

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

**Education Workers
Newsletter**

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The Privatization of Public Education

For the pharaohs of the New Right, "privatization" has roughly the same conceptual standing as "traditional family values". It is seen as something which is intrinsically good, fundamentally American and unquestionably efficient. As they have pursued their policies of cutting taxes and generally gutting the entitlement programs, it has also been maneuvered into being the "last available option" (not counting revolution).

Of course corporate involvement in education is nothing new. Post secondary schools, both public and private, have always sought funding from major corporations and corporate foundations. Yet in the past this has usually involved a give-and-take process, with the school bureaucracies reluctant to surrender control over how the funds were to be spent. That these funds were often misspent is undeniable (and natural given the bureaucracy that controlled them), but occasionally they were also used to fund worthwhile projects and bolster valuable programs. In the current crisis, with the school bureaucracies desperately trying to preserve at least a bureaucratic skeleton, the entry of the corporations into this situation takes on an entirely different character. If we let our imaginations free reign, and assuming that corporate funding of political figures gives them some influence in how those figures behave, the gutting of education funding can be seen as the culmination of a complex business strategy, a "hostile takeover" of basic social service concessions by major corporations. In an economy which is becoming increasingly dependent on "making money" rather

than "making things", an economy where service and maintenance are replacing manufacturing as principle activity, the vast services supplied by state bureaucracies become potentially high-profit business ventures (as is already happening around the country in areas ranging from prisons to public schools).

The shaping of public education policy has long been recognized as a major factor in the arrangement of social relations. We need look no further than the example of education in Spain in the 1930s. Public, state-

funded education did not exist. What passed as education was under the strict control of the Catholic Church and was operated on a "cash and carry" basis: people who could afford to pay the school fees did so, those who could not sought alternatives or sent their children to the fields or factories.

Into this vacuum stepped the Anarcho-Syndicalists of the CNT (the National Confederation of Labor). Seeing the need for free education they established schools, funded by local unions, to educate the children of workers and peasants. These

THIS MODERN WORLD

SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT OUR NATION'S SCHOOLS SHOULD BE **PRIVATIZED** AND RUN WITH THE **FREE-MARKET EFFICIENCY OF OUR MAJOR CORPORATIONS...** WHICH LEADS US TO WONDER: WOULD THIS MEAN THAT SCHOOL PRINCIPALS COULD REWARD THEMSELVES WITH MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR **BONUSES** REGARDLESS OF PERFORMANCE?

—AND SO, I'M PROUD TO PRESENT THE **TWO GRADUATING MEMBERS** OF THE CLASS OF '93...



WOULD CORPORATE RAIDERS TAKE OVER ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN **LEVERAGED BUYOUTS**—AND THEN SELL OFF THE SCHOOLS' **ASSETS** TO PAY OFF THE DEBTS INCURRED?

GOOD NEWS—WE JUST SOLD THE FIFTH GRADE CLASS TO **BECHTEL!**



By TOM TOMORROW

IN ORDER TO MAXIMIZE PROFITS, WOULD THE WASTEFUL EXTRAVAGANCE OF **LIVE TEACHERS** BE ELIMINATED—IN FAVOR OF A MORE COST-EFFICIENT **AUTOMATED INSTRUCTIONAL METHOD?**



AND...WOULD THESE PRIVATIZED FREE-MARKET SCHOOLS RESPOND TO INEVITABLE FOREIGN COMPETITION IN THE TRADITIONAL MANNER OF AMERICAN BUSINESS...BY **WHINING AND BEGGING FOR GOVERNMENT HANDOUTS?**



schools were influenced by the ideas of Francisco Ferrer (founder of the Modern School movement) and stressed freedom and creativity over rote learning and indoctrination. Ideology was not part of the curriculum (unlike American schools where the inevitability and desirability of free market capitalism is stressed to religious proportions), but the emphasis on freedom of thought and intellectual curiosity naturally brought many students to Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism. The face of Spanish society was so effected that by the time of Franco's attempted coup the CNT was the largest existing union organization and Anarchism was the ideology embraced by the majority of those who opposed capitalism.

This lesson was not lost on the capitalists of the west or the authoritarian communists of the east. In America, pro-capitalist indoctrination has become the major focus at all levels of the education system, to the point now where consumer society is considered the highest point of social evolution by many. With companies such as Wittie Communications piping consumerism into primary school classrooms via television monitors, this is not only inevitable, it is the idea.

Whenever corporations insert themselves in post-secondary education, non-business programs (the arts, literature, history, etc.) suffer accordingly. The corporations want training centers for technicians and researchers, partly funded by public taxes (a great deal for them) and partly funded by corporate largesse. This a much more cost effective approach than operating their own private training centers.

