

The General Assembly **Education Workers Newsletter** March 1992 Issue Number 1

Yale Staff Workers and Graduate Employees Unite in Solidarity

Clerical and technical workers at Yale are firmly placed in history as the first such workers to successfully form a union at an Ivy League school. They did so with the inspiring solidarity and support of maintenance and service workers already organized at Yale. It now seems that the CTs are passing that solidarity along to the next group of workers who are attempting to organize. Graduate students (teaching and research assistants) have formed the Graduate Employees and Student Organization (GESO), which includes over 50% of the graduate workers at Yale.

On December 4th, GESO picket lines went up in the early morning hours at major university centers throughout New Haven. CTs and other staff workers refused to cross their picket lines. In retaliation, the administration suspended 100 workers for two weeks each. These suspensions are being challenged through the grievance process.

On January 24th, 300 GESO members occupied the Yale library for 24hrs. Many were threatened with expulsion for refusing to give their names to campus security. A rally outside the library was joined by many staff workers in support of the graduate students.

The contract for locals 34 and 35 (Hospital Employees and Restaurant Employees Union which represents Yale CTs and maintenance workers) expired on January 17th. Members have voted to strike if no agreement is reached. GESO representatives have been included in all contract negotiations at the insistence of Locals 34 and 35. Support for GESO recognition has been strongly voiced by staff representatives.

A general agreement is in place between staff organizations and GESO to support each other in strike activity, should it come to a strike. "Three unions, three contracts" is the battle cry (referring to locals 34, 35 and GESO). Since graduate employees teach a large number of the undergraduate classes, such a unified action would be strongly felt. A GESO activist said it would result in: "a complete shutdown, there would be no teaching, not even off-campus. That can force the University to a quick settlement."

By forging strong ties between staff workers and graduate employees, education workers at Yale have placed themselves at the forefront of the current struggles within the U.S. education system.

Militant Tactics Stop Maryland Teacher Lay-offs

A "work-to-rule" campaign, a "work-in", a takeover of a county government building, and other militant tactics have helped teachers in Montgomery County, Maryland block layoffs planned to ease the county's budget crisis.

Like public employees throughout the country, Montgomery County workers have been facing cutbacks as revenues drop due to the recession, reduced federal and state support, and the failure to make corporations and the rich pay adequate taxes.

Twice in the past two years, under-funding by the County Council led the board of Education to break its contract with the Montgomery County Education Association.

When the Council appeared ready to adopt further cuts, including unpaid seven-day furloughs of all county employees, county workers surprised local politicians with a series of militant actions:

●MCEA led a six-union coalition which organized a massive turnout at County Council hearings. Teachers, police, firefighters, and other county workers in the packed hearing room were loud, blunt, and angry. County Council members who expected polite testimony from self-sacrificing public servants were taken aback.

Takeover -

●The coalition then took over the hearing room for the night. The action drew intensive media coverage.

●For a month, thousands of MCEA members worked-to-rule, meaning that they worked only during their paid duty hours, performed only their official tasks, and no longer spent their own funds on supplies.

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The Attack on Multiculturalism

Joining affirmative action as a recent target of conservative ire is multicultural education. Multiculturalism, essentially an attempt to augment the traditional western canon with studies reflecting the historical experiences of women and minorities, has been subjected to incessant media scrutiny, but few have illuminated the issues as clearly as Nancy Romer and Ellen Schrecker in the November/December Against the Current and Manning Marable in the November issue of Z magazine.

Romer's article, "Multiculturalism in Brooklyn College," gives an activist account of how racism and sexism were challenged at an urban, working-class college. "What

started out as a politically broad, faculty-dominated movement against bigotry," she explains, "evolved into a more politically progressive and multiracial group." Her analysis of this particular movement provides universal lessons to all concerned with educational reform.

Schrecker's piece, "PC: A New McCarthyism?" cuts to the heart of the debate by rightly insisting that "the movement to enhance cultural diversity on the nation's campuses is an attempt to make those institutions, and the economic opportunities they present, more accessible to all students, including those who for reasons of race and gender...had been previously excluded."

