

Students and Teachers! The Unasked Question: Why Have School?

Rich Gibson
San Diego State University

Dear Students and School Workers,

School is about to begin and unless you are very lucky, the drudgery resumes.

Perhaps you can challenge your friends, teachers, and colleagues, or maybe torment the worst one, with a little exercise I use at the beginning of every class: Why have school? Why are we here?

I ask that question in class one, advising students that I will follow it with these:

- What are the main things going on in school?
- What are the main things going on in society?
- What might your answers have to do with each other?

Having done the interactive dialogue frequently, I can usually predict most of the student responses—but never all, and sometimes not the funniest ones.

Part of your task as a real student is to seek answers to the question: who am I in relation to others, and what shall I therefore do? Asking our key question may help.

One good scenario: you will recapture the view that most very young children have, fairly quickly fogged over by much of schooling: I can understand and change the world.

You might practice the exercise with classmates before school begins.

Fair warning: very few teachers have asked this of themselves. They may be reluctant to do it, even angry you posed the question. But “why are we here?” must be posed and answered in every class. It’s the teacher’s, and your, responsibility to reasonably answer it—beyond “truancy laws.”

At this point, please take perhaps ten minutes to think through, and make some notes about your answers to those questions just above.

Now (did you really, really do it?) I offer my thoughts which are radical, to-the-root analyses; more radical than most.

Why Have School? Why Are We Here?

Let’s step back a moment in order to put school in its proper, social, perspective.

Schools are the key organizing point of de-industrialized North American life, and much of life elsewhere.

Evidence: There will be almost 50 million young people in k/12 schools in 2015. Nearly one-half of the youth in high school today will be draft-eligible for the next seven years. They're just about all registered for conscription.

Numbers and positioning mean you are in a vital position to influence society—for better or worse.

Another 21 million mostly young people are in US colleges and universities.

School workers, not industrialized workers, are by far the most unionized people in the USA, more than 3.5 million union members. School unions are shrinking, but slowly, while industrial unions collapse, evaporate, because, in part, industry evaporates, and because industrial union leaders abandoned the idea at the heart of unionism—the contradictory interests of workers and employers.

The US will spend more than \$629 billion on schools this year, about \$12,300 per student. However, this average varies a great deal between states. California, once the finest and least expensive of state school systems, kindergarten through college, is now one of the worst, spending about half the national average. Then, as we shall see, there are remarkable disparities between districts.¹

What Is Going On In Schools?

Elites sought greater control over schools since the wars on Vietnam accelerated a student-teacher-prof-veteran leftist movement that nearly upended what has always been a segregated and deceitful system of mis-education.

Once elected, the demagogue, Obama, invaded US schools with his Race to the Top (RaTT), a project personified by Chicago's education huckster Arne Duncan. The RaTT, and later the Common Core, speeds what was already happening in capital's schools under George W. Bush, and Bill Clinton before him--and adds a few factors for spice.

Note that the 40 year education strategy has always been bi-partisan, as with war funding, and bank bailouts.

The RaTT's predecessor, touted by Democrats and Republicans alike called the No Child Left Behind Act had at least these key factors:

- The development of a regimented national curriculum to promote nationalism;

¹ References for the student counts, costs, etc., are at <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372>

- High stakes standardized tests to promote segregation, indifference to learning, and ignorance with a pretence of scientific backing and;
- the militarization of schools in poor and working class areas.