Their desire is obvious: they wish to turn the public school system into a vocational training assembly line, for their own use, which will provide them with a surplus of trained personnel. The result will be continued reduction in wages and ever-increasing unemployment. Welcome to the New World Order.

University of Minnesota Clerical Workers Win Contract

Fifteen months after deciding to seek union recognition, 3100 clerical workers at the University of Minnesota ratified their first contract on May 6th.

The main sticking point in negotiations at Minnesota concerned layoffs and seniority. This was due to the University's attempt to keep in place a confusing and unfair compensation system that left most decisions in the hands of managers and administrators. "The University would pay people anything it wanted within the very wide guidelines allowed by each classification," according to Gladys McKenzie, one of the union organizers.

The new contract provides for wage increases of 5.2 to 7.9% and establishes a committee to re-examine classifications.

Other important gains include:

1. Flexible scheduling. To meet the childcare needs of its members--most of whom are women and many of whom are single mothers--the union won some flexibility in scheduling. Now workers can make choices when their eight hour day will begin and end.
2. Temporary workers. As at many other colleges and universities, workers at Minnesota were often categorized as temporary even after they had been employed for up to 20 years! They have few benefits, no seniority rights and can be laid off at whim. The new contract automatically gives permanent status to any worker after 3 years.

How They Won: Internal Communication

"We won because we are well organized," said McKenzie. "And everyone is involved." A 56-member workers council functions as an executive committee. And with nine internal organizing committees, workers can always find a union rep to talk with. The committees also provide noon-time trainings and educationals for members on particular subjects.

McKenzie sees the contract as just the beginning of the union's work.

"Negotiations are just a period in the life of a union. Not the end. We won't wait until the contract expires in July 1993 to create the kind of climate we need to win."



Music to Strike By

We Just Come to Work Here, We Don't Come to Die-(Cassette)- 17 songs about getting hurt at work. Songs cover carpal tunnel syndrome (a real toe-tapper), VDT dangers (this one gave me a headache) and just plain old accidents. Artists include: Sweet Honey in the Rock, Joe Glazer and Anne Feeney. Send \$10 to: Labor Heritage Foundation, 815 16th St. NW #301, Washington, DC 20006. Or call: 202-842-7880.

The Pipets: Gonna Build a Union-(Cassette or CD)- This is the third cassette produced by the Pipets, members of the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers. Lots of old standards plus some written for the Harvard fight. Send \$8 to: HUCTW, 67 Winthrop St., Cambridge, MA 02138. Or call: 617-661-8289.

Not Bread Alone-(Cassette)- Produced by the Bread and Roses Cultural Project, features recorded highlights the Bread and Roses conference. Discussions of film, literature and art, readings by worker poets. Send \$9.95 to: Bread and Roses Cultural Project, 330 W. 42nd St., New York, NY 10036. or call 212-947-1944

Proposal to Form an Education Workers Network Part II

In the last issue of TGA we went through some ideas of how an education workers network might function and some goals were proposed. In this issue we'd like to take a look at some specific reasons groups and individuals would want to affiliate to such a network.

Solidarity and Support-

In a large country such as the United States individual workplace struggles often occur in virtual isolation. At best outreach might be attempted to the immediate local community, but no real vehicle exists for a nationwide mobilization of support for workers involved in local struggles in specific industries (such as the education system). Ad hoc committees occasionally spring up around a specific struggle, but for the most part when we confront our bosses in the workplace we do so with no expectations of help from

other workers around the country.

One potential benefit of an Education Workers Network would be in providing a vehicle for rallying support for local struggles on a national scale. Publicizing boycotts, letters of support and encouragement, fundraising, angry letters to bureaucrats, all of these are possible and positive results of the network we are proposing.

Planning for the Future, Laying Foundations-

The daily struggle for improved benefits and conditions is vital, but such struggle is ultimately pointless unless there is hope of one day moving beyond these limitations. The failure of business unionism has been its unwillingness and inability to envision a world where capitalism and wage slavery are not the norms. As we have said previously, the hope for the education system does not lay in

the maintenance of an unsatisfactory status quo. We must recognize the need for each of today's demands to lead to bigger and more significant demands tomorrow. Rest assured, the capitalists have a vision, although they are wisely unwilling to share it with the rest of us (since it seems to include our enduring ever increasing levels of exploitation and oppression). As education workers in the current situation we are in a unique position to develop and articulate an alternative vision, one which perhaps can serve as a rallying point for other workers in other sectors. But to do this we will have to communicate. We will have to coordinate our actions, building an organization capable of helping us in the "here and now" while also moving us assertively into the future.

Education Workers Vs. New College of California!