Maryland Teachers Continued-

They stopped grading papers or preparing lessons at home in the evenings. They told parents that conferences or phone consultations could no longer take place after school hours. Field trips which would have extended beyond the duty day were cancelled.

Perhaps the greatest uproar was caused by teachers' refusal to write college recommendations for students—a task normally done during off-hours. While the tactic drew much criticism, teachers tried to direct students' anger against management. "If you're unhappy about this," they told students, "take responsibility and protest the budget cuts." Teachers' aggressive tactics also served the purpose of drawing public attention to their demands.

- Some teachers conducted a day long work-in, meaning that instead of presenting lessons, they graded papers or performed other duties they normally are expected to do during their free time.

- Students were encouraged to attend public hearings and to write letters to county officials, denouncing budget cuts that would affect their education. For many students, it was their first direct experience in a movement for social justice. Many said they saw their teachers in a new light—as working people fighting for their rights and for their students.

While the union has stopped the planned furloughs for now, MCEA leaders expect more budget cuts in the near future. Meetings are already underway with other unions to plan a broad local and state-wide campaign for tax reform to pay for education and other vital public services.

Taken from Labor Notes, January, 1992.

Welcome to the General Assembly!

The General Assembly is a newsletter produced for and by education workers. We would like to form a national network of people employed in the education system who are interested in workplace democracy, rank and file control of labor organizations, and opposing the deteriorating condition of education in the United States. People interested in helping to form such a network should write:

The General Assembly
c/o Workers Solidarity Alliance
P.O. Box 40400
San Francisco, CA 94140

The General Assembly is available for postage costs (send a .29 cent stamp to the above address for each future issue you would like to receive). Bundle copies (10) are available for \$1.50. We encourage you to photocopy **GA** and distribute it to your co-workers. If you know of someone who would like to receive the next issue of **GA**, send us their name and address and we mail them a copy.

This issue of The General Assembly has been funded by donations from Workers Solidarity Alliance, U.S. Section of the International Workers Association, a world-wide association of syndicalist labor organizations.

Bush's Budget: The Financial Aid Scam

The education budget proposed by George Bush in January contains what appear to be major increases in funding levels for student financial aid. A closer look reveals this to be a smoke screen for a drastic cut in student eligibility for Pell Grants and funding for two other areas of direct student assistance: College Work Study and Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants. The major area of increase, the Guaranteed loan programs, will add to student debt upon graduation. Federal assistance programs for graduate students (4 out of 5) have been recommended for complete elimination, and support for libraries would also be eliminated.

Bush's election-year ploy to live up to his "education president" slogan will make 435,000 students ineligible for Pell Grants (1) by making it more difficult for students to qualify as "Independent". Students classified as dependent must include their parent's income in their applications, decreasing the amount of aid they are eligible to receive. Currently students born after January 1st, 1969 must demonstrate 2 years of financial self-sufficiency to qualify for independent status.

The Supplemental Grant program (SEOG) and College Work Study (CWSP) are programs designed to assist students whose financial need is higher than average (in the case of the SEOG) and to assist students in finding employment while attending school (CWSP). Cutting these programs, by 38% and 26% respectively, seems designed to reduce aid to students from low-income families and punish students who need to work to get through school.

The increase in the Guaranteed loan programs (the

Union Officials Suppress Dissent at San Francisco State

In a time of great stress, sometimes mistakes are made. But the mistake made by members of the Executive Committee of Chapter 305, California State Employees Association at SF State, is both inexcusable and damaging to the very idea of organized labor.

Chapter 305 officials had recently formed a "labor-management" committee to deal with impending budget shortfalls which the University management was trying to balance on the backs of the workers at SFSU. An atmosphere of cooperation between management and labor was sought, and for the union officials at SF State this meant that deals were cut one-on-one with management representatives, a dubious practice at best. The initial agreement reached via this process was promoted by CSEA Division Director Brian Young in an article which appeared in the Chapter 305 newsletter, **Rank & File**. The editor of the newsletter, Faith Rach, had the audacity to write a conflicting opinion to that of the division director and then print it. Little did she know what she would be subjected to as the result of expressing a dissenting opinion.

