

Classroom Struggle NEWS LETTER

With this newsletter we confront the continuing destruction of quality public education for the working class and people of color in Oakland and across the United States and thus the elimination of our childrens' right to learn and grow. Our youth, full of creativity, passion, energy and wisdom, deserve better. We do not fully understand the changes our communities are going through and this ignorance holds us back from transformative change, but it is crucial that we face our ignorance straight on. The price of doing nothing is much greater. We know that Oakland has a powerful history of struggle and resistance against oppression. Most importantly we are certain that Oakland has the power to demand what our communities deserve and need, a system that serves and is accountable to its community rather than profits from it. This is our call to rise up! This is our call to knowledge! This is our call to you! Together lets fight for what we know and fight to find out what we do not! Read on with open minds. We promise you, this is only the beginning.

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Editors' Note: We strive to research our articles at the highest standards. Many of the above articles have citations but due to space restrictions we do not include these in the newsletter. To see the citations please visit the articles on our blog: classroomstruggle.org.

Issue # 4, January 2013

ClassRoom Struggle

To Defend and Transform Public Education

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Election 2012: The True Impact on Oakland Schools

By Margarita Monteverde and Felicia Vivanco

Over the weeks and months leading up to the November 6 elections, electoral politics dominated the conversation in the news, social media and discussion; a unique moment in a culture normally preoccupied with shopping and celebrity gossip. These conversations, focused mainly on the two party debate over the presidential race, have now all but ceased. With Obama's re-election victory and the passing of California's Prop 30 (which puts funds into public education through a sales tax increase and tax on the wealthy) many residents in Oakland and across California breathed a celebratory sigh of relief. However, the post-election rejoicing may be premature when we begin to take seriously the real implications that these policies and politicians have on our lives. While the Obama hype overshadowed local elections, a traditionally less popular topic during election times, the Oakland school board race drew more attention than usual this year. This was due to the unusually large number of contested seats across districts and the historic amount of money poured into these races which often go ignored by the public. If we believe in fighting for quality public education for all, then it is important that we take a deeper look at the landscape that has led to our current situation and what has now been laid down by the 2012 election results as it affects public education locally and nationally.

Part 1: The National Landscape of Education Reform

To understand the potential situation we face in Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) as a result of the elections we must investigate the place that the Bush and Obama Administration's education policies

have put us in and where they are leading public education nationwide. In his first term Obama upheld and promoted Bush's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy, which was a major catalyst in pushing the rampant education reform policies we see today. These reform policies, backed by corporate foundations, like the Broad, Gates and Walton foundations, claim to have children's best interests at heart. In reality, however, these reforms aim towards privatizing education by gaining corporate control over the education system. This is done through promoting the proliferation of charters rather than improving already existing public schools, limiting rights to collective bargaining for school workers, and using biased standardized testing to measure student, teacher and school success. Arne Duncan's, Obama's Secretary of Education, program to "improve" upon NCLB is his Race to the Top (RTTT) Initiative, implemented in 2009, which simply includes an additional competitive element to the already malicious policy. Obama plans to expand this policy in his next term.

Through Race to the Top, states must compete with each other for extra funding based on a certain criteria set by the Federal Government. States must plan and implement reforms that will supposedly increase standardized test scores and improve teacher evaluation systems. Due to RTTT many states like Georgia, Illinois, and Hawaii have fallen behind in this contest for funds, having not met the reform standards or facing political resistance from teacher's unions and some local politicians who see this policy as the federal government bullying local governments. Similarly to No Child Left Behind, local school boards are a step on the ladder to the implementation of these reforms. On

the district level, Oakland has joined the group of school districts missing out on RTTT funding. Just this October, \$15 million dollars for new math technologies in the classroom was lost due to the Oakland and San Francisco teacher's unions' refusal to adopt standardized test scores as a way to evaluate teachers. One might wonder: what do teacher evaluations have to do with money for new



computers in math classrooms? For many this underhanded attack on teachers alluded to a hidden agenda behind these policies that is tied to the effort to privatize and thus dismantle public education in the US. NCLB and RTTT are the foundational forces that propel the pro-charter, anti-union, and pro-standardized testing stance of the school board in Oakland and across the country. These days the energy of local school boards is put towards finding a way to apply these federal policies across districts and on individual school campuses. This fact, in a sense, explains the victory of Oakland school board candidates, backed by pro-charter and corporate money, and gives a glimpse of how RTTT and NCLB may be applied in Oakland in the next four years. Knowing this we must keep our eyes wide open to what our government is implementing and planning at all times, not only during election season.

Part 2: Prop 30 – What It Is, What It Isn't, And How It May Affect Oakland

After losing out on Race to the Top funding for the last three years and continuous cuts to public education, one way California attempted to deal with its \$15 billion dollar debt in part was through the passing of proposition 30. Many, including administrators, teachers and parents, were hugely relieved by the proposition's passing. Prop 30 prevents a \$6 billion cut from the California education budget (mainly K-12) that would have drastically affected schools throughout California. This money is paid for by a combination of a .25% sales tax increase and additional taxation to people who earn over \$250,000 for the next 7 years, starting retroactively from January 1st, 2012. It is estimated that these taxes will raise between \$6.8 and \$9 billion, of which 89% will go to K-12 and 11% to community colleges.

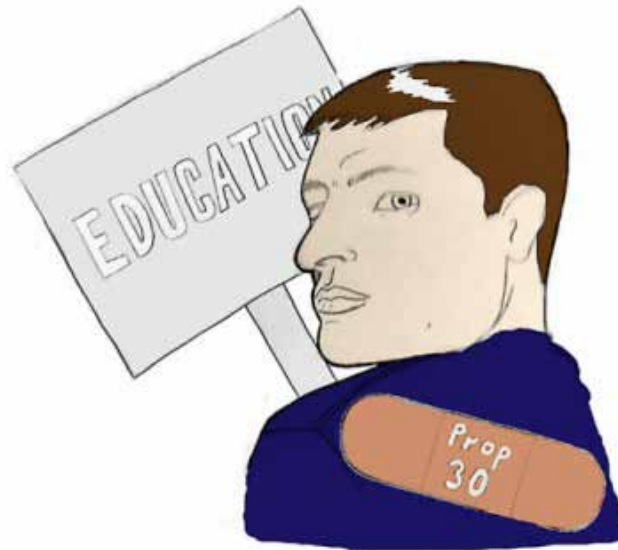
Beyond that breakdown, where will the money be going and how will it be used in schools? In searching article after article, this information is hard to find, mainly because the money is already spent. Proposi-

tion 30 prevented cuts but it does not pour new funding into schools. The language of the proposition states that school boards and community college boards must hold open meetings to determine the use of funds. This language is ambiguous about exactly how much public participation will be involved. It is important that students, parents and teachers have a significant voice at these meetings. Are the current and newly elected members of the Oakland School Board really planning to get community input? The school board's track record speaks poorly to the possibility of the school board seriously listening to the criticisms and suggestions of parents and teachers. We have seen their true disregard for community voices after a long year of marches, pickets, petitions and sit-ins against the school closures. We do know that K-12 schools are guaranteed \$200 per student and community colleges will be given \$100 and once

again the question is: how will this be spent and who decides?

One place that is clear this funding will go towards, although not explicitly stated, is charter schools. Proposition 30 funding is shared with charter schools as well as public schools. The newly elected school board will be a major decision maker in how

Prop 30 funds are distributed. This could be a possible explanation for why the California Charter Schools Association donated \$49,000 to pro-charter candidates in the Oakland School Board election. The candidates that are backed by the California Charter Schools Association are much more likely to distribute more funds to charters in Oakland. What does this mean for the next 4 years to have these candidates in office? School Boards do not govern or make decisions about the budget or daily operations of charter schools although they do make decisions about what new charter schools get approved. If charter schools already receive extra funding from sources outside of the district, should Prop 30 money go to them? Oakland already has 40 charters and 30% of all students attending them. When we look at the national trend towards charters in other cities like



New Orleans, where they have taken over almost the entire district, what can we infer about the direction of Oakland? What impact will this have on the remaining public schools of OUSD?

Part 3: Oakland School Board Elections: Candidates, Money, and GO Public Schools

The Oakland School Board election this year brought to light the contrasting interests of the major players within the district. The unusually massive amount of money funneled into the Oakland school board elections this year, in part by the CCSA, begs the question, what are the political intentions of these generous donors especially now that all of their candidates have won? Great Oakland Public Schools (GO), a non-profit community advocacy organization founded in part by the ex-CEO of Dreyer's Ice Cream, Gary Rogers, raised the largest amount of money, \$185,000 for a slate of three candidates- Jumoke Hodge, James Harris, and Rosie Torres. All three candidates are avid supporters of Superintendent Tony Smith and his pro-charter and school closure policies. Most of the GO Pac funding was donated by only three sources, each giving around \$50,000 – San Francisco venture capitalist Arthur Rock, founder and corporate entrepreneur Gary Rogers, and The California Charter School Association. The Managing Director of GO, Jessica Stewart, recently described the logic behind their pricey investment in the race: “The school board is really important in Oakland. They control a \$600 million budget. They choose the superintendent. They just make really important policy decisions for our kids.... We're just doing whatever it takes because this really matters. This is a one in four years opportunity to have four seats up on the school board. And we're in this to win it,” she states.

Now that they have succeeded, GO's influence, be it negative or positive, in Oakland schools is ensured. This uneven amount of large campaign donations also brings up the question of equity, reminiscent to the controversy over presidential campaign contributions from corporate

donors and super-pacs (public action committees where corporations can spend unlimited amounts of funds). OEA Vice President Steve Neat finds GO's victory troubling. “It's just not healthy for democracy when two people can come in and just flood an election with huge amounts of money. I'm sure they're expecting to get something for that kind of investment. Nobody puts \$50,000 into a campaign unless they expect something back in my opinion,” says Neat.

In comparison to GO, the Oakland Teacher's Association (OEA) raised around \$20,000 to run an opposing slate made up of candidates very ingrained in Oakland's working class communities of color and with real onsite experience in Oakland schools. The candidates were Thearse Pecot, a grandmother of students at the now closed Santa Fe Elementary, Mike Hutchinson an ex-after schoolteacher who taught at Santa Fe and other schools in the district, and Richard Fuentes the former president of the Hoover Elementary Site Council. Both Pecot and Hutchinson were active in last year's struggle to keep Santa Fe and four other elementary schools open last year. The school closure fight had intensified community anger and criticism of the school board and increased public attention of resistance to austerity measures, privatization, and attacks on teachers nationally and locally. The controversy over school closures has deeply influenced the school board race in a district where only 8 of the last 12 races were contested. This struggle put the district on the defensive, encouraged voters to pay attention to the race by illuminating the

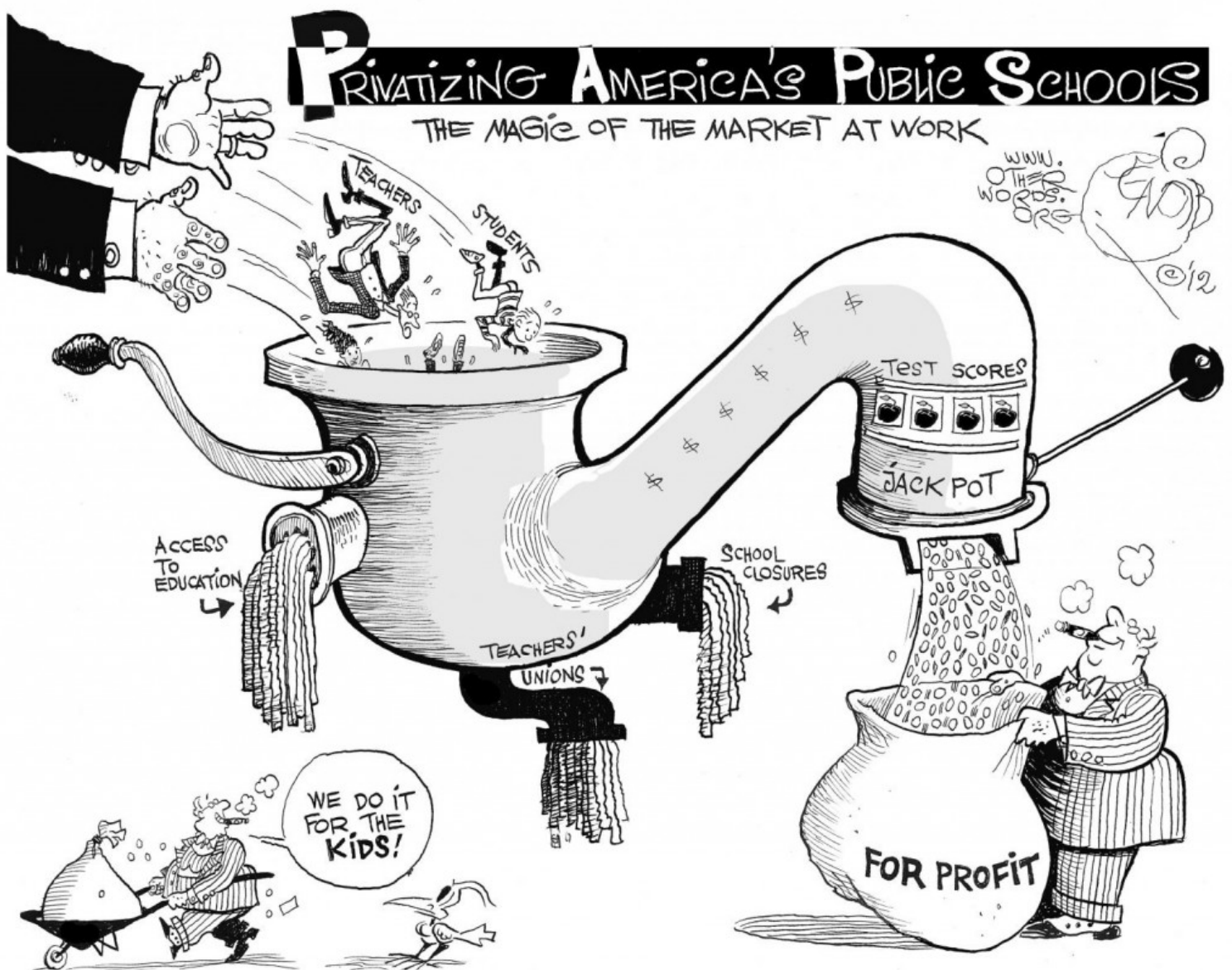
important role of school board members and the impacts of their decisions, and inspired more candidates like Pecot and Hutchinson to run. In the end OEA lost out. They were at a disadvantage not only monetarily but also because they have already been weakened (like so many unions over the last decade) by austerity measures and strategic attacks by those in power on public sector unions.

The fact that GO and OEA challenged each other in this election has further fueled the rhetoric that parents and teachers have conflicting

BOARD & TEACHER DISCUSSION FORUM



“Well, we seem to have found our perfect format.”



interests. Especially because GO has been somewhat successful in recruiting an economically diverse base of Oakland parents while OEA faces the same criticisms as other teachers unions nationally of putting teachers' self-interests above student's needs. This critique of OEA is rooted, however, in a false divide that mainly serves the interests of politicians and policy makers who would like to fracture any potential collective community power in order to push their education reform platform without opposition. Although they relate to children from different standpoints, both parents and teachers are deeply invested in the learning, development and lives of children. We have seen examples of parents and teachers effectively uniting to push back against school closures, standardized testing and the proliferation of charters like with the Chicago teachers' strike this summer.