We first attempted to form a staff workers union at New College of California in the winter of 1991. Five of us (out of a defined bargaining unit of 22 workers) took out membership cards in the Industrial Workers of the World. Retaliation from management began quickly but with just enough subtlety that it would've been very hard to make an ULP charge stick. The other 7 people in the bargaining unit who were leaning toward unionization were scared into neutrality. Of the five of us who joined the union, 3 quit, one now works only 1/4 time and I stayed on. I was transferred from a job I liked to a job I hated. When I still didn't quit, they got sneaky. In mid-April we held the first meeting of the New College Workers Assembly organizing committee. This was a direct inspiration of the Education Workers Network and designed to be an affiliated body of our network. In the first week of May I was involved in a

disagreement with the management consultant hired by the college to re-organize the financial aid office where I work. One morning upon arriving at work I was told that I would not be needed that day, and that I should go home until further notice. I haven't been allowed to work since.

Steven Kushner has worked at New College for 14 years. Last winter he was told that he wouldn't be given any classes for that term. He was advised that he would probably be happier elsewhere. He was, as far as he knew, still in the "peer review" process, and his review was looking pretty good. He had a letter from a noted educator commending him on his teaching abilities. He had letters of support from other faculty and staff members. But in this case the process didn't matter. People wanted him out (specifically the academic vice president Millie Henry and the head of the humanities department Richard Shapiro). To get him out they

were willing to violate their own process, and abandon all ethical considerations as they did so.

There is no staff union at New College. Neither is there a faculty union. For this reason unfair treatment and rights violations are commonplace. Most people have simply packed up and moved on. But Kush and I have chosen to fight. We have documented evidence of management's theft of financial aid funds as well as employee retirement funds. We are ready and willing to fight. Your support in this struggle would be much appreciated. Letters of support should be sent to either Kush or I c/o this newsletter. Letters of protest should be sent to Anne Temple, CFO, and/or Martin Hamilton, Administrative Vice President, New College of California, 50 Fell Street, San Francisco, CA 94102.

Mike Kolhoff

CRISIS IN EDUCATION

Education Alliance and the Defense of Education

We are facing a future of testing all children at 7, 11, 14 and 16 with a view to setting school against school and child against child. Competition is the order of the day. Higher education is seen on factory lines with "increased output", perhaps doing a degree in less than 2 years! Lowering of standards will be necessary to accommodate increased numbers of students. The linking of education to the business world has already begun with funding available for projects that have commercial applications.

A significant conference of some 40 people took place in March under the auspices of the Leicester Education Alliance. Apart from Leicester parent speaking against the testing of 7 year olds, other speakers included a university lecturer suspended from University College Swansea for raising the question of falling standards, a

student from Middlesex Polytechnic who talked about recent demonstrations and occupations against massive attacks on student's conditions, and Mary Hufford, Deputy General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers who spoke about the hidden attack by the National Curriculum as well as what they must teach.

Further contributions from the floor showed just how wide-ranging and systematic these attacks are. Like those in the health service, education "reforms" are designed to fundamentally change the education system as we know it.

The message of the conference was clear: in this climate of stringent and repressive reforms, of lowering morale and overpowering frustration, those whistleblowers who come to the surface to speak out against what is

going on and in defence of our education must be supported.

The Trade Unions either cannot or will not support their members. Isolated individuals who do not like what they see going on have nowhere to turn. The threat of discipline hangs over all our heads.

(The above text is from a flyer received from the Leicester Education Alliance. Leicester Education Alliance is a sub-committee of the Leicester District Trade Union Council. It can be reached via Paul Henderson, Department of Sociology, Leicester University, LE17RH. Sounds like things are rough all over.)

Students Call for Statewide Shutdown/Teach-In

Student organizers in the California State University system have called for a two day shutdown/teach-in to protest cuts in education funding imposed by California governor Pete Wilson. To date, the California Faculty Association and elements of the California State Employees Association (representing clerical-techs and service workers) have pledged support and participation in the action. The shutdown is scheduled for September 23 & 24 1992. Statewide demands include:

- * Re-prioritization of spending and revenue generation to comply with

the Master Plan for Higher Education, which mandates free, quality, accessible education.

- * No faculty or staff layoffs, reduction in student services or increases in the faculty-to-student ratio.

- * Immediate recall of governor Wilson.

Additional demands at San Francisco State University include:

- * Opposition to increased faculty and staff workloads.

- * Proportional representation for students, faculty and staff in university

decision making.

- * Downsizing and wage reduction for University management positions.

- * Opposition to all privatization and school voucher programs.

- * Reinstatement of layed off staff and faculty.

Staff members at SF State are making plans which could include a noon time rally, informational tables concerning staff issues, and classroom presentations prior to the shutdown.

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