The RaTT makes logical extensions:

- Sharpened demands for a national curriculum—the Common Core-- in more subjects (beyond literacy and math),
- merit pay based on student test scores;
- attacks on all forms of tenure (made palatable to the public because they know through experience that there is no shortage of incompetents in schools);
- Layoffs, hits on pay and benefits, increases in class size;
- Tuition hikes driving youth out of college with razor-like precision, typically rooted in inherited wealth;
- Some privatization, but hardly only privatization (the corporate state—described below--reflects both the unity and contradictions internal to the ruling classes who have different short term views of profitability);
- Calls for national service setting up a syphon for middle class opposition to a draft;
- Intensified moves into cities and schools in crisis, like Detroit and New Orleans, demonstrating again the contradictory goals of social control and profiteering;
- Ruthless competition between school districts and states for limited RaTT reward dollars;
- A harsh rule of fear and intimidation sweeping across all of capitalist schooling;
- The abolition of union contracts by fiat--administrative or government “emergency” declaration (Detroit Public Schools, and many, many, more);
- Suspensions and expulsions of students, a race and class based manoeuvre that, step by step, obliterates youths’ ability to begin to achieve their potential.

Indeed, fear, from all angles, is the core emotional value in schools today.

The Jeffersonian ideal of education for enlightened citizenry is long gone, replaced by schooling for jobs and war.

What is the Social Context of School?

The education agenda is a class war agenda, and an imperialist war agenda. One begets the other.

In 2012, the Council of Foreign Relations, led by war-hawk Condoleezza Rice ("We don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud,") issued its Education Task Force Report, demonstrating in clear terms that the education agenda is a war agenda: class and empire's wars.

Human capital will determine power in the current century, and the failure to produce that capital will undermine America's security. Large, undereducated swaths of the population damage the ability of the United States to physically defend itself, protect its secure information, conduct diplomacy, and grow its economy."¹

Let us tick off the emerging realities of our times; the results of the many crises of capital contradicted by the promises of democracy.

The coming and recent elections should not only be studied as how voters choose who would most charmingly oppress the majority of the people from the executive committee of the rich: the government. It should be studied, more importantly, as how an element of capitalist democracy, the spectacle of elections, speeded the emergence of fascism as a mass popular force; that is:

- The promise of perpetual war is real;
- -the US, incapable of defining a grand strategy (for example, harmony won through equality), is dying a death by a thousand cuts and organizing social decay—unable even to target a primary foe, dashing to hot-spots while other empires rise;
- the corporate state, the rule of the rich, a near complete merger of corporations
- and government (2008 bank and auto bailouts);
- the continuation of the suspension of civil liberties (as with renditions, police murders, mass incarceration, etc.);
- the attacks on whatever free press there is;
- the rise of racism and segregation (in every way, but remember the immigration policies);
- the promotion of the fear of sexuality as a question of pleasure (key to creating the inner slave), and the sharpened commodification of women (Sarah Palin to pole dancers);
- the governmental/corporate attacks on working peoples' wages and benefits
- (bailouts to merit pay to wage and benefit concessions, to multi-tier wage rates);
- intensification of imperialist war (wars in Afghanistan escalates war on Pakistan which provokes war on Russia, etc, and the US is NOT going to leave Iraq's oil);
- the promotion of nationalism (all class unity) by, among others, the union
- bosses;
- teaching people the lie that someone else should interpret reality and act for us, when

- no one is going to save us but us;
- trivializing what is supposed to be the popular will to vile gossip, thus building cynicism—especially the idea that we cannot grasp and change the world, but also debasing whatever may have been left of a national moral sense;
- increased mysticism (is it better to vote for a real religious fanatic or people who fake being religious fanatics?);
- —one spectacle heaped on the next (celebrity worship, narcissistic electronics, etc.) and
- incessant attacks on radicals, isolating, discouraging, surveilling, and in some cases jailing those who not only practice radicalism, but who theorize to-the-root analysis.

Capitalist schooling exists within these social rising circumstances

Whose Schools Are These? These Are Capital's Schools.

This is, again, a capitalist democracy in which capital dominates democracy at every turn (bankster bailout, the auto-takeover on behalf of stockholders while auto workers' lives were gutted, empire's endless wars, etc).

Schooling is not education, the latter a "leading out," the former, schooling, a fetishized form of mis-education.

The capitalist market necessarily creates pyramid-like inequality, not only in the pocketbook, but in the mind.

Is there a single public school system in the US?

Actually, there is not. There are five or six carefully segregated school systems, based mostly on class and race.

The image of education in the minds of philanthropic economists is this: "Every worker should learn as many branches of labor as possible so that if...he is thrown out of one branch, he can easily be accommodated in another." (Marx)

There is a pre-prison school system in much of Detroit, Michigan or Compton, California; a pre-Walmart/military system in National City, California; a pre-craft worker system in City Heights, California; a pre-teacher or social worker system in Del Cero, California; a pre-med or pre-law system in Lajolla, California and Birmingham, Michigan; and a completely private school system where rich people send their kids, like George W. Bush or Mitt Romney—or the Obama children.

Arne Duncan, Obama's Secretary of Education, also sends his kids to private schools.

Rich schools teach different realities using different methods from poor schools. In rich schools the outlook is: "This globe is ours; let us see how we can make it act." In the poorest schools, the outlook is, "Tell me what to do and I will do it."

What Are Schools Designed To Do?

Schools are huge multi-billion dollar markets where profit and loss influences nearly everything.

Consider the buses, the architects, textbook sales, consultants, the developers for the buildings, the upkeep, the grounds, the sports teams, salaries, etc. Cost is always an issue in school. This is, after all, capitalism.

It is more than fitting to use a church analogy: schools as missions for capitalism and empire, and the vast majority of school workers, its missionaries. The theology: nationalism.

The average salary for public school teachers in 2013 was \$56,383. Salaries of public school teachers have generally maintained pace with inflation since 1990–91. (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009)

Multiply \$56,383 by the total number of school workers, above. That's a tidy sum.

These relatively good salaries, in comparison to the crash of industrial wages and jobs, served as an imperialist bribe to educators, winning them to conduct the child abuse that is high-stakes exams and regimented curricula—and not protesting the wars that erode their kids' lives, for example.

But, as economic break-downs caused by overproduction and war evaporated at least some of the ability to make the pay-off—and as school workers became more and more alienated from each other, their communities and students through those same processes—the bribes and jobs began to vanish—as we witness today. School workers then begin to complain about the symptoms of their problems, as with high-stake exams, and not the core: imperialism and capitalism.

The reality of the imperialist bribe is especially evident inside the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers. Both unions are deeply involved with American intelligence agencies, like the Central Intelligence Agency's front Education International (the inheritor of the Cold War CIA education fronts).

Why? For a reason parallel to the reason the American Federation of Labor was born: US workers will do better if "outside" workers do worse, thus tying the interests of US school workers with the nation's bosses, hence their relentless support for Democrats.

It is a direct payoff. Reg Weaver, former NEA president, made \$686,949 in his last single year of office. He now is on the board of EI, along with other past NEA and AFT bosses.

In 2010, about 10,000 NEA members at their Representative Assembly voted about 9,900 to 100 not to discuss the empires wars. In 2011, NEA was the first organization of any size to endorse Obama. Scratch our back with jobs and income and you can abuse kids and make war.

There is, in schools unlike most factories, a tension between elites' desire for social control and profitability. This can be seen in the contradictions within elite groups about the

privatization of schools. It's also evident in the production and sale of textbooks: social control vs. profitability.

It can also be seen in the liberal and unionite response to the current school milieu: "Defend Public Education!"

This is to defend a myth, on the one hand, to wish to harken back to non-existent halcyon days of schooling when it was not teaching lies, not segregated, and truly public.

On the other hand, the false demand is designed to treat schools like middle class job banks, to lure school workers into attempting to tax the rest of the working class to "win," the further mis-education of their children—as did the California Teachers Association in 2009 with a ballot measure that failed, deservedly, by 2/3rds.

Better to "Transform Schooling!" or "Rescue Education from the Ruling Classes!"

More Answers To Why Have School

Skill and ideological training

Under skill training we might list, of course, "the three r's," along with music, art, athletics, theater, science, etc. That list comes fast and easy.

Ideological training is another thing. Ideological grooming would include nationalism (the daily salute to the flag, school spirit, etc.) as well as the training in viewpoints established by teaching distinct curricular substance (political science, civics, has nothing to do with economics) in the segregated schools, using different methods.

Beyond nationalism, one clear purpose of most schooling is to make the system of capital natural, almost invisible, and to present it as the highest, last, stage of human development.

Further, students must become so stupefied that they see no real contradiction between nationalism and the other central tenet of capitalist thought: individualism. Me! Education, necessarily a social effort, becomes an individual commodity, often in the form of test scores, used as a weapon for merit pay and, by realtors, to fix home values.

NCLB and the RaTT eradicated history in poor and working class areas and, in other areas, eliminated any sense of resistance, even the traditional right of revolution written into the Declaration of Independence: unthinkable.

The upshot of capitalist schooling is that many students, surrounded by the unsystematic, incoherent, mystical world-views of both the curricula and most teachers, come away learning not to like to learn.

Curiosity, a birthright of all children, gets crushed. Parallel to that dubious success, children in exploited areas learn they cannot understand or alter the world. So, people in pacified areas become instruments of their own oppression.

Baby-sitting and warehousing kids

Babysitting is a key role played by capitalist schools. One way to find out, “Why have school?” is to experiment; close them. In our case, teacher strikes serve as a good test subject.

In school strikes (no sane union shuts down a football program), the first people to begin to complain are usually merchants around middle schools—who get looted. The second group is the parents of elementary students, quickly followed by their employers. (These realities can help demonstrate to elementary educators their potential power along with setting up kids’ entire world views).

The baby-sitting role is, again, funded by an unjust tax system and serves as a giant boon to companies that refuse to provide day care for their employees—but are able to duck taxes as well. This is redoubled by the fact that unions, like the United Autoworkers, completely forgot their 70 year old demand for free day care.

Schools fashion hope: Real and false.

On one hand it is clear that societies where hope is foreclosed foster the potential of mass uprisings: France in the summer of 1968 is a good example of what can happen; uprisings starting in school and quickly involving the working classes nearly overthrew the government.

Real hope might be found in showing kids and school workers alike that we can comprehend and change the world, collectively, and teaching them how.

Ask, “Why are things as they are?” every day. Or, in demonstrating that we are responsible for our own histories, but not our birthrights. Must we be lambs among wolves? Does what we do matter?

False hope might be the typical school hype: Anyone can make it; all you must do is work hard. Trumpery. Inheritance is, more than ever, the key to understanding social mobility, or immobility.

To the contrarians: there is nothing unusual about elites picking off children of the poor, educating them, and turning them back on their birth-communities as a form of more gentle rule. Obama would be one example of such a success. Skanderberg, the Albanian rebel trained by the Turks, would be a failure.

Schools create the next generation of workers, warriors, or war supporters.

Automatons or rebels, or something in between, a process with some witting direction. Those workers need to be taught to accept hierarchy, to submit, to misread realities like class war and endorse nationalism (school spirit) or racism (segregated schooling products). They need to accept their lot, to be unable to notice why things are as they are; why some live in abundance while others have no work—when there is plenty of work to do—why drudgery is so much part of most jobs. The core project here: obliterate the possibility of class consciousness.

What Cannot be Taught in Capital’s Schools in the USA?

School workers who follow the official line in school are prevented from teaching the core issues of human life: work, rational knowledge, love (sexuality) and the struggle for freedom.

Work: it is not possible to teach truthfully about work because it is illegal in California and many other states to teach favorably about Marx. Absent Marx, no grasp of the labor movement, alienation, and exploitation.

Rational knowledge: very few teachers will be able to take note of the historical fact; people make gods, gods don't make people. While multi-culturalism, a mask for nationalism that is still in style, may promote interfaith "tolerance," history suggests religion is the ideology of death, and current events underline that reality. Which teachers will say that in a classroom?

Love (sexuality): It is illegal in California to teach sexuality as a matter of pleasure. Rather sex education is steeped in fear of diseases, pregnancy. Teaching people to fear their own bodies is key to producing the inner slave—most religions understand that.

The struggle for freedom: While I think it may be easy to justify the importance of the three paragraphs above, this fourth is my assertion that people will persistently struggle to be free. At issue is whether or not they grasp why they are not free, a radical analysis, or they battle the phantoms that their adversaries toss in front of them.²

Students, like everyone, struggle to be free, but how much freedom exists in schools—for anyone? Not much, if any, and what there is will probably be produced by spontaneous action. School imbues the practice of un-freedom.

What of the Resistance?

People will fight back because they must. But the traditional organizations of resistance failed both the pedagogical project at hand, that is, teaching people why things are as they are, how to develop strategy and tactics on their own, and the practical project of direct action, control of work places and communities. While people must resist, it is vital they grasp: Why?

Let us make another tick-list, this time about the school unions, a reminder and details from the paragraphs above:

✓ No leader of any major union in the US believes that working people and employers have, in the main, contradictory interests, thus wiping out the main reason most people believe they join unions. Bosses (for that is what they are) of the two education unions (the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers-AFL-CIO--by far now the largest unions in the USA) openly believe in what former NEA president Bob Chase called "New Unionism," the unity of labor bosses, government, and corporations, "in the national interest." There is nothing new about company unionism, however, nor the corporate state. Company unionism produces highlights like the AFT, the smaller of the school unions, to invite Bill Gates, dead-set on capitalist schooling, to be the key-note speaker to their 2010 AFT convention.

² I took love, work and knowledge from Wilhelm Reich, adding my own struggle for freedom.

✓ Union bosses recognize their own opposing interests to the rank and file. The union tops, after all, earn much more than school workers. As above, Past NEA president, Reg Weaver, took in \$686, 949, in his last year of office. Current president, Lily Eskelsen-Garcia, will make at least \$450,000. Power in the unions is vertical, top-down, perfectly clear in the structure of the AFT, somewhat disguised, but every bit as real in NEA. These mis-leaders who move up fairly slowly through a hierarchy learn a variety of strategies to manipulate people and, “protect the contract.” These maneuvers, like grievance procedures, move workers away from the locus of their power, the work place, to geographically distant spaces where “neutral” arbitrators decide on vital issues. But the unions rarely file cases to arbitration and, nevertheless, lose about 2/3 of the cases they file. Union bosses also divert member action to the ballot box—any place away from the job site—where, in the words of one top NEA organizer, “if voting mattered, they wouldn’t let us do it.” But electoral work keeps member volunteers busy and it reinforces the false notions school workers have about professionalism (professionals set their own hours and wages, they determine the processes of work—teachers typically are called professionals by people asking the workers to buy textbooks for their kids), allowing educators to win hollow “respect,” the chance to dress up and rub elbows with Important People, away from school.

✓ Corruption is endemic in the AFT where a steady stream of leaders have been jailed, not only for looting the treasury (Miami, D.C.) but also for child-rape and embezzling (Broward, Florida—twice). NEA hasn’t suffered the kind of dramatic jailings AFT suffers, but, for example, my own boss in Florida, where I worked as an NEA organizer, was convicted of embezzling about \$1/4 million from the union.

✓ The school unions draw on a member base that is about 85% white and reflect the racism that such a base inherently creates. Rather than fight to integrate the teaching force and schools, the unions urge more and more “education” classes (typically an utter waste of time), adding on expenses for students, meaning those with the least get shaved out with razor sharp precision—by class and race.

✓ The unions, like all US unions, do not unite people, but divide them along lines of job, race, years of tenure, staff and leaders from rank and file, that is, down to the narrowest interest—capital’s favorite question: What about me?

✓ Since the mid-1970's, union bosses have supported every measure that elites used to regain control of schools which were, in many cases out of control. The NEA and AFT bosses today support curricular regimentation, high stakes racist exams, the militarization of schooling, merit pay, and charter schools (a key new source of dues income).

✓ The AFT organized the decay and ruin of urban education in the US, while the mostly suburban NEA let urban schooling be devastated, failing to recognize the truth of the old union saw, “an injury to one only goes before an injury to all.” That both unions steeped themselves in volumes of forms of racism (racist exams, racist expulsions, racist segregation, etc.) should not go unnoticed or excused.

✓ The education unions serve to peddle the wage labor of education workers as a commodity to employers and to guarantee labor peace. In this context, there is a direct trade off: no strikes or job actions in exchange for guaranteed dues income; the check-off. That is precisely

the historical origin of the agency shop. It is also a big reason why union bosses obey court injunctions against job actions; threats to the union's bank account, that is, the union staff salaries.

✓ School unions attack the working class as a whole. One glaring example (May 2009) of this was the support the California Teachers Association and the NEA gave to a series of ballot propositions that would have dramatically raised the taxes of poor and working people while leaving corporations and the rich off the hook, again. NEA and CTA combined spent more than \$12.2 million dollars on the campaigns, and lost overwhelmingly. CTA-NEA demonstrated to poor and working families that organized teachers are enemies—yet those same people are educators' most important allies.

✓ These are the empire's unions. Top leaders are fully aware that a significant portion of their sky-high pay is made possible by the empire's adventures. NEA and AFT bosses work with a variety of international organizations on behalf of US imperialism. These adventures are frequently deadly as with the AFT's unwavering support for Israeli Zionism, support for the recent oil wars, and, precisely to the point, work with the National Endowment for Democracy, a Central Intelligence Agency front, in wrecking indigenous leftist worker movements. While the AFT has been the spearhead of US imperialism inside the wholly corrupt "labor movement," NEA has also been deeply involved. There is a long history of this, back to World War I and the AFL's support for that horrific war. Again, the flag-waving theory behind it: US workers will do better if foreign workers do worse.

Unlike the private sector where less than 10% of the people belong to unions, school workers are the most unionized people in the country. It follows that it is important for change agents to be where the people are. But one must keep one toe in and nine toes out of the unions.

There are some indications that resistance inside the unions, and out, is rising. In Chicago, a recent election threw out the past, sold-out, union leadership. The CORE caucus organized for months, inside schools but, importantly, in communities among students and parents. Many hoped that new president, Karen Lewis, would serve as a beacon for future union reformers, should she overcome the temptations of office, the hierarchical union structure, the patch-work nature of the CORE foundations, and the full-scale attack that will be surely launched on CORE over time. In 2012 CORE led a massive strike. Events in 2015 suggest, however, that Lewis and CORE will fail to build a mass class conscious movement—and become just another union. We shall have to wait and see.

Social democrats, really social nationalists, have come to power in other teacher unions as well: Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Detroit, for example. What they have in common is their determination to not point to the system of capital and imperialism, despite the fact that many of them belong to so-called "socialist" parties. Perhaps they believe that people need to be taken by baby steps to more radical realities, that is, tricked into class consciousness. In a fun-house mirror sort of way, they look like the upper echelon union bosses, despite heavy doses of militant rhetoric.

The ongoing public workers's strike in South Africa, a true class battle that includes the entire public work force (educators too) versus the Quisling African National Congress

government might serves as an inspiration, if any US media covered it. They do not. Word, however, does slip out.

On March 4th, 2010, masses of students, school workers, and community people organized under banners that said, “Educate! Agitate! Organize! Strike! Occupy! Teach-in!” Their actions, which included building seizures, express-way sit-downs, walk-outs, rallies, marches, and freedom schooling, varied from area to area but the connection of capitalism/war/racism/class war was made in every case I saw.

The organizers then called for similar actions on October 7th and a national conference in San Francisco in late October.

In the interim, the expert dis-organizers from the unions, the Democratic Party, and the usual sects showed up. That movement veered from its radical beginnings to the reactionary call, “Defend Public Education,” and mobilizing to get out the vote—rather like urging people into church where they know their children will be raped, where they are expected to tithe, but it’s all for the common good—some day.

In 2011, NEA and AFT co-sponsored, from the background, a “Save Our Schools” rally in Washington D.C. The rally cost \$150,000 dollars. Less than 5,000 people came. The quid pro quo was, “No attacks on Obama. No criticism of the wars,” In the silence, the payoff worked, but with only 5,000 people, the fake rally also showed the unions’ inability to organize anything of significance. What they do well is dis-organize, deflect, and deceive. They will fashion pacified areas where people are instruments of their own oppression.

In the 2014-2015 school year, a movement grew to “Opt-Out!” of high stakes standardized exams which are, after all, racist, anti-working class—sorting tools that are not used in the private schools where Arne Duncan sends his kids.

But few leaders of this action ever commented on the “Why?” of the exams, i.e., class and empire’s wars, so they built a movement that appealed to many upper middle class groups, but left they key questions—and answers—blank. The core matter, class consciousness, remains untaught and unlearned.

The opportunism that drives the “Opt-Out ‘Movement’” is perhaps best exemplified in historical context.

On July 3rd, 2000, National Education Association president, Bob Chase, spoke to the delegates at the NEA representative assembly: “(I) heard from more of you about standards and high-stakes tests than any other single issue since becoming president of the NEA...In some states, testing mania is quite literally devouring whole school systems like some education-eating bacteria.”³

Chase earlier promoted what he called, “New Unionism,” that is, the unity of unions and their members, government officials, and corporations, in the “national interest.” While there is

³ Chase comments are at Education Intelligence Agency by Mike Antonucci at <http://www.eiaonline.com/archives/20000703.htm>

nothing whatsoever new about company unionism, corporate state unionism, and the practice wasn't entirely new to NEA (American Federation of Teachers president, Al Shanker pursued the same plan a decade before Chase) the NEA president codified what became NEA practice ever since.

NEA officers went on to talk anti-testing while helping create all the foundations of all the tests and offering minimal surcease to school workers who tried to resist the test fetishes.

At base, it is more than possible to be racist, sexist, nationalist and brimming over with pro-war sentiment, and oppose the test which would probably make your kid even more stupid.

In the near future, the union tops will use the illusion of the importance of the presidential election to divert millions of dollars and thousands of student and teacher volunteer hours into greater support for the corporate state: what eminent political scientist Chalmers Johnson called, "fascism," nearly a decade ago. They will do everything they can to mask the fact of class war from above.⁴

What Value do Teachers, School Workers, Create?

Working within the school industry, which is itself a multi-billion operation, teachers engage an ideological battle, wittingly or not, that fashions the methods of thought, and thus actions, of the next generation of workers, soldiers, the middle-class buffer zones, defenders of elites like lawyers and military officers, and more. Can school workers act in concert with students, parents, vets, and others, to gain greater control of the value they create? There are hints, only hints, in the near past that they can: the Chicago teachers strike. In the now-distant past: the Students for a Democratic Society.

What can be done now?

People can be told that this is capitalism, rooted in exploited labor—and crises;

- that there is a connection between capitalism and imperialism—endless war;
- that the key reasons for the attacks on working people and schools are rooted in those two;
- the education agenda is a class war agenda and an imperialist war agenda;
- that the government is an executive committee and armed weapon of the ruling class--there they work out their differences, allowing us to choose which one of them will oppress us best;
- that the overwhelming majority of union bosses have chosen the other side in what is surely a class struggle--the union hacks gain from the wars and capital by supporting those wars, winning high pay and benefits, and betraying workers, they're a quisling force, junior partners to a very real ruling class;

⁴ More on US unionism here <http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/10/23/counterfeit-unionism-in-the-empire/>

- that students, not teachers nor profs, are the primary target of capitalist mis-education and history shows they can and will take leadership, organize, and fight back;
- that we can build a social movement that rejects the barriers US unionism creates, from job category to industry to race and sex and beyond.

The core issue of our time is the reality of endless war and rising inequality met by the potential of mass, active class conscious resistance.

We can fight to rescue education from the ruling classes although schools may be illusion mills, human munitions factories, or missions for capitalism—the vast majority of teachers its missionaries.

What upends that is a mass, class conscious social movement that shouts the words that tyrants fear most: Equality! Justice! Retribution!

Escalating direct action to control work sites, communities, and importantly, the military.

Everything negative is in place for a revolutionary transformation of society

(distrust of leaders, collapse of moral suasion from the top down, financial crises, lost wars, massive unemployment, booming inequality, imprisonment of only the poor, growing reliance on force to rule, eradication of civil liberties, corruption and gridlock of government at every level, etc.) What is missing is the passion, generalization, organization, commitment, and guiding ethic to make that change.

For a beginning, how about a one day, nation-wide, rank and file school strike, uniting all school workers, students and people of the communities: Monday, the day after the International Workers' holiday—Mayday? The idea is in the wind among some of the rank and file.

There is no reason to look around for approval. It won't come, top down. It is after all, just us.

Time is short. Justice demands organization.

Meanwhile, try those questions at the top in and out of class.

What defeats men with guns? Ideas!

Author

Rich Gibson, a co-founder of the education-based Rouge Forum, is Professor Emeritus, San Diego State University and a former professor of labor history and social studies at Wayne State University in Detroit. He can be reached at: rg@richgibson.com



Since 1997
ISSN 1097-3087
<http://clogic.eserver.org/>

Editors

Rich Gibson
San Diego State University

Martha Gimenez
University of Colorado (retired)

Gregory Meyerson
North Carolina A & T University

James Neilson
North Carolina A & T University

Joe Ramsey
Quincy College

E. Wayne Ross
University of British Columbia

David Siar
Winston-Salem State University

Advisory Group

Robert Albritton, *York University, Canada*

Theodore W. Allen, *Brooklyn Public Library (1919-2005)*

Crystal Bartolovich, *Syracuse University*

Rosalyn Baxandall, *State University of New York, Old Westbury*

Vladimir Bilenkin, *North Carolina State University*

Jamie Owen Daniel, *Director of Organizing and Development, UPI Local 4100, IFT/AFT/AFL-CIO*

Anthony Dawahare, *California State University, Northridge*

Greg Dawes, *North Carolina State University*

Teresa L. Ebert, *State University of New York, Albany*

Barbara Foley, *Rutgers University*

Marcial González, *University of California, Berkeley*

Rosemary Hennessy, *State University of New York, Albany*

Mike Hill, *State University of New York, Albany*

Peter Hitchcock, *Graduate Center-City University of New York*

Amitava Kumar, *Vassar College*

Neil Larsen, *University of California, Davis*

John McClendon, *Michigan State University*

Sophia A. McClennen, *Pennsylvania State University*

Andrew Milner, *Monash University, Melbourne*

Warren Montag, *Occidental College*

Bill V. Mullen, *University of Texas, San Antonio*

Richard Ohmann, *Wesleyan University*

Bertell Ollman, *New York University*

Vijay Prashad, *Trinity College*

Russell Reissing, *University of Toledo*

Modhumita Roy, *Tufts University*

E. San Juan, Jr., *Philippines Cultural Study Center*

Sean Sayers, *University of Kent*

Helena Sheehan, *Dublin City University*

David Slavin, *Westfield State College and Emory University*

Paul Smith, *George Mason University*

Alan Spector, *Purdue University Calumet*

Michael Sprinker, *State University of New York, Stony Brook (1950-1999)*

Carol A. Stabile, *University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee*

Richard Stahler-Sholk, *Eastern Michigan University*

Kenneth Surin, *Duke University*

Jeffrey Williams, *Carnegie Mellon University*

Richard Wolff, *University of Massachusetts, Amherst*

Michael Yates, *University of Pittsburgh, Johnstown (retired)*

Indexed in: MLA Bibliography, EBSCO Databases, MLA International Directory of Periodicals, International Progressive Publications Network. Digital preservation by LOCKSS at Stanford University.