

## Barbarism Rising: Detroit, Michigan, and the International War of the Rich on the Poor

Rich Gibson  
*San Diego State University*

Every Detroit teacher was fired in the fall of 2012.

Apparently, the nation did not notice. Hence, this story.

On March 26, 2013, 78% of the voting members of the Detroit Federation of Teachers ratified a contract which DFT president, Keith Johnson, called “terrible.”

The contract mirrors, but does not improve, an edict imposed on the union by an “Emergency Manager,” Roy Roberts, a black 74-year-old former manager at the failed General Motors corporation, once the most powerful company in the world, now commonly called Government Motors. Roberts was appointed by Michigan Governor Snyder, effectively setting aside all the key actions of the elected Detroit School Board—the third state takeover in 25 years. None of them repaired the school system.

The DFT contract, though, does allow the union to continue to collect dues, the pacified labor of its members sold to Roberts for the term of the contract. DFT president Johnson will continue to receive his \$142,000 salary as the rank and file accept another set of wage and benefit concessions.

Concessions, DFT members should have learned, don’t save jobs. Beginning in 1996, the DFT made concession on concession until, in the fall of 2012, every Detroit public school teacher was effectively fired and forced to reapply for a position. Hundreds of them, including teachers with 20 years and more seniority, one of them a former DFT vice president, have never been recalled.<sup>1</sup>

Even before Roberts arrived, Detroit Public Schools had been shifted into a “Good School/Bad School” system, somewhat parallel to the “Good Bank/Bad Bank” plan of the bailout days. Good schools get funded. Bad schools organize decay.

GM, at nearly the time of Robert’s birth, was faced down in the Great Flint Strike of 1937 by the militant, class-conscious, United Auto Workers union – seizing buildings, fighting

---

<sup>1</sup> Interview with former DFT vice-president Greg Johnson, March 27, 2013.



back cops and troops. The first industrial contract was won by direct action. Where is the resistance today?<sup>2</sup>

We shall see how the DFT, UAW, Johnson, Roberts, and the union movement reflect one another as the world, Detroit, and Michigan, writhe in a rising tide of barbarism—booming inequality, militarized mysticism, and a real promise of endless war—that can only be combated by the potential of a mass, activist, class conscious movement which connects reason to power—for equality and justice.

The parent body of the DFT, the American Federation of Teachers, was among the first, along with the UAW, to openly redefine the relationship of unions, their members, and employers. Once defined best by the term “contradiction,” both unions at the top adopted what once AFT president Al Shanker, and later National Education Association presidents, called “New Unionism.” The UAW was more direct: “Partners in Production.” Long before the 2008-9 bailouts, the union tops joined government officials and corporate bosses to declare their unity, not noting that meant the rank and file, and most of the rest of the world, would be on the other side.<sup>3</sup>

The DFT now has but 4,000 members, one-third its size a decade ago, while the UAW looks at the same fate, but about 25% of its size in the union’s heyday. Wages for Detroit school workers, like auto workers, have collapsed while, in the schools and the factories, new hires work for half what the more senior employees earn.

The Detroit Public Schools were once heralded as the finest urban school system in the US, serving more than 299,000 students. Those schools, like all capitalist schools, were never truly public but always segregated by class and race, even within the city. Depending primarily on birth-class, students were taught different “facts,” by teachers (whose dress differed) using different methods, in distinctly different facilities.<sup>4</sup>

Today, the divide is even more glaring. The Detroit Federation of Teachers, in 90% black Detroit, is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, the smaller of the two national teachers’ unions, representing, for the most part, urban areas.

Suburban Michigan, overwhelmingly white, is represented by the Michigan Education Association, and linked to the larger National Education Association. The racial divide between DFT and MEA hasn’t been demolished by the union leaders, and now it’s being used to demolish their members. MEA stood aside and let Detroit rot, doing nothing. Detroit’s conditions, and management demands for concessions, spread throughout the state—an injury to one preceding an injury to all, a slogan too dangerous for today’s labor bosses.

---

<sup>2</sup> For a complete description of the Great Flint Strike and the end game for the UAW, see “The Torment and Demise of the United Autoworkers Union, retrieved from <http://clogic.eserver.org/2006/gibson.html> - note32

<sup>3</sup> David Selden in *The Teacher Rebellion*, (Howard University Press, 2003), describes the turn to the right in the AFT and its relationship to labor imperialism. Jack Scott, in *Yankee Trade Unions Go Home* (New Star Books, 1978), made the earlier case. Kim Scipes in *The AFL-CIO’s Secret War Against Developing Country Workers: Solidarity or Sabotage?* (Lexington Books, 2010) brought things up to date.

<sup>4</sup> Mirel, J. (1999). *The rise and fall of an urban school system: Detroit 1907-81*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

The same conditions prevail nationwide. Eighty-four percent of the US teaching force is white. Minority teachers mostly remain located in the most urban areas while suburban school kids are taught by a white teaching force. The national school system is as segregated as it was at the time of Brown vs. the Board of Education; white students being the most fully segregated body.<sup>5</sup>

Not too long ago, most youth could project a somewhat better life than their parents. No more. The false promise of the Obama ruse, “Anyone can make it,” is statistically shattered by the fact that the generation exiting school will do worse than their elders, probably much worse.