On February 19th, Faith went to an executive committee meeting scheduled for right after work in one of the school's meeting rooms. When she seated herself at the conference table she was almost immediately

Stafford and the Supplemental Loan) is extremely questionable. It comes at a time when congress, in their review of the Higher Education Act, is considering replacing the guaranteed loan program with a federal direct loan which would remove private lenders (banks, S&Ls and companies specializing in loan origination) from the financial aid system. Bush's proposed funding increase of 25% is an increase in the amount of student loans the feds will guarantee the states, who in turn guarantee the lenders who make the loans. The loan programs are profitable for the lenders (despite the protestations over default) because most people pay back their student loans and the loans that default are paid by the state, who is then paid by the feds. Bush's increase in funding for this program, at the same time as he proposes to decrease eligibility and funding for grant programs, seems designed to bolster the lenders (and perhaps encourage their lobbying efforts) at the expense of the students. Students unable to obtain grant assistance will have no choice but to apply for loans. Since January 1st, 1991, changes in federal regulations allow lenders to examine credit worthiness when considering making student loans. Can this be viewed as anything less than an open attempt to keep poor and working people from obtaining an education?

Bush's education budget is a sham and a scam. It is very thinly disguised to further limit access to education to those who, because of their social position and class, don't need financial aid.

Mike Kolhoff
Financial Aid worker

attacked by the division director, chapter president, vice president, treasurer and the chief steward. The picture of this gang shouting simultaneously, cursing and berating in unison, is apparently their idea of what "union" means. Solidarity to them must mean obediently following orders. In any case, the newsletter editor was reduced to tears but continued to hold her ground. The question, in the mind of the executive committee, was one of presenting a unified front. But that is a non-issue. The way they handled their disagreement brings into question how these people believe labor organizations should function. Their model union is apparently a lock-step, authoritarian club, where a privileged few direct the poor "unsophisticated rank and file". These people are union bosses of the vilest sort, people willing to gang up on lone victims in their cowardice. CSEA (an affiliate of SEIU) has only 25% membership at SF State. It's not hard to see why.

And what about the **Rank & File** newsletter? Faith has committed to continuing the newsletter, which had been funded by CSEA, on her own with the aid of other rank and file CSEA members and any of the 75% of non-members interested in helping. The **Rank & File** is alive and well, and outside the control of the union bureaucrats.

Long live direct democracy! Long live the **Rank & File**!

FIGHT THE CUTBACKS

**IN AFDC, EDUCATION, HEALTHCARE,
WELFARE, STATE WORKERS SALARIES**



**RALLY AT THE
STATE
BUILDING
APRIL 8
WEDNESDAY
4 TO 6 PM
VAN NESS &
McCALLISTER
SAN FRANCISCO**

INITIAL ENDORSERS:

**Associated Students at San Francisco State University
Direct Action for Education, SF State
Income Rights Project
San Francisco Coalition on Homelessness**

FIGHT THE CUTBACKS!

The current education system in the United States is already so substandard that Americans are the most ill-read, uninformed and illiterate people in the Western World. Politicians like it that way. It makes us easier to manipulate. If the education system in this country is already down, the current cutbacks seem designed to put it out.

But the crisis that is upon us is not the product of unalterable evolutionary forces. It is a purposeful and premeditated attack on the idea of education as a universal right.

IT CAN BE OPPOSED. We don't have to give anything back. We don't have to stand by and watch them finish off education. We can make the bureaucrats find the money to finance education. They are required by their own laws to do so. If we don't cooperate in their scheme, they will have to come up with the money somewhere. United, we can even tell them where they will have to find the money! If we are to win, we must **GO ON THE OFFENSIVE.** We must go beyond pathetic demands for slightly less than the status quo. If the status quo is substandard, less than the status quo is unacceptable. We must go on the offensive. We must **demand more than what we have now.** We must demand a new education system, a system run by the community and the people who work in it.



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