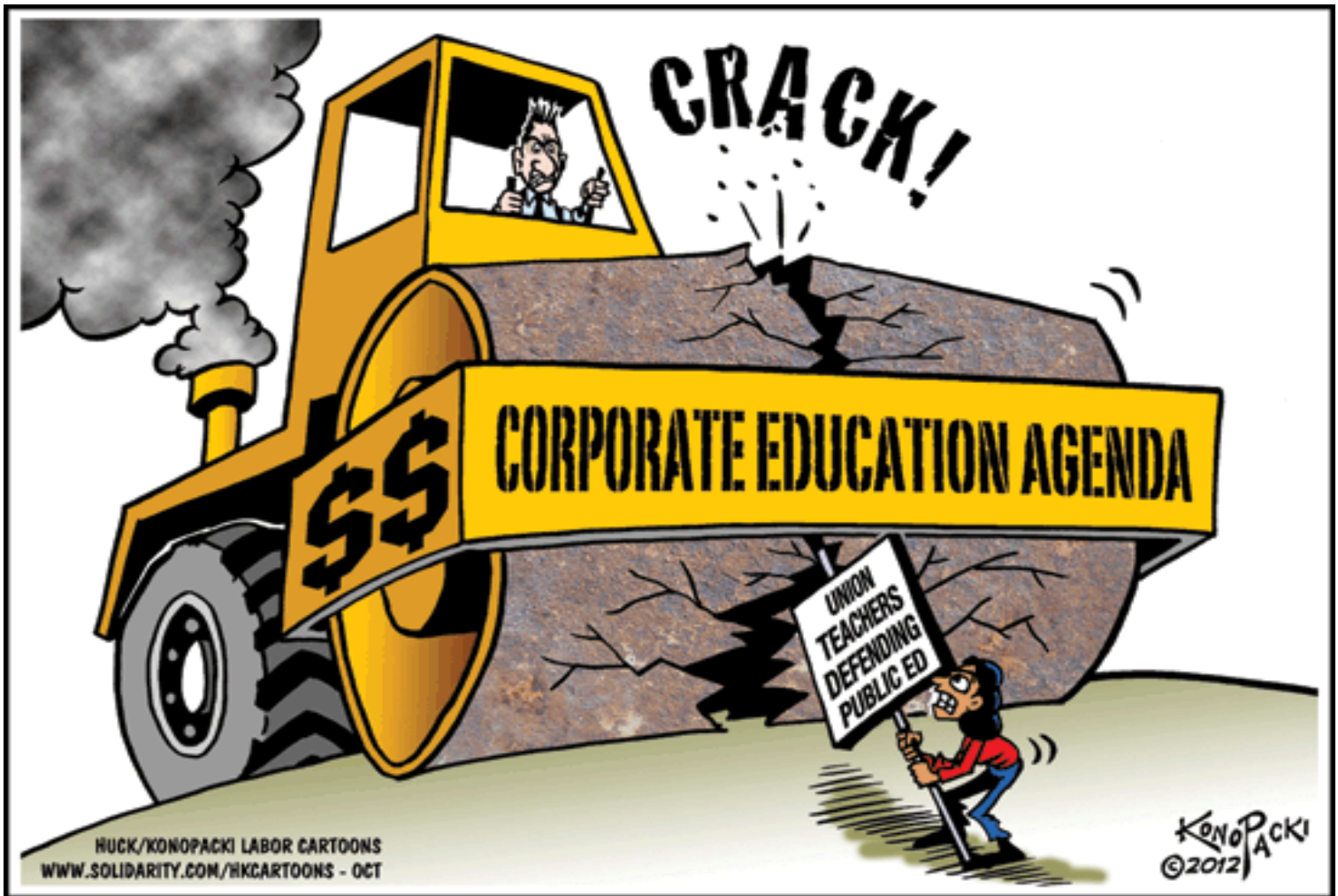
The polarization between OEA and GO is a cause for concern. What has made this polarization possible and what are the impacts of it? Shouldn't an organization that claims to represent Oakland parents and teachers who trying to improve public schools, be in support of the union's slate, a slate that has teacher and student interests at heart? GO has had such an enormous and rapid influence in the district because they filled a void where there were no large fighting forces of parent and teacher organizations outside from the union who were doing citywide political work. The organizations that did exist prior to their entrance on the scene were various district led bodies such as the CAC, SSC and the PTA that have often been unable to challenge the district due to their ties with them.

The unsettling and bleak reality is that GO claims to be the voice of school communities that will push the dis-

trict to provide quality education for all students while at the same time they are funded by the charter association and wealthy private donors who do not represent the interests of the majority of Oakland's teachers and parents. The politics of their candidates and on their website are vague. Jonathan Klein, CEO of GO Public Schools, speaking about the elections, said that the GO slate candidates would be involved in "generating resources, fiscal responsibility, and expanding oppor-

overwhelming support of Tony Smith and board members that have kept Oakland teachers without a contract for 2 years. Groups that are truly invested in teachers have a responsibility to support and collaborate with the union in order to ensure working conditions that allow teachers to effectively do their job.

This election has shown us the power of GO to influence school board elections and has given us a more



tunity across the city." The language is so unclear that it does not communicate what kind of policies they really support. Where are the resources coming from? What will be cut to "ensure fiscal responsibility?" What kind of opportunities are being expanded and for whom? He also stated of the candidates that "with their support, we will advance policies and programs that give every child in Oakland an opportunity to attend a great school and help every teacher access the support they need in their classroom." This statement, along with the image across their homepage stating "We <3 Oakland teachers" is hugely hypocritical and in direct contradiction to their

clear idea of their true interests and who is supporting them. These school board elections were a loss for those who want to fight for equal quality public education for all students no matter their race or economic status. We must take seriously the lessons we have learned. GO showed their true colors, strength, and influence. We must challenge their influence over the board and the way they have claimed a monopoly over parent voice in Oakland and expose their real intentions. Many teachers and parents outside of GO have their own visions for defending and transforming the education system that does not rely on charters and big money. We as parents,

teachers, students and school workers, must consolidate these visions, give them form, visibility and connect them to action. We need to create our own fighting force, not dependent on institutional support, that is capable of matching GO.

Conclusion

There is something sobering about the truths laid out in this article that should temper the initial excitement and relief of many in the wake of these elections. We cannot afford to be complacent and satisfied simply because Obama has won and the Democrats have a majority. We need to understand the reality behind the policies and people in office so we can decide how to act in our own interest. We need to know and understand the implications around the fact that one of the biggest monetary influences in the Oakland school board elections was the California Charter School Association. This helps us to understand exactly who is gaining power—charters—and who is losing power—the OEA—in this district. We need to see that the reason charters have this power is because we have not been able to form a clear alternative or strong resistance to privatization. We need to believe we can build a group able to represent and fight for the united interests of students, parents and teachers to defend public education rather than wholesale privatization. A group that desires a deep transformation in the education system that enables our students to receive the education they deserve. This election paints a very clear picture of what is missing and how strongly we need to fight for Oakland schools in coming years. The stakes are high. One Oakland parent put it very frankly on a recent blog post when she said, “I expect that this new group will probably get quite close to finishing off the Oakland Unified School District.” What can we do to stop this? The first step is to educate ourselves and get organized to fight for the education system we deserve.

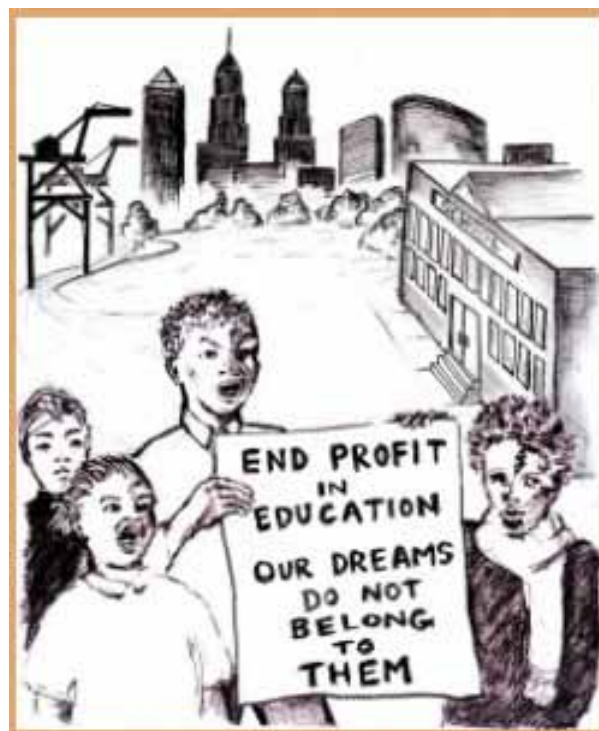
Margarita Monteverde and Felicia Vivanco are two Oakland educators.

Why We Chose Classroom Struggle To Be Our New Name

Our committee grew out of the Occupy movement. The first political project that brought together many of the founding members was the organization of the student, parent and teacher march for education on November 2, 2011. We have been supporters of much of the work of occupy, have received financial support from Occupy Oakland, and were leaders of the Lakeview occupation in protest of school closings and privatization in our school district. In the course of the spring and summer, our organizational relation to the Occupy Oakland general assembly became less clear, to the point where our committee began to function as a semi-autonomous committee of education workers, rather than as a branch of Occupy. As individuals we have a high level of respect and solidarity for the activists of Occupy Oakland, and as a committee we have appreciated our political relationship with Occupy Oakland for the space that has been opened for radical politics and struggle as a result of OO's actions. With that said, we have not been formally a part of Occupy Oakland for quite some time, and we want to be clear about where we're at as a committee. For this reason, we've decided to rename our committee, newsletter and blog, and have chosen a new name that represents our dual commitment

to the struggle for radical changes in both our schools and our society at large – Classroom Struggle. We see this as a struggle both internal and external to the classroom itself, and deeply entwined with the struggle of working class people to create a new society.

Central to the work of Classroom Struggle is a dual call to not only defend our public school system but to transform it in the process. While public schools have served a role in developing white supremacist, capitalist and imperialist ideology and social structure (for example through segregated schools, tracked programs, manda-



ted pledge of allegiance, etc.), they have also been key sites of struggle and served as assets for movements of working class students of color and other youth struggles. This has been true since Reconstruction in the US South when black slaves who had fought to emancipate themselves from slavery organized toward establishing public education with funding from the capitalist state as a form of reparations; it was evident during the student walkouts in the late 60's against imperialist wars and in support of Ethnic Studies; and it could be felt over the last two decades in Oakland where teachers and students have repeatedly joined forces to fight Prop 21, state budget cuts and gang injunctions.

In many ways, public schools are the last commons that we have in this country, the last place where people – children, teenagers, teachers, parents, school workers, neighbors – meet across differences and share the only assets that cannot be taken from us: our knowledge and vision. Yet our K-12 schools, the very last free public service still provided to ALL people inside U.S. borders, are under attack. Between austerity policies that slash school budgets, union busting that threatens the quality of teaching, corporate backed reforms aimed to turn young people into work ready robots rather than creative thinkers, and the rapid privatization of our schools (of which Oakland is a leader with 30% of students in charter schools), our schools are very literally under attack. And for this reason we call for their defense. What we are calling to abolish is not education but rather capitalism.

We see the struggle to abolish capitalist schools as one place where we can begin to chip away at capitalism's grasp on our society. Capitalist tendencies run deep into the structure and politics of schools. Whether we consider the way in which capital benefits from public schools by tracking students within academic programs, or within schools that themselves function as tracked systems; or whether we consider the way that the school system itself was organized around the logic of a factory, complete with bells ringing and time managed just like a factory, it's clear that the origins of public schools include a deep relation with the need of capital to reproduce a division of labor. Meanwhile, global capitalism's ongoing austerity strategy even more severely limits the educational opportunities of working class students. UC/CSU systems are

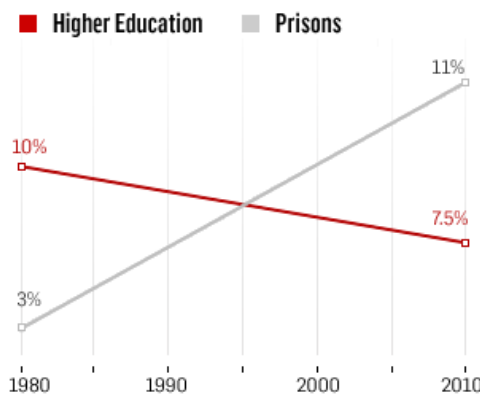
increasingly raising tuition, defunding people of color outreach programs, cutting the number of professors, increasing class sizes and pushing students of color and all working class students out of higher education. In public secondary schools we see ongoing cuts in funding, increases in class sizes, and attacks on school workers. Despite progressive and radical attempts to re-structure schools, promote ethnic studies and other forms of radical curriculum, there is no fundamental hope for a liberatory education under capitalism. This is why we say we must push the education struggle to its limits and fight to make it as much of an anti-capitalist struggle as possible.

Given all this context, we know that the whole of public education as it currently stands, is a very unjust system to say the least. We also know that the roots of this injustice are not ignorance or ineptitude, as the education reform movement commonly frames the issue. We call to “transform” rather than “reform” education because we don't understand the public education system to be a “broken” or “failing” system that simply needs to be fixed, but rather we believe it is acting in ways that have been deliberately designed to reinforce a hierarchical race/class structure. Public education is used to support a fragmented, deskilled, and deeply hierarchical workforce, where poor students and students of color are funneled into underground economies, chronic underemployment, and low wage work; middle class students are trained to be professionals; and wealthy students are trained to become the ruling class. The school to prison pipeline, zero tolerance policies, tracked classes, unequal distribution of resources, racist administration and teachers, Eurocentric history standards, and english-only classrooms are only the beginning - the list of oppressive practices could go on and on. It is not enough to defend our schools. Perhaps more importantly, we must be working towards their transformation into intergenerational

centers for healing, exploration, learning, self-actualization and the development of resilient communities not only able to survive current and coming disasters but to build skills, relationships and power to overthrow the current power structures of our society.

Finally we know that part of our work as educators and organizers is to facilitate healing within ourselves, our schools and our communities. Capitalist exploitation and white supremacy create

CALIFORNIA GENERAL FUND



social, emotional, and psychological conditions of permanent trauma for the working class and POC. The ongoing trauma of daily life under capitalism leads to internalized oppression that we take out on one another horizontally. There is a profound need for healing from this oppression through struggle against the conditions that reproduce it. While the process of healing is often co-opted through government agencies and nonprofits, this should not mean that the process of healing itself is not radical. It is a central human need we have that our struggles and educational practices should be aimed toward meeting, even if fundamental healing is not possible in any complete way while we're stuck in webs of capital and racial oppression. As we organize ourselves we should seek ways to overcome alienation and trauma so that we can build new social relations of compassion, care, and solidarity. The job of the educator is simultaneously to reproduce the workforce as well as producing a caring work of reproducing a caring, critical, and autonomous social being. We strive to push our work toward the humanistic side of the contradictions we face in our organizing and educating.

As Classroom Struggle, we are building a network of projects based out of Oakland, CA aimed towards this commitment to transforming our education system, participating in a movement for the abolition of capitalism, and developing a culture of healing to sustain our communities through the current struggles and those ahead. We hope you will join us and be in touch.

Why Teachers Should Care About the Contract

By Aram Mendoza

Oakland teachers, do we care about having a union? Do we care about having a good contract? What is an imposition and what should teachers do about it?

These are not rhetorical questions.

The reality is that we have been under an imposed “contract” since 2010. What does this mean? Simply put: Tony Smith and the OUSD school board have unilaterally, dictatorially, and undemocratically imposed terms of work upon education workers. It means that the “last, best, and final” offer was put on the table by the OUSD district bargaining team and was NOT agreed to by the OEA bargaining team. Though this imposition was carried out in April of 2010 (which was why OEA’s last strike was in that same month), it was not the last time that Smith and the Board have imposed on education workers: last year’s “Accelerated TSA” campaign was imposed on Fremont, McClymonds, and Castlemont teachers without any public, democratic process. More on this later.



Chicago teacher on strike last fall.

Back to our current contract situation - we must ask: does our contract really matter? As I've talked to co-workers and friends who are teachers in Oakland's public schools I've come to see the total lack of information that we have in relation to our own contractual agreement with the district.

I spoke with one veteran teacher of 19 years at my school the other day about what it means for Oakland teachers to be under an imposed contract. She told me, "I have no idea why we haven't had a real raise in so many years . . . and it impacts us by creating a situation in which we are working under conditions of disrespect. It's no surprise that

teachers like me - people who have been in this for over 15 years - are few and far between. It's much easier to transfer to another district and actually make decent money to support my family with."

The lack of a strong contract that guarantees certain crucial working conditions for teachers leads to the high rate of teacher-turnover that we see year after year in Oakland. This, in turn, contributes to the continual destabilization of Oakland schools.

Being able to negotiate a contract is not just about raises. It is about having our union be able to negotiate for all of our rights as workers and also our vision for education. Our contract is the legal guarantee of our rights. The ability to negotiate a strong contract is the tangible representation of our power, as a voice for ourselves and for education in Oakland.

Without a contract we are at the whim of the districts short sighted plans of "improvement" (and the ways that teachers are displaced and disregarded in these plans). Last year, this looked like school closures (with over 100 teachers being displaced) and Accelerated TSA positions imposed on three high school staffs. The Accelerated TSA situation at Castlemont, Fremont, and McClymonds highlights the dictatorial nature of Smith and the Board's decision making process, but it also highlights the contradictory nature of the current strategy employed by the OEA. The reality is that the Accelerated TSA proposal was actually favored by many teachers at the aforementioned schools. When I've spoken to teachers at all three schools, many have acknowledged the fact that A-TSA is a union-busting tactic, but at the same time they've expressed that they don't feel much connection to the union and thereby aren't convinced that an attack on the union is actually an attack on their working conditions! Clearly work needs to be done to bring together school workers and the school community to have more comprehensive political discussion about our positions as workers and how to move forward (more on this below.)

Regardless of our positions on whether or not these were the correct steps for Oakland schools, it is clear that OEA was in no position to actually fight back against these and propose something different. Without an active base of teachers organized at the school-site level, it will be impossible to get a contract that will benefit our conditions as workers and the conditions of learning of our students. Without an active interrogation of OEA's current strategy and slogans we will not be able to build the type of teacher base which can be an actual force fighting in the interests of ourselves as workers, for our students as learners, and for the communities we serve as a whole. The situation at Fremont, Castlemont, and McClymonds reveals a schism that exists between an important section of teachers and our union. Our next steps must include bridging this rift.



One of the OEA's current slogans is that "teachers working conditions are students learning conditions". This may be an oversimplification but there is deep truth to the fact that if teachers do not have job stability, are constantly pushed to have larger class sizes, and lack prep time, then students are faced with teachers who are not in very good shape to facilitate classroom learning. We might just as well reverse the slogan and say that student's learning conditions are determined by

teacher's working conditions (not to mention the conditions of the community), but the essence of the point is the same: we must fight as teachers for our interests as workers in order to fully fight for the whole community's interests.

Another way of framing this is that whether we are teachers or students, all of us have the same boss: the district and superintendent.

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Where do we go from here?

The fact of the matter is that we're dealing with an employer - the district and superintendent - who have no

problem imposing work conditions on us and our students no matter how “collaborative” we wish to be at the bargaining table. The policies that Smith and the Board are carrying out and imposing on us reflect the policies of budget cuts and privatization that have swept much of the world - from Chicago to Greece and beyond.



HI! WE'RE EVERY SOCIAL PROBLEM IN AMERICA THAT YOU CAN NAME ROLLED INTO A HERD OF TOO MANY HUMANS FOR ONE MERE MORTAL TO MANAGE... LET ALONE TEACH. WHERE DO YOU WANT US TO SIT?

Smith and the Board have not put their jobs on the line, sitting-in at the offices of their superiors and demanding more money from the state to fund education and job creation. Rather they have sought to deal with philanthropic foundations such as the Bechtel Foundation - the same people who are profiting from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Our employers will only respond to a show of force on our part, as teachers, and that force comes in the form of a community strike of teachers, parents, and students. The reality is that we're nowhere near having the political will and organizational structure to build such a strike. So we must start from where we're at.

Currently, we're in bargaining with these people. This means that we're not “strike legal” - meaning, we can't legally organize a strike. As of now, our relationships with parents are mixed: some of us have strong relations with parents and understand the material needs they have, while others of us are not in direct communication with many parents. Our relationships with students are equally mixed. There's a long way to go to build the political relationships we need to fight for what Oakland's youth deserve, and there's no better time to start than now.

Ultimately, it will take embedding ourselves within the struggles of working parents and politicized students in order to maximize our own organizing efforts. For now, we will focus on what we can do more narrowly as

workers in order to build a base that can be supportive of our own direct struggles as well as those of the community.

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In terms of what we can do within typical workplace-organizing framework we have few possible directions. Under imposition, we have two main options: organizing

a wildcat strike or organizing a work-to-rule campaign. Briefly, a wildcat strike is an “illegal” strike by workers that is often not sanctioned by the union leadership and often targets both the employer and the union leadership. Workers have historically organized wildcat strikes when the union leadership has not provided a way forward that actually confronts the employer directly, and where this same leadership is more interested in collaboration with the employer than with negotiating the best terms for their workers. Teachers have organized wildcat strikes against high stakes testing and imposed contracts in places like Miami, Ottawa, and Virginia, among other places. (Links to teacher wildcats on our blog.)

Work-to-rule, on the other hand, is a set of actions that workers take where they do no more than the minimum required by the contract. Teachers in both Hawaii and the UK recently organized work-to-rule actions where they took different approaches toward targeting their employers. In the UK, workers specifically targeted their management by refusing to have more than one meeting with their administrators per week, refused to have more than the minimum number of observations in a given “performance management cycle,” and refused to hand in short-term curriculum planning documents. On the other hand, the Hawaiian teachers employed work-to-rule tactics by coming to school right at the start of the school day, as opposed to coming in early to prepare for the days activities. They also left right at

3pm, meaning that all after-school activities were effectively shut down. (Links to Hawaii and UK work-to-rule on our blog.)

While these are two main ways that teachers have used to carry out the struggle for power at the workplace and for a strong contract with their employers, are they the only ways? Are they the best ways?

One of the challenges that we face as teachers is that we are care workers. As teachers (similarly to parents) we are charged with the double duty of caring for our students and children to help them develop socially, emotionally, and academically, while doing all of this in the context of capitalist society which requires us to train them into a disciplined pool of workers. We work for the positive and progressive development of our young people's humanity, while also being charged by the state and capital with the duty of producing a docile workforce.

If we are honest with ourselves we may see how we do both, often contradictory, forms of work in the course of a given school day.

The reason that engaging in workplace and contractual

struggles as care workers is challenging is that we are ultimately responsible for the well-being of the young people. That means if we strike, during the school day, where will the students go? Where will students spend their days? Who will be responsible for them if their parents are not available to care for them because they

have to go to work themselves? Equally pressing for care workers is: if we don't go on strike, what is the future for our student's education in Oakland? Fighting for our contract, makes us unable to fulfill our duties as care workers for a series of days or weeks, but not fighting for our contract has contributed to a situation where daily we feel like we are failing our students.

The answer to this question is not to give up the strategy of workplace actions. Rather, it presses us to consider the necessity of making our workplace actions ones in which there is active support and participation by parents and community. This will ensure that our struggle doesn't destroy our caring relationships with young people, but rather reinforce the positive relationships we already have AND strengthens them by acting against the restraints of our employers which are seeking to impose harsher and harsher working conditions on us. These are the same working conditions that push high-stakes testing as the

main way of evaluating us as teachers, and they are also the same conditions which put more and more students in our classrooms, which means less and less time that we have to individually support each young



Hawaii teachers engage in a work-to-rule protest.

person who comes in through our classroom doors.

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In mid-January of this year, teachers at Seattle's Garfield

High School publicly declared that they would boycott the imposition of district-mandated standardized testing of their students. This effort sought to unite the interests of students and teachers in a common campaign of resistance: students are negatively affected by the whole tracking system that these tests reinforce, with all its racialized implications, while teachers are negatively affected by being evaluated on their work with students based on these tests. The Seattle teacher's heroic stand is a battle that they are in the midst of fighting, and is a model for all of us to consider as we seek a way forward for ourselves that brings together our interests as workers and the interests of working families and students that we serve.

Recently, special education classes at two different OUSD elementary schools have seen consolidations; in one case, a class that formerly had two teachers to serve a given amount of students was cut down to one teacher; in the other case, a special education teacher was serving students at two school sites with a student-to-teacher ratio of more than 40-1. In both these instances, parents and teachers were quick to begin discussions and rally together and go to the school board to denounce the layoffs for BOTH the effects it would have on teachers AND the effects it would have in undermining the quality education of students. At both schools, teachers began talking with parents, passing out flyers in the beginning of the school day, and mobilizing forces from the staff and school community to make public speeches at the school board. One of the teachers facing the imposition of an unmanageable teacher-student ratio was given a reduction in students to whom they were responsible for serving, while at the other campus the parents and teachers began a legal mediation procedure to determine what would happen.

Without going into the specificities of either case at this moment, we must see the potential for broader united

action in these micro-examples of struggle. The fact of the matter is that the consolidations of both these special education positions must be understood in relation to the objectively terrible position we are in as teachers - we are under an imposition by our employer. Therefore all small struggles at local school sites are struggles against the conditions of imposition, even if they are not always directly understood as such.

What if we had a network of teachers, parents, and after-school workers who were ready and on-call to show up at a given school site to carry out direct protests



Chicago teachers struck last fall, in part, for better learning conditions for heavily disadvantaged students.

and pass out flyers whenever there was the threat of increased class sizes? What if this same network were ready to interrupt school board meetings and insist that the official proceedings be halted until our demands to rescind layoffs and consolidations were met? What if our school sites were seen as organizing hubs for taking the established relationships of parents, students,

and educators and turning those relationships into political relations through shared struggle? We can start building these by having parent meetings to discuss the connections between teacher working conditions and student learning conditions; staff meetings of all non-administrators to discuss the nexus between after-school and non-unionized staff working conditions with the working conditions of OEA members. To what extent are these types of political relationships being built? To what extent are these relationships materializing through struggle against micro-examples of workplace exploitation such as those special education examples briefly illustrated above?

It is my belief that we must strengthen our base of support across all our co-workers, with students and with parents, by carrying out direct actions and political education at our workplaces. This is the way in which we will best develop the active base that can play a role in fighting for a quality contract for teachers, and using

the contractual struggle to fight for better conditions for all workers, parents, and students involved in OUSD.

Aram Mendoza is a teacher in OUSD.

Here are concrete things we can all do:

1. Begin meeting with our co-workers - formally and informally. Discuss the conditions of work and determine what are the major issues that are holding us back from working with our students in the ways that we deem appropriate.
2. Attend all OEA events and network with teachers from across the district; discuss common areas of concern and begin developing the infrastructure needed to coordinate mutual aid and actions that can support struggles at individual schools when they arise. Become an OEA site-rep if your school doesn't have one; if you already have one, become an alternate. Read all bargaining updates and discuss them with your coworkers. What are their thoughts? What should we advocate for in contract negotiations, and how?
3. Discuss with parents the challenges they are facing in the community and in relation to raising their children. What are their material needs that are not being met? Think of resources to share with them that can support them in their struggles on the job, with housing, with immigration status, etc. Ask them what resources they know about that you can share with other parents that may not have access. Share with them your best understanding of the current situation that OUSD is in - talk about privatization, austerity, etc. Read up on these topics to the extent that you're not clear on them.
4. Talk with your most politicized students about the issues that you both face as students and workers. Where do your interests intersect? Where are potential differences in interests? What do they know about student movements in other parts of the world - Chile, Greece, Egypt, etc.

International Labor Action for Rank and File Teachers: In the Fight for Free Public Education -- Beware the Union "Leadership"

By A.S. Read

In the United States and countries all over the world there still remains an institution that links people towards a common goal. This goal, literacy, is entirely necessary for all working people to navigate the complex and increasingly oppressive nature of "civilized" society (aka Capitalist Society). There are many definitions of what literacy entails (most rates are based on the ability to read and write at a specified age), overall it is estimated that the worldwide literacy rate is around 80%.

I would argue the institution responsible, for what is arguably an impressive percentage, is free public education. Yet, assaults on this institution are taking place in countries all over the world. As these attacks get more and more aggressive, rank and file teachers continue to fight back and prevent further losses to collective bargaining rights, despite the tendency of capitulation and self-interest from union bureaucrats.

This article will highlight two recent labor struggles where teachers courageously went on strike in response to the continuing global assault on public education manifesting in their regional schools. University teachers in Sri Lanka went on a three month strike, and K-12 teachers in Namibia went out on a wildcat strike that lasted two weeks. Both actions were bittersweet considering in each country it was the agency of the teachers that drove the strikes, however it was the treachery of the union bureaucrats (ie. collaboration with the state) "representing" the teachers that ended the actions with

minimal or no concrete gains. This article also provides context for this labor union sabotage, and ideas for teachers to push the struggle forward.

Sri Lanka's education system, particularly the higher-education system, our great socialist dream, is perhaps one of the very few things we got right – at least to some extent. It remains a fact of pride for us that any student in Sri Lanka who qualifies for University entrance can attend university and receive higher-education of a very good quality, regardless of their socio-economic background. (<http://blogs.mw.wordpress.com/2012/10/01/the-futa-struggle-for-education-and-more/>)

In response to the Sri Lankan government's attempt to eradicate this "great socialist dream" -- 4,000 teachers from 14 Sri Lankan public universities began a strike on July 4th of 2012. The lecturers demanded a 20% wage increase and an overall increase in government spending on education to 6% of Sri Lanka's gross domestic product (GDP). Other issues the university

teachers feel must be addressed is the, "severe political interference and oppression taking place at public universities countrywide." According to a Sri Lankan citizen's blog, "They [universities] are no longer places where one can teach and learn freedom of thought." The current government, often accused of being soft on human rights violations, is also implementing a new leadership training program -making it compulsory for every batch of university entrants to undergo a militarized training program that's meant to instill 'discipline' and 'values' in them. These training programs are carried out by the Ministry of Defense, and the content of these temporary military camps have been highly con-

troversial." This strike, despite a major sell-out by the Federation of University Teachers Association (FUTA) was inspiring in its depth, perseverance and commitment to fight the Sri Lankan Government's ruthless austerity agenda.

"You cannot call something illegal if it is supported by majority." -Namibian teacher

In the Khomas region of Namibia, public school teachers went out on a wildcat strike that began November 1st and lasted over two weeks. This action spread to most urban centers throughout the country. The strike, no doubt inspired by the militancy of striking Marikana platinum miners in neighboring South Africa, prompted

widespread support from other public sector workers, and was even joined by nurses in some regions. The teachers urged parents to rally with them if they were interested in the education of their children. The teachers demanded a 40% wage increase and were extremely frustrated at the slow pace of the negotiations between the Namibia National Teachers Union



Sri Lankan teachers on strike, through rain and shine, for an increase of education spending to 6% of GDP.

(Nantu) and the Education Ministry. Teachers also wanted higher housing and transport allowances as well as a tax-free 13th cheque (a 13th cheque is similar to a bonus -- paid out at the end of each year). The strikes have seen a high level of militancy with daily marches and rallies at the Ministry of Education offices as well as the High Courts in Windhoek, the Namibian capital. "In the morning, we meet here (Ministry of Education office premises), we mobilize ourselves and we march to the court. I don't want us to lose focus. We are here for a strike and if tomorrow at court they tell us to go back to school, we will not go back until we see money in our bank accounts." Although this militancy was

widespread, these wildcats fizzled - based largely on the nature of collaboration between the Namibian Ministry of Education, which immediately ruled the strike illegal, and Nantu, the union allegedly representing the teachers.

For teachers, interested in the defense and transformation of public education we can look to these two strikes for inspiration. Yet, we must also learn valuable lessons to prepare for the battles looming on the horizon. In these cases, the public school teachers in Sri Lanka and Namibia were either sold out by their union (FUTA) or utterly neglected and abandoned by the self-interested "leadership" of the teachers union (Nantu).

1) It's important to know as much as possible about the union leaders bargaining on "our" behalf and identify any individuals with careerist ambitions. In Sri Lanka, FUTA's president - Nirmal Dewasiri - is the brother of Economic Development Minister Basil Rajapakse. Considering this, it should come as no surprise that the three month strike ended with no concrete gains and only

"assurances" that the government will address the teachers demands within a medium term framework commencing from the 2013 budget. These bureaucrats had the audacity to schedule a joint press conference to announce this "deal", however FUTA's executive committee decided this might not be a great idea, and in the end held a separate press conference. The two brothers did sign a joint statement, which according to the Sri Lanka Guardian - "made it clear the union sold out its rank and file for a more central role in the island nation's right-wing education reforms." Its very telling that the union bureaucracy didn't even place the deal in front of its membership to vote for or against, and held closed door meetings with cabinet ministers and education officials throughout the strike. In Namibia, it was the union's regional chairperson in Khomas -- Dankie Katjuanja,

who was suspected of secret meetings with government officials and taking bribes after attempting to convince the teachers to take an 8% pay increase and go back to work. For Namibian workers in general, it is fairly common practice for them to see their union "leaders" take advantage of militant actions, like a wildcat strike, to springboard their own political careers in exchange for convincing the rank-and-file to return to their jobs.

2) We must demand that our union leadership negotiate in open meetings where teachers, parents and students can all observe and have input. On top of this, we must, as the rank and file, develop the framework to be ready at a moments notice to withdraw support from the union bureaucracy if we feel there is even a hint of capitulation or self-interest

from leaders. Whether this comes in the form of a union caucus or education committee, or something more inclusive of other sectors of workers -- like a workers council, it must have complete autonomy from any of the hierarchical structures designed to limit the militancy and success of strike actions. This type of autonomous framework would have been very



Namibian teachers went on a wildcat (unsanctioned) strike against extremely low pay and treacherous union leadership.

beneficial for the Namibian teachers in their recent wildcat strikes. This is a quote from a letter sent to the Namibian, "Nantu is the government and the government is Nantu... "An apple will never fall far from the tree". Nantu is a member union of the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW), an umbrella organization of Namibian public sector unions and a part of the ruling SWAPO Party of Namibia. With this in mind, Namibian teachers in Khomas, in response to ridiculously low wages and high teacher to student ratio, at some levels the ratio is 48 students for every teacher, not to mention a union in no hurry to negotiate and improve these conditions, had no choice but to engage in a wildcat strike. And their decision proved to be correct as it spread to each region of the country. The government immediately declared the strike illegal, and the secretary

of the Ministry of Education -- Alfred Iilukena leaked threats to the media that N\$750 would be deducted from teacher's paychecks for every day of the strike. What is shocking is that the teachers don't even make this amount per day.

Complete with threats and illegal declarations from the Namibian state, and without union support, the wildcat strikes proved hard to hold together, and dissension between the teachers soon spread. Although many rank and file teachers felt the strike should continue, the majority decided to go back to work for the sake of the students.

Other issues emerging and affecting the chances of success, was the fairly widespread labor illiteracy amongst the strikers, some of the rank and file didn't even know they held membership in Nantu, and many were ignorant of their own wages and salaries. This is due largely to Nantu's failure to provide even the most basic but necessary information to its constituents. Also, no updates from the negotiating table were provided, as all of the bargaining with the education ministry was done in secret. With these facts, it's not surprising to read of Namibian teachers interested in forming their own unions, outside and autonomous from the national union (Nantu), or looking to the Teachers Union of Namibia (TUN), the rival to Nantu.

3) Our organizing must be comprehensive - inclusive of all the rank and file teachers, all school workers, and all parents and students. This will help teachers learn their contractual rights to protect themselves in the day to day dealings with administration, and win concrete gains during battles with the state. This will also help teachers build solidarity with their fellow school workers, and students and parents -- who can then help build solidarity with workers in other sectors, as so many parents of public school students are workers.

The wildcat strikes were also sabotaged with the help of complicit national media outlets. According to an article on allafrica.com - striking teachers booed Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) reporters as they offloaded their equipment to cover a meeting, and then chanted, "NBC is anti-strike" and "now that you got your increment you are biased in your reporting," as the reporters returned to their media van. Nantu - also used the media to try to save face in what was surely embarrassing, as most of Namibia's teachers went out on a wildcat strike without Nantu's support. After the strike

ended, a member of the union's negotiating team sent a letter to the Namibian.com website - attempting to sway public opinion away from what was widespread support for the teachers militancy. Here is a quote from that negotiator, "The negotiating team has acted upon the instructions of its membership." If this is the truth then why did the teachers engage in a wildcat strike? and why did this wildcat strike receive such widespread support from the rank and file?

4) We must fight to challenge and change the mainstream media's narrative. I won't pretend to know the extent of the narrative being promoted in Namibia and Sri Lanka, but in the U.S., the media has been successful in convincing far too many people that teachers and our unions are to blame for the state of public schools. Recent documentaries/movies like *Waiting For Superman* and *Won't Back Down* serve as the tour-de-force of this false mainstream rhetoric. Therefore, we must fight to challenge this narrative while also developing ways to promote our narrative. During a strike, this is even more necessary as the ruling class can and will use all means to diminish support for the strike and demoralize strikers. In Namibia it was the national media, fresh with an increase in pay, bashing the nationwide strike. In Chicago, earlier this fall, it was Rahm Emanuel labeling the CTU strike, which had near unanimous support from the rank and file and widespread support from Chicagoans, as a "strike of choice". Effectively saying that the teachers did not need to go on strike and were doing so based on self-interest and not collective interest in education.

5) We must use new media forms (youtube, facebook, twitter, etc) to facilitate both national and international connections between teachers interested in defending and transforming public education. These connections must be made. The global ruling class has shown no interest in providing the integral funding and resources for public schools to maintain and expand literacy rates. It is happening all over the world, and there has been no signs of this subsiding. The only way this will stop is when they are no longer in control of our schools. Congratulations to Sri Lankan university teachers and Namibian public school teachers on their inspiring efforts to fight this assault on public education.

A.S. Read is a teacher in OUSD.

The Real Conditions of Afterschool Workers

In the past ten years there has been an explosion in the number of people working as non-unionized educators and teachers in public schools. We make up maybe a third of the people educating and caring for kids in Oakland schools. We are after-school workers, Ameri-corp staff, non-profit workers, teacher's aids, counselors. We plan lessons, build curriculum, support kids, help with homework, create performances. We do much of the work that teachers are unable to do -- because of budget cuts, large class sizes and increasingly more demanding test-prep. We provide outlets for creativity, support for emotions, frameworks for conflict resolution and activities to build community. We do all of this and are paid very little, with no benefits and no job stability. We will be the first to be cut or fired due to budget changes. Some of us are just doing this until we are able to start another career and some are hoping to work in education for the rest of our lives.

Either way, in the moment, we are relatively isolated in our classrooms and school sites. We don't know what things look like in all the other schools, how programs run, or what staff and curriculum support looks like. But we know that we are crucial to the functioning of schools in Oakland. Kids would receive less instructional time and schools would not function without us. We know that we are vastly underpaid and overworked (even more than unionized teachers). We know that even if we do not always love our job, we have an investment with the kids we teach.

In order to further clarify our thoughts on the nature of after-school programs we offer accounts from three after-school teachers in Oakland. Their writing is based on their experiences navigating the difficult terrain of non-unionized after-school teaching.

Paula Simoni:

I have been doing after-school work for over a year now. As someone interested in education before entering the field, I was surprised to find that many of the coworkers I have encountered are not specifically interested in

education, but simply fell into the field due to the lack of employment opportunities. In the past year, I have worked at three different school sites for two different non-profits. There were several commonalities between the sites and non-profits providing the content of the programs. Highlighted in bold below are important criteria that reveal a cyclical pattern after-school programs repeat from year to year, which can only be viewed as having deleterious effects on the learning of students recruited to these programs.

Incredibly high staff turnover rate. I initially started at two of the three schools mid-year. Of the staff I worked with at one school, only one of the afterschool staff remained (not including the boss) from a staff of nine. In my current program, all staff were new this year. There are a variety of reasons for this turnover rate. The chief reasons for this I think can be grouped under a few themes: low pay rates/part-time hours, poor working conditions at the school sites, and the lack of job stability.

Low pay and part-time hours. Although teaching in afterschool programs does require a level of skill in maintaining a classroom and being able to facilitate lesson plans, there is no credential required. Thus the pay is lower. The rates vary depending on the non-profits providing employment, but the typical range I encountered is from minimum wage to (the highest I have heard) \$20/hour. These rates would be manageable if you were working a full-time schedule, but in after-school, unless you are running the program, there are no full-time employees. In addition, all positions come with no benefits and no sick days.

Lack of job stability/funds. As someone who last year worked for two non-profits at different school-sites, I have noticed a trend in the hiring/rehiring process. While there are staff who remain in the program for years, it is a small percentage. As previously mentioned, I feel the staff turnover is due to the unpredictability of working for nonprofits that annually struggle to allocate enough funding to their programs. For example, at the beginning of this year, the OUSD withheld funds from one non-profit that works in after-school, resulting in the executive director of the non-profit having to personally pay the wages of the workers for over a month. In another case, the non-profit I worked for previous to this year asked me to undertake a project at the end of

the 2012 school year, promising additional funds. Upon completion, I was informed that I would only receive partial pay for the project I had worked on, due to the lack of funds at the end of the fiscal year. Each year, due to austerity based budget cuts that decimate money for social programs non-profits consistently lose funding.

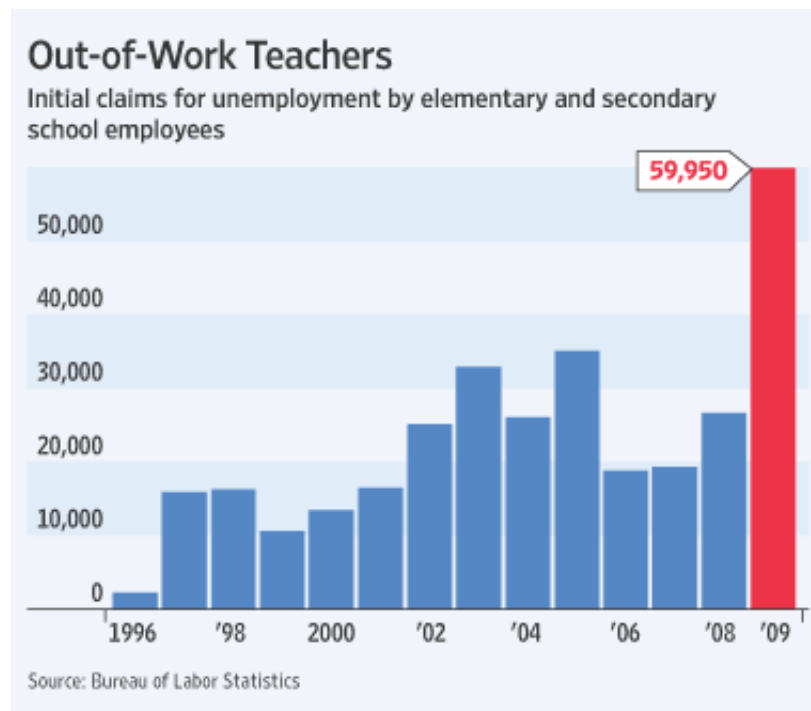
Poor Working Conditions. For staff, this means . We are asked to prep in increasingly short amounts of time. Currently, I am given 15 minutes before and after program to prepare and then clean up (it is impossible to actually prepare in that time). We are never paid for lesson plan creation. Supplies are limited, and we are constantly encouraged to 'be resourceful.' In addition to having very little time to actually prepare, we are also often expected to create our own curriculum, without much planning or support in being able to do that. Last week I spoke to an Americorp worker who is contracted under the Superstars Literacy program. She told me that while they are expected to test their students and show concrete improvement in literacy, they are not provided with the curriculum to do so. They are expected, as extremely low paid staff, to find it themselves. What are results of these working conditions?

Affects on students. At any age, but especially their early years, it is important for students to be able to expect consistency with their educators. This is impossible when the workers are facing conditions that essentially force them to eventually leave the position. Students notice this reality. Recently, a 5th grade student of mine asked me how long I had been teaching. When I answered already a year, she concluded that I would be leaving the following year. This student, who has been in after-school every year since kindergarten, has experienced the turnover rate first hand, and remembers it.

N. Finch:

I always felt the inequality of after-school education when waiting outside my class for the Sylvan group to be let out. My class of 15 kids, which is much lower than many after-school classes, would be standing in line as the group of five sylvan kids would be getting ready to leave. Five Sylvan students for 15 of mine! They would file out with new textbooks and workbooks in hand. The worst days were when they carried gift cards for being a part of Sylvan. And being 3rd graders, of course, they bragged to all the other students -- who would then inevitably ask me when they would get their gift cards to Starbucks and McDonalds. Starbucks and McDonalds!!!

This all took place in a program where it was a daily battle to stop kids from getting most of their caloric intake from Hot Cheetos. Meanwhile, a lot of the education they were getting should have been things they were receiving in school. Reading and math support is great but when the students were going through seven hours of overcrowded day classes, then an hour of Sylvan -- they were exhausted by the time they got to our homework class. It was



always a struggle getting them to focus on their homework.

My frustration at the inequality of our different programs only increased when my boss told me Sylvan got about \$100 per student per day of attendance. Our funding was something around \$7.50 per student per day of attendance. Somehow we were supposed to teach three times the number of students compared to Sylvan for something on the order of 10x less funding. Are you kidding me!? Something is seriously messed up with the state of public education when this is the norm—and not just in Oakland but across the country. Something's gotta give.

Felicia Vivanco:

I am a third year after-school teacher at an Oakland middle school. I began as a full-time Americorps volunteer for a program run through a large local education non-profit. I never thought I would make it through the first year. So much of me wanted to quit within the first month, but my connection with the students kept me at this school and working for this organization through all of the long hours and lack of recognition, resources, guidance and support. Today, after almost three years, I have a different understanding of the purpose and position of after-school teachers and Americorps staff. After working for the same organization but in these two different capacities - I have to admit that my time in Americorps, although similar, was much worse than just an after-school teacher (non-Americorps).

When I began I thought I was doing something virtuous, and over the years I have been celebrated by friends, coworkers and family for taking on the “selfless and noble cause” of working with at risk Oakland youth of color for little pay. More accurately, I saw teaching and youth work as an escape from the abuse and monotony of service work, a job I might feel good about and enjoy, a job with purpose. I want to acknowledge the great amount of growth and learning after-school work has provided me personally. I would not take back my time at this school, yet I see clearer than ever the contradictions and outright wrongs that are perpetuated

by after-school programs today, many of which are driven by the money funneled into non-profits by corporate and billionaire foundations (Gates, Walton, Broad etc. etc.). The government then often contracts with local non-profits, funded by these foundations, to provide the programming aspects of the internship and after-school program. Thus “public schools” have a significant portion of the extended school day dominated by private interests.

-We hope these accounts help highlight and clarify the nature of after-school programs. The more we understand all the intricate ways (billionaire foundations, charter schools, non-unionized labor, after-school programs) the ruling class is “investing” in public education, with the intent of privatizing, the more we can formulate a collective strategy to derail and

dismantle these plans. For those with similar experiences who feel strongly about defending and transforming public education please contact us or leave comments on our blog.

Paula Simoni, N. Finch, and Felicia Vivanco are all afterschool educators in Oakland.