It follows that the commonplace call to “Save Public Schools” is rooted in myth. It’s a demand to more deeply empower what is now a full-blown corporate state, promoting a unity which never existed, insisting on a tax increase that will invariably be aimed at those working people who still have jobs, and, importantly, it is a fountain of school worker opportunism: “Save my job, pay me, and I will implement the national curriculum, proctor racist high-stakes exams, and be silent about the militarization of every level of schooling.”

Inherent in “Save Public Schools” is the nationalist view that we all share a common goal to educate all kids in a democratic society. That’s never been the case. It is, though, a good way to make a war popular: us versus them.

Better: Rescue Education from the Ruling Classes!

“Save Public Schools” is usually followed by: “Stop Privatization;” targeting charter schools.

But privatization misreads reality.

The education project is an imperfect, but true, merger of the corporate, government, and military levels of US government—as were the bi-partisan bailouts of 2008 and the current bi-partisan wars.<sup>6</sup>

Nearly all charter schools are, in fact, publicly funded, subject to the public—with corporatized regulations.

In three words: corporate state fascism. It cannot be made gentle or more democratic. Why offer this perverse structure a cover of legitimacy and more power still?<sup>7</sup>

Today, in fully segregated Detroit, there are less than 55,000 students. A charter system, mostly owned by private operations but funded with public money, holds another 55,000—if internal DPS figures can be trusted. Typically, they cannot. In DPS, for example, every employee at every level has had an interest in inflating attendance numbers. In capitalist schools, every child actually in a schoolroom represents a dollar value.

---

<sup>5</sup> Feistritzer, C. E. (2011). *Profile of teachers in the U.S., 2011*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Information. Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/media/pot2011final-blog.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> For an elaboration of the education agenda as a war agenda, Gibson, R., & Ross, E. W. (2009). The education agenda is a war agenda. *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor*, 16, pp. 31-52. Retrieved from: (<http://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/workplace/article/view/182226>)

<sup>7</sup> Gibson, R. (1999). What is fascism? *Third World Traveler*. Retrieved from [http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Fascism/What\\_Is\\_Fascism\\_Gibson.html](http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Fascism/What_Is_Fascism_Gibson.html)

Corruption and incompetence ran rampant at every level of public life in Detroit for a century, but it hurt more as wealth left the city.

Days before the DFT contract ratification, 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.”<sup>8</sup>

A little more than a decade earlier, one of Detroit’s previous Takeover bosses, Kenneth Burnley, made the commodification of students quite clear at the first board meeting of 2000: “One of my key goals it to demonstrate that the real consumers of our schools are not students, but small-factory owners like Ms. Bravo here, our co-board member, who needs workers to show up on time and consistently in her plant on the southwest side.”<sup>9</sup>

In the midst of World War I, a general demanded that the schools become “human munitions factories.” That capitalist schools serve a capitalist state is key to grasping the war project at hand.<sup>10</sup>

We can restate that the education agenda is a war agenda from another standpoint: The school unions’ relationship with The National Endowment for Democracy and Education International. NED is a well-recognized CIA front while EI is the inheritor of the CIA sponsored international teacher unions.

Leaders from both school unions retire to Education International where their salaries are not disclosed. But NEA’s ex-president, Reg Weaver is there. He was paid \$686,949 for his last year in office, in a union where many teachers live in house trailers. Former NEA president Mary Hatwood Futrell is at EI. Current NEA president Dennis Van Roekel (\$465,000 a year and an expense account he can live on) will surely be there. He’ll join Ed McElroy who “serves on the board of directors of Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, Education International, and ThanksUSA. McElroy is a member of the board of directors for the National Endowment for Democracy (NED)—a private, nonprofit organization created to strengthen democratic institutions around the world through nongovernmental efforts.”<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Council on Foreign Relations. (2013, March). CFR-Sponsored independent task force on U.S. education reform and national security. Retrieved from [http://i.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/Education\\_TFR\\_Summary\\_Recommendations.pdf](http://i.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/Education_TFR_Summary_Recommendations.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Gibson, R. (2000, October). The struggle for hope in Detroit. *Substance News*. Retrieved from <http://richgibson.com/struggle.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Hochschild, A. (2011). *To end all wars*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, p. 67.

<sup>11</sup> Source: <http://www.aft.org/about/leadership/mcelroy.cfm>

The vacillating reactionary, current for-profit press and education “reform” favorite, Diane Ravitch served at the NED and is still saluting the flag and God-blessing America with the best of them.<sup>12</sup>

Labor imperialism, theoretically propelled by the idea that US workers will do better if the world’s workers do worse, and in practice the AFL-CIO’s backing of CIA-corporate adventures all over the world, may have served a relatively tiny number of US workers for a short time, but at the end of the day, it inevitably failed.

Lenin described the payoff a century ago:

The receipt of high monopoly profits by the capitalists in one of the numerous branches of industry, in one of the numerous countries, etc., makes it economically possible for them to bribe certain sections of the workers, and for a time a fairly considerable minority of them, and win them to the side of the bourgeoisie of a given industry or given nation against all the others. The intensification of antagonisms between imperialist nations for the division of the world increases this urge. And so there is created that bond between imperialism and opportunism.... As a matter of fact the extraordinary rapidity and the particularly revolting character of the development of opportunism is by no means a guarantee that its victory will be durable: the rapid growth of a painful abscess on a healthy body can only cause it to burst more quickly and thus relieve the body of it. The most dangerous of all in this respect are those who do not wish to understand that the fight against imperialism is a sham and humbug unless it is inseparably bound up with the fight against opportunism.<sup>13</sup>

The lack of international solