing (since my children are currently Negative 3 Months old, it won't be an issue this year, but I like to be prepared).

If you opt out, you may well get grief and pushback for your choice. Here is why you should do it anyway.

1) No Benefits for Children or Parents

Your child is not allowed to discuss specifics of the test with anyone, so there will be no after-test conversation that would help her glean lessons through reflection. Your child will not get any specific feedback telling her which answers she got right, and which she got wrong. You will not get any feedback on the test except a single blanket score between 4 (super-duper) and 1 (not so great). Once this test is done, you will not know anything about your child that you did not already know.

2) No Benefits for Teachers

In most states, we are not even allowed to lay eyes on the test, and we will receive a single score for your child. All of this is useless. We will learn nothing about your child, and nothing about your child's class (except how well they did on this test). If an administrator or a teacher tells you that the test results will give them valuable information about your child, ask them why they have not already collected that information by other means and if not,

what they've been doing for the past eight months.

3) Wasted Time and Resources

What could your student have done with the time spent on preparing for the test, drilling for the test, taking the test? What could your state and local school system have done with the millions of dollars spent on giving the test? Students, parents and schools are paying big in both financial and opportunity costs.

4) Warped View of School and Life

Test-centric schooling leaves our students with the impression that they go to school to learn how to pass the test, and then to take the test. That is a terrible model for learning and for life. Contrary to what test supporters say, life is not all about standardized tests. You will not take a bubble test to get married or to have and raise children. Whatever your career, it will not involve a steady daily diet of test prep and test taking. Show your child that the Big Standardized Test is not the point of school.

5) Do Not Negotiate with Hostage Takers

You may hear that your child must take the test because otherwise it will hurt the school or the classroom teacher. This is simply hostage taking. And it's important to remember that every year this continues, schools and teachers continue to pay a price — in time, in money, in the growth of a pervasive toxic test-driven atmosphere. This argument is a bully who says, "If you don't let me beat this kid up, I will beat him up even more." In any bullying situation, the person to blame is not the victim the person that the bully uses as an excuse to bully. The problem is not that your child is not taking the test — the problem is the state that is threatening to punish the school and teachers. Deal with the real problem; do not enable it.

6) Privacy Matters

This is certainly not the only mechanism being deployed to capture, collect and monetize data about your child. In fact, many folks who position themselves as opponents of BS Tests are actually doing so to build a case for other data



collecting methods (but we will talk about Competency Based Education another day). But opting out is certainly one clear and immediate way that you can keep some of your child's data out of the hands of the Big Data miners.

7) The Value of Non-compliance

In this day and age, it is never too early for a child to learn that sometimes people in authority will demand that you comply with dumb actions. Unthinking compliance is unwise. It is good for all citizens to learn to say "no," and the Big Standardized Test is a good practice case for all the reasons listed above. Compliance is not a virtue in and of itself; this is a great chance to practice rebelling just a little.

8) Be a Snowflake

It is true — your opting out may well not get your state or school district to change policy, may not recapture all the time and money being lost to testing, may not change the course on which we are currently set. But then again — if you are one among many, it might. Put enough snowflakes together and you get an avalanche that crushes everything in its path.

The requirement to make schools test-centric, to put bad tests at the center of school's existence is foolish, on the order of demanding that all students wear silly hats. At this stage of the game, there can be no doubt — there are no benefits to the test and many unnecessary costs...It is time to make your life a source of friction in the machine.

This year, whether it is for the first time or the tenth, Opt Out.

Education Profiteers Create Conditions for Failure, Then Claim They Alone Can Fix What They Broke

Ruth Rodriguez-Fay, *Defending the Early Years*

"If you don't understand the journey of those you serve, you cannot be an advocate for justice." - Mary Bacon

Mary Bacon's quote above is essential to this presentation that I have been honored to share today. It is critical because of the present day infusion of Corporate America into the design and construct of our public schools. It is also more so, because those who have set their goal on restructuring our public schools have chosen to isolate certified educators, child development experts and families whose stakes are high in ensuring our children's success. Instead, we have billionaires, hedge funds moguls, real estate investors positioning themselves as the saviors of what they have come to label as "failing" schools. They have used their \$\$power to influence legislators into passing an education "reform" that goes against what we educators have been trained to do. The disrespect to the teaching profession, especially those of us educators of color, has been unprecedented. No other profession has received such attacks as teachers have, such blatant attacks by non-educators on our ability to do what we have spent our lifetime careers mastering.

The Billionaires and hedge funds moguls have waged a war against public education, especially harmful to communities of color. One of the nation's largest lobbyists, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), looking for profit ventures for their investors, determined that public education was a multi-trillion investment opportunity just waiting to be tapped; and they wasted little time concocting a business-model, profit-making endeavor masquerading as education reform with business, factory-style measures. [...]

I was hopeful when Governor Deval Patrick of Massachusetts announced his Readiness Project, seeking advice on his education policies. I was honored to serve on his Massachusetts Comprehensive and Assessment System (MCAS) and Assessment initiative, hoping to have the opportunity to present an alternative to the damaging high-stake test forced upon all the children, one that had killed the dreams of so many children who were denied a high school diploma based on this single test.

Learning that our alternative recommendations were denied, and the state would continue with the MCAS, I confronted the Governor at his event at Framingham State

University, in an audience of over 300 people. I said face to face, "Governor, I thank you for giving the opportunity to serve in your Readiness Project on MCAS and Assessment. I am saddened that you did not accept our recommendation for alternative forms of assessment, and have made the decision to continue the harmful test. But, I challenge anyone in this room, including you Governor, to immerse yourself in Spanish for one year, then take the test in Spanish — for that Governor, is what you are asking English Language Learners (ELL) to do." One year of English immersion was all that former Governor Mitt Romney believed ELL students needed to compete with their English speaking counterparts. As a result, Massachusetts has continued to demand that all students must take the test, and if they fail, they do not receive a diploma. ELL students are still are subjected to the test!

Let us look at how one goes about privatizing public education. First, you manufacture a crisis and instill public fear. We saw this in the Hollywood propaganda, Guggenheim's *Waiting for Superman*, where teachers were blamed for everything that is wrong in the country. Schools and

Profiteers Create Conditions for Failure • 11

3 • SAY NO TO RECEIVERSHIP



and directly against public control of our public schools.

Given the test scores are the main means for imposing receivership, refusing the tests is a main means to refuse receivership. Now is the time to step up refusal. Get informed, discuss and take a stand for the right of parents, teachers and students to decide! These are our schools, not Elia's!

Given that the state itself found the tests to be invalid in various ways, a moratorium on using test scores to evaluate teachers and principals. However, there is no moratorium on the testing itself or on receivership, based on these same invalid tests. So when the state and superintendent claim that "Student performance on the

2017 Grades 3-8 ELA and Mathematics tests will have no employment-related consequences for teacher and principal evaluations," it is inaccurate and misleading. The testing is still being used to put and keep schools in receivership. For these schools, the receiver has the power to fire teachers and principals, to involuntarily transfer them, and more. These are significant "employment-related consequences," based on the test scores. There needs to be a moratorium on testing and receivership. And since the state will not do so, refusing the tests is a means for parents and students to do so.

*Refuse Receivership by
Refusing the Tests!*

10 • PROFITEERS CREATE CONDITIONS FOR FAILURE

the students were presented as “failures,” who needed to be rescued — this time by a business-style intervention.

Since teachers are presented as the problem, one immediate relief is through their profit-making endeavor, known as Teach for America. These are recent young college graduates, (no need to have an education degree, only agree not to join the teacher’s union), who will receive 5 weeks of training where they are advised never to associate with union, certified teachers. These teaching interns are replacing certified, union teachers with years of experience. They are placed in the school districts with majority Black and Latino student populations. They fit right in with the Charter Schools Enterprise, who hire non-union, and many non-certified teachers. You then create a system that becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, through the enforcement of high stake testing. The testing is used to deny student’s promotion and graduation, evaluate teachers based on student’s test scores, then when a school reaches the level of failing based on the test, then they come in with the claim that since schools are failing the billionaires are the only ones that can save them.

I have a challenge understanding how these profiteers positioned themselves as the savior of a system that they created. Remember when the Bush administration went to bomb Iraq? The campaign prior to the bombing was filled with lies about weapons of mass destruction, how we were going to save the people of Iraq from their evil leaders. Then, after destroying the country, our government came back to the people saying that our tax dollars will be used to give Chaney’s Halliburton a no-bid contract to repair what they broke.

It is the same playbook the profiteers are using in education — create the conditions for failure until the system is broken, then claim that they alone can fix it. In order to fix what they broke, they use an appealing



language, like “innovation,” “reform,” and their favorite, “choice.” What we have come to understand about “choice,” is that the choice is only for the profiteers not the families of children with special needs nor English Language Learners.

Another form used is to deflect the truths with dog-whistle propaganda, glossy presentations that disguise the real ideology of greed under the umbrella of “freedom” and “saving children.” Once the propaganda is solidified, that is when ALEC comes in. ALEC, with funding from Bill Gates, the mastermind behind the Common Core, was able to forge alliances with big business and state legislators. Another brilliance of the profiteers was to buy off both major political parties, as we now know that both Republicans and Democrats have drunk the Corporate education reform kool-aid. This was done through the creation of legislation that politically and financially benefited the Billionaires and Wall Street investors and their politicians. They also use the tactic of laundering the policies through a number of non-profit agencies and corporate

philanthropy, where the origins are not easily traced. [...]

The Common Core was designed with little to none expert educator or child development advice. When President Obama announced his early education initiative, many of us were hopeful that our Black and Latino young children would benefit from early intervention. But, as we read the wording and began to understand what was involved, it became clear that “test and punish” was now being imposed on children who were 4 and 5 years old. To her dismay, my friend Nancy Carlsson Page, Professor of early education at Lesley University expressed her disdain, as she told me, “for now we have 4 and 5-year-olds, who should be spending their time in play activities, learning about their environment and socializing as well as developing a love for learning, forced to spend the better time of the school year prepping for a single test, a test that has been shown to be harmful and abusive to children.”

(From a speech at the First Focus Summit that was held at the National Press Club in Washington, DC, July 7, 2016)

Visit our website: usmlo.org

Connect the Movements Around the Women's March, the Day Without Immigrants to Anti-imperialist/Anti-militarist Actions

Sarah Jaffe, Interview with Anti-War Veteran Rory Fanning, March 24, 2017

(Below is an interview with Rory Fanning, an anti-war veteran and conscientious objector, and author of the book *Worth Fighting For: An Army Ranger's Journey Out of the Military and Across America*. His work centers on opposing U.S. militarism at home. He is also the coauthor, with Craig Hodges, of the new book *Long Shot: The Triumphs and Struggles of an NBA Freedom Fighter*. He lives in Chicago, and often speaks at high schools there. He said, "There are more kids signed up in Chicago's JROTC (Army) and NJROTC (Navy) than any other school district in the country; ten thousand kids: 50 percent Latino and 45 percent Black." Speaking about Trump's proposed budget he said:

Rory Fanning: I think it is important first to note that this budget request, particularly through defense, is not unprecedented. It really only takes us back to 2011 numbers when they kind of set a cap on military spending. But Obama asked for \$700 billion for defense in 2012. I think Trump is asking for \$600 billion, which is an increase of \$56 billion over the previous year. It is

still more military spending than the next thirteen countries combined. One of the most alarming things about this budget is the number of active-duty Army troops that are going to be increased. It is going to go from 475,000 to about 540,000 at a time when there is really no existential threat to the United States. That is just going to mean more intense recruiting in the most vulnerable communities in the U.S.

Recruiters know kids in poverty-stricken areas have fewer options after graduation. They know that paying for college is more difficult. So, they go there and promise kids education. They promise them leadership skills. They promise discipline and structure. There are ten thousand recruiters stalking the hallways, working with a \$700 million advertising budget each year, to say nothing of the movies and video games.

In terms of talking to high school students, what are some of the arguments you make?

Rory Fanning: I just try to plant a few seeds. I do not go in there and finger wag and say, "Don't join the military." I emphasize the importance of critical thinking — right

now, in the present, in high school and also if they do decide to join the military.

Their experience with the military [often] does not go further than movies and video games. [Many] say, "How much is the military like 'Call of Duty,'" (a popular first-person shooter game). I'll say, "Do you hear babies and moms crying when they watch people die in front of them, innocent people die in front of them?" "No, not really" is their answer. "Are the majority of the people you kill in 'Call of Duty' innocent?" "No, not really." "Is there torture in 'Call of Duty'?" "No, not really." "Can you turn off 'Call of Duty'?" "Yes." "Well, you can't really turn off war after you have been there."

In the military, by design, the politics are completely detached from the mission. It is about the person to your right and left. It is not about unending trillion-dollar wars. I communicate the fact that there is nothing worse than killing somebody for a cause that you do not understand....

I cite some statistics. There are 40,000 homeless veterans, people who just cannot

Anti-Imperialist Actions • 13

I • OPPOSE U.S. WAR CRIMES

constitutional means to hold the government war criminals to account. There is no means to charge or even sue the criminals. This is a serious problem that requires serious deliberation. How is it that such a serious matter as war crimes and punishment for them is not part of the constitution? What content is required in a new constitution so as to ensure the crimes and criminals can be identified and punishment rendered and the demand of the people for peace ensured? Addressing such matters is an important part of the work today for an anti-war government.

The U.S. has also stepped up its attacks in Yemen, a country that is no threat and whose people have long opposed U.S. intervention. U.S. forces carried out a barrage of 30 airstrikes in 36 hours, exceeding the 32 confirmed U.S. drone strikes in Yemen

in all of 2016. Over the past two years the U.S.-backed Saudi Arabian airstrikes have killed thousands of civilians, with more than 1/3 of the strikes hitting civilians. As well, conditions imposed by the U.S. sponsored war against Yemen have imposed starvation for many across the country. Again, no problem has been solved, conditions for the peoples have worsened, and death, destruction and chaos are widespread. Putting a stop to U.S. terrorism against the peoples is required, first and foremost by bringing *All U.S. Troops Home Now!*

Despite the reality that more troops and more bombings have not won any U.S. wars, whether against Korea, or Vietnam, or now Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen, this is the only answer the U.S. provides. It is desperate to hold onto and expand its world

empire and sees force and more force as the only response.

The increased aggression in Iraq and Yemen are indicators that the government is planning for yet broader war. Trump has called for increasing the number of Army troops from 475,000 to about 540,000. This means recruitment in the high schools and universities will be stepped up, with potential for a future draft. Organizing efforts to provide an anti-war alternative in the schools is needed. Youth are the ones forced to be soldiers in the U.S. imperialist army, with African Americans and Puerto Ricans a main target of recruiters. Now is the time to counter recruiters and organize anti-war youth committees, to defend our rights and our communities from war and repression.

12 • ANTI-IMPERIALIST ACTIONS

get their minds straight after seeing what they saw overseas, cannot get reintegrated into society because they have lost parts of themselves that can never be recovered. I think a lot of people are disillusioned by what they actually see when they are overseas.... There is very little space for veterans to come back and tell their stories. There is a lot of patting on the back at sporting events and concerts and whatnot, but as far as actual space to hear the realities of war, there are next to none.

I think [there are] upwards of 50,000 war resisters who signed up for the military since 2001... I think the potential for veterans who come back to become positive influences in the fight against exploitation and oppression is really high. Reaching out to veterans to organize and to call out injustices that they see is high.

Yes, we have seen that several times in the last year. In particular the veterans going to Standing Rock to support the struggle of native peoples

Rory Fanning: There is a lot of leverage in conversations when you are a veteran as to what is and is not necessarily good for society. I think the whole response, Veterans for Kaepernick (the African American football quarterback who refused to stand for the national anthem at a time police were killing unarmed black youth) you saw that trending on Twitter. I think veterans are very sensitive to the fact that this largely is not a free country. There are more people in prison than any other country in the world per capita. The majority are Black and Latino.

When you sign up, allegedly, to fight for freedom and democracy and you see nothing of that kind being practiced here in the U.S., with the mass surveillance and the reach of agencies like the National Security Agency, etc., this is not what you put your life on the line for. When I see someone like Colin Kaepernick refusing to stand for the national anthem, I think people who have actually sacrificed for freedom and democracy really respond well to that.

One of the reasons I was sensitive to what was happening to Colin Kaepernick, because people were saying that Colin

Kaepernick was spoiled and he did not appreciate what he was given and he was a coward for not respecting the flag. I found his case to be the complete opposite of that, which I realized by working with Craig Hodges, who was blackballed by the NBA for demanding the league do more to fight racism, economic inequality. Not just the NBA, but also the president of the United States when he visited George Bush, Sr., after his second championship. He called on power, essentially, to do more to fight these problems in our society and he lost everything as a result.

I saw Colin Kaepernick subject himself to the same fate, potentially. We are seeing NFL owners turn their back on Kaepernick now as he is out in the market trying to get acquired by a team. A lot of what is happening to Kaepernick happened to Craig Hodges. He lost, potentially, millions of dollars standing up for justice. But, he also recognized that he had a platform that could be heard. He realized that the people in his community were not going to have the opportunity to have a microphone, or the *New York Times* interview you, or visit the White House, so he wanted to make the most out of it because he felt like he owed, not just his community, but also his ancestors who came to this country as slaves and were subject to exploitation and oppression for the last couple hundred years.

You were one of the people, the veterans sitting with Kaepernick at the Cubs game, right? For people who are reading this who are veterans, do you have advice for them on how to use that moral authority?

Yes, I think the best advice is to find a group or an organization. Even if you are a veteran, it is way easier to stand up against something if you have a lot of people with you. I am a member of Veterans for Peace. Iraq Veterans Against the War exists. But, all of these groups need to be strengthened. We are at a lull in the anti-war movement, despite the fact that we are engaged in wars in seven countries right now.

I am constantly looking to talk to more high schools and colleges, wanting to give these kids the full story, because if [military



recruiting] is already predatory, it is just going to be on steroids with this administration, the pressures of sending kids overseas to fight wars for billionaires.

We spend about \$1 trillion a year on our military; if we took just a percentage of that, we would have completely new infrastructure in this country. This failing infrastructure is a far greater threat than any terrorism here in the US. I think the odds of dying in a terrorist attack are one in twenty-five million, but the odds of dying in a car crash in Mississippi are one in two thousand.

If a terrorist attack happened in this country or if we provoked Iran into some kind of war, I think the justification for further crackdowns on minorities in this country would be absolutely suffocating. I think it is important that people stay vigilant, pushing back against militarism as much as they can. We do not want to just respond to this administration. It is important to be as vigilant as possible right now against how this administration would respond to a terrorist attack or they could lead us into another war. If we were to go to war against Iran, I think there would be devastating consequences.

I know the anti-war movement is kind of at a lull, but if we can connect the huge movements around the Women's March, the Day Without Immigrants, and all of that to anti-imperialist/antimilitarist actions, I think we would be better for it.

EXPANSION OF U.S. IMPERIALIST AGGRESSION

U.S. Begins Ground Invasion of Syria

Approximately 300 U.S. marines and 100 Army Rangers entered Syria in early March, according to media reports. They add to the approximately 500 U.S. Special Forces in Syria “training, advising and assisting local forces” and an unknown number of intelligence operatives and mercenaries. The entrance of U.S. ground troops and promise of more is connected to the victories of the Syrian Army in liberating Aleppo and other cities since December and U.S. and Turkish efforts to prevent parts of the north of the country from returning to Syrian control.

Marines from the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit, the Battalion Landing Team 1st Battalion, 4th Marines were located in Navy ships off the coast of Djibouti, then flown to Kuwait and from there to Syria. They brought part of an artillery battery of M777 howitzers. The Army Rangers entered northern Syria from a base used by the U.S. in Erbil, Iraq. Another 1,000 troops could be deployed in northern Syria in the coming weeks according to news reports, bringing the total number to at least 2,000.

The immediate aim of the U.S. is to prevent the liberation of Raqqa by the Syrian Army. Raqqa is the last major ISIS-held city in Syria. Its liberation by Syrian forces would otherwise take place in the coming months. Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad told SANA news on March 18, “We are very close to Raqqa now. Yesterday, our troops reached the Euphrates River, which is very close to Raqqa city, and Raqqa is the stronghold of ISIS today, so it’s going to be a priority for us, but that doesn’t mean the other cities are not priority.” Assad explained that unless there was stepped up foreign intervention, the war would be over in “a few months.”

Instead, the U.S. is deploying troops with an aim to bring Raqqa under siege in the coming weeks. It is joined in this aim by various contending forces, including Turkey, Turkish and U.S.-sponsored armed groups, and a new



U.S.-backed coalition called “Syrian Democratic Forces” which is opposed by Turkey. The shifting alliances within the U.S.-backed forces are such that some media disinformation on the U.S. troop deployment states that it has been done to keep all of the warring groups separated and prevent them from turning on each other before Raqqa is taken.

U.S. President Donald Trump, at an event in Melbourne, Florida on February 18 declared his support for the longstanding proposal of Hillary Clinton and other warmongers to establish “safe zones” in northern Syria. “What I want to do is build safe zones in Syria and other places... we were left a mess like you wouldn’t believe, but we’re going to build safe zones. We’re going to have those safe zones. [...] We’re going to have the Gulf states pay for those safe zones. [...] We’re going to do it that way instead of taking massive numbers [of refugees].” The Trump plan for “safe zones” means U.S. occupation and annexation of sovereign Syrian territory in which U.S. sponsored armed groups are given political power.

This U.S. attempt to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat is desperate. The disputes within the U.S. coalition over who will control what, whether it be proxies of Turkey, groups hoping that, as

in the case of Iraq in 2003, U.S. intervention will facilitate their aspirations for independence, or other armed groups under U.S. sponsorship, are further indication that this aggression will not contribute to ending the conflict. It will not resolve any problem for the people of Syria and must be opposed.

Syrian Government Rejects Invasion

In an interview published on March 20, Syrian President Al-Assad responded to a question about the U.S. presence, saying, “Any military operation in Syria without the approval of the Syrian government is illegal, and I said if there are any troops on Syrian soil, this is an invasion, whether to liberate al-Raqqa or any other place. This is first. Second, we all know that the [U.S.] coalition has never been serious about fighting ISIS or the terrorists, so we have to think about the real intention of the whole plan, if there is a plan to liberate al-Raqqa. To liberate it from who? From ISIS? To give it to who? So, their plan is not to fight terrorists, not to help the Syrian government, it is not for the unity of Syria, it is not for the sovereignty of Syria, it must be something else, not any of these factors that I just mentioned.”

Asked about double standards of the U.S., which is facing increasing accusations of killing civilians in air strikes in Syria, President Al-Assad said, “The American policy is based on many standards, not double [standards]; they have maybe ten standards because they do not base their policy on values or on international law; they base it on their own vision, their own interests, sometimes on the balance of different lobbies and powers within the American institutions.”

Dispute Between U.S. Allies

Meanwhile, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, addressing what factions will control Raqqa and how, said on March 2 that the U.S. does not have

U.S. Ground Invasion of Syria • 15

14 • U.S. GROUND INVASION OF SYRIA

a “clear plan regarding Raqqa.” “During the visits to Turkey of the head of the US Joint Staff and the director of the CIA, steps, which we can call preliminary, have been taken in this process,” Erdogan said. It is “unacceptable” that the “Syrian Democratic Forces” should participate in the operation due to the predominance of Kurdish forces in that grouping, he said. In fact, Turkey is leading its own intervention in northern Syria, taking towns such as Jarablus and giving control to its proxy terrorist groups called the “Free Syrian Army.”

In response, the U.S. has said it is providing weapons only to “Arab groups” within the “Syrian Democratic Forces” and not the Kurdish YPG, and that more than half of the “Arab groups” have now been “vetted.” U.S. General Joseph Votel, head of U.S. Central Command, confirmed the new U.S. troop deployment on March 9 and stated, “Our intention here with this — and this fell within the authorities that are provided to me right now — was to ensure that we had redundant capable fighter support on the ground to support our partners and ensure that we could take advantage of opportunities and ensure the continuing progress that we’ve been seeing.”

Turkey is also concerned about control over a northern Syrian town, Manbij which was taken from ISIS by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in August 2016. As a result, Turkey’s stated plan to create a “safe zone” under its control from its border with Syria to Raqqa is therefore in conflict with the U.S.-backed SDF controlling Manbij. Turkish commentators blamed the situation on “U.S. ambiguity and Russian aggression.” On March 16, Turkish Defense Minister Fikri Isik said that a diplomatic settlement of the Manbij issue between Turkey, Russia and the United States is central for the Syria peace process, but that Turkey will resort to other means if this fails.

**Bring All U.S. Troops Home Now**

The U.S. has no place in Syria and its newest attempts to derail a peace process and achieve regime change in its favor by continuing to prop up terrorist groups are bound to increase the suffering of the Syrian people and also bound to fail in the face of Syrian resistance. The U.S. has no right to decide over any matter facing the Syrian people, not least control over its territory or airspace.

The people of the U.S. and the world have been told time and time again that U.S. imperialist military intervention is a solution to crises real or imaginary. This is the case now as the people are told that “finally” the U.S. will eliminate its bastard child ISIS. Far from resolving problems, U.S. intervention in Syria since 2011 has brought and will continue to bring untold misery to the people.

This is because the U.S. aim is first and foremost self-serving, to defend and expand its domination based on geopolitical calculations and to defend the place of U.S. oligopolies and financial

oligarchy. This was the U.S. aim in 2011 when it began funding and providing weapons for revolt against the Syrian government that turned into a full-scale war and parts of the country being occupied by terrorist groups. It is the case now with a stepped up U.S. military intervention based on undermining and obstructing the Syrian-led liberation of Syria.

Syria is a sovereign country whose people are now beginning the difficult work of reconstruction and reconciliation, having overcome challenges that looked insurmountable. Among the biggest challenges was and still is the flow of money, arms and fighters from the imperialists into Syria. The fact that the battle is not over was cruelly reiterated to Syrians on March 15 when a suicide bomb attack took the lives of 32 people in the capital, Damascus. There is an urgent need for all people of conscience to join with the Syrian people in denouncing this U.S. invasion and demanding All U.S. troops OUT!

Visit our website: usmlo.org

New York State Grades 3-8 Testing and Receivership

HOW YOU CAN CHOOSE TO REFUSE

- **Common Core is Harmful to All**
- **Receivership is Racist and Creates More Inequality**
- **Refuse to Be a Number**



**ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!
OUR SCHOOLS, WE DECIDE!**

COMMUNITY FORUM

Tuesday, April 18, 6pm

Buffalo State College, Classroom Building C-122

free parking, from Grant or Elmwood turn on Rockwell, then Academy Drive, lot R-6



JOIN US! INFORMATION, DISCUSSION AND CALL TO ACTION

Speakers Include:

- **Dr. Mark Garrison**, Education researcher and analyst, D'Youville College, speaking on *Testing as a Tool of Control and Refusal as a Means to Say, We Decide!*
- **Molly Dana**, WNY parent organizer on state testing addressing *How to Opt Out of Testing and Examples from Struggles in WNY*
- **Ruth Rodriguez Fay**, United Opt Out National Administrator, Board Member of Defending the Early Years, addressing the *Impact of Testing on Minority Children and Nationwide Examples of Resistance*

ORGANIZED BY: BUFFALO WE DECIDE • BuffaloWeDecide@gmail.com