

# **CLASS STRUGGLE EDUCATION WORKERS**

November 2015

## **Clinton and Sanders Support Corporate “Education Reform”**

## **No to the Democrats, the Spearhead of Attacks on Public Education and Teachers Unions**

### **We Need a Class-Struggle Workers Party**

**By Class Struggle Education Workers/UFT**

NOVEMBER 12 – We’re now in the heat of the 2016 election campaign, the crucial period when the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates are amassing their “war chests” of millions of dollars from big business backers and Wall Street moguls. They will then make those expensive TV ad buys that will tell voters how to vote when the primaries roll around early next year. The Republicans appear to be running an “ugly contest” to see who is the most reactionary of all. The Democratic “race” is dominated by Hillary Clinton, with Bernie Sanders (who masquerades as a “democratic socialist”) acting as a “progressive voice” to keep discontented liberals in line.

Both the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) have endorsed Clinton. Many union “reform” groups are looking to Sanders. Both claim that their candidate is the best way to fight the corporate education “reformers” who are seeking to profit from and privatize public education to the extent possible while trying to destroy teachers unions. But the reality is that the assault on the public schools and teachers is a *bipartisan* campaign by *both* capitalist parties. And for the past eight years under the administration of Barack Obama, it is the Democrats who have spearheaded the attack.

Let’s look at the record.

“Hillary” is the embodiment of so-called “centrist” Democrats, among them Obama. The patented Clinton method of political “triangulation” supposedly consists of locating the respective conservative and liberal positions and then plotting a course somewhere in the middle. In reality, it involves adopting the basics of the bourgeois right wing, and then trying to prettify it with a little rhetorical window dressing. And according to the traditional Democratic playbook, the Clintons pose “left” in the

primaries, run to the center in the election campaign, and then govern from the right.

Hillary says she has fought “for 35 years” to improve schooling. This goes back to the 1980s when husband Bill was governor of Arkansas and appointed her to lead an Educational Standards Commission. On an AFT questionnaire, she claims she worked to raise standards, increase teacher pay and lower class size. But her 2008 campaign biographer, Carl Bernstein (*A Woman in Charge*) wrote that “she called teacher-testing the real heart of the reform package” and considered the Arkansas State Teachers Association “the leading villain” for opposing it. And while imposing standardized testing, Arkansas scores remained next to the bottom nationally.

From the beginning, Hillary Clinton has been closely associated with the three major capitalist foundations pushing for corporate education reform, the Walton Family (owners of Walmart), Bill and Melinda Gates, and Eli Broad. Hillary was a member for six years of the board of directors of Arkansas-based Walmart, the largest private employer in the world, notorious for its anti-union practices and paying its employees rock-bottom wages. As U.S. Secretary of State under Obama, she followed up this act by siphoning off earthquake relief funds to set up a garment factory run by Korean sweatshop owners in northern Haiti that pays workers less than \$5 a day.

Clinton’s relation with Los Angeles-based education “reformer” Eli Broad is even closer. Broad has been a long-time pusher of charter schools. A September 20 gala at the opening of his new museum, The Broad, was the target of a teacher protest against his plan to spend \$490 million to turn half of all L.A. schools into charters. At the gala, Hillary recalled how in 1983, as Bill became Arkansas governor, she became Broad’s lawyer “and life has never been the same.” When Bill Clinton

was president, Broad was an overnight guest in the Lincoln Bedroom, used for big-bucks campaign donors. In 2009, the Clintons attended a pre-ball dinner hosted by the Broads for the inauguration of Barack Obama.

Hillary was also paid \$100,000 (in New York State funds) back in the '80s to lead a Commission on Workforce Skills for Marc Tucker's National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE). Tucker's plan for national standards was laid out in the Clintons' 1994 "Goals 2000: Educate America Act," the model for today's Common Core. The NCEE's 2006 report on *Tough Choices or Tough Times*, financed by the Gates Foundation, calls to end secondary education for many poor and minority students after the 10th grade (see the *Internationalist* special supplement, "No to Teacher-Basher McCain and Education-for-War Obama" [November 2008]).

Hillary Clinton has called for "highly structured inner city schools," like the charters that subject African American pupils to military-like regimentation. Last week, Hillary Clinton made some mildly critical remarks about charters, how they "don't take the hardest-to-teach kids," and called for federal standards about accountability, accepting English-language learners, etc. While liberal critic Diane Ravitch softly defended the Democratic front-runner, skeptical readers weren't buying the Hillary turnaround story. On the other side, an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* (12 November) complained that the AFT's "Randi Weingarten "got what her union's endorsement paid for."

Rest assured, once the primaries are past, candidate Clinton will revert to her aggressively pro-charter stance.

But what about Bernie Sanders? While most of labor officialdom is pro-Clinton (even though many unions have not yet formally endorsed) the American Postal Workers Union and National Nurses United have endorsed Sanders, as have a number of unionists. A "Labor for Bernie" flier calls to "take on the enormous economic and political power of the billionaire class" and touts his call for a "political revolution" and a national \$15-per-hour minimum wage. Sanders also poses as being "anti-war," even as he recently (October 3) stated, "I support President Obama's effort to combat the Islamic State in Syria" and called to overthrow the Assad government.

Sanders highlighted in his AFT candidate questionnaire that he voted against Republican George Bush's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law and its emphasis on standardized testing. He neglected to mention that he initially voted for the NCLB, or that he voted for its reauthorization in 2007. In 2012 he told Obama's education "czar" Arne Duncan that he supported the administration's Race to the Top program, and only wanted to get a waiver for Vermont (as many other states had) from the rigid requirements of the NCLB. And last July, when the Senate was debating a rewrite of the law, Sanders supported the "Murphy amendment," which would have kept some of the law's most discriminatory punitive features.

The Democrat-sponsored amendment would have required the withdrawal of federal funding from so-called "failing schools," i.e., from some of the schools most in need of additional resources in the face of rampant student poverty, homelessness, decaying structures and the other factors plaguing urban education. In response a group of teacher activists, including a number of supporters of the Movement of Rank and File Educators (MORE) in New York, wrote to the Sanders campaign begging him to "to clearly articulate a position that is anti Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and high-stakes testing (HST) and in favor of decoupling testing from teacher evaluations" (*Washington Post*, 21 August).

Sanders' campaign responded with a statement upholding his vote for the Murphy amendment, and for the final bill, which would keep testing requirements (while not mandating specific tests). Nothing about teacher evals or Common Core. Some of the letter-signers expressed disappointment, but said they would support the Vermont senator anyway, with the usual "lesser-evil" arguments. This only confirms Bernie Sanders' role as a sheep dog to round up straying liberals and keep them in the flock.

However much they seek to disguise this with campaign rhetoric, Clinton and Sanders share the essentials of the education "reform" agenda which seeks to turn the public schools into a cash cow for contractors, vendors and charter school operators to milk, and to provide manpower training to produce wage slaves for capital. To fight the *capitalist* assault on public education, we must build a workers party based on a program of class struggle leading to a workers government, which can finally secure high quality public education as a right for all. ■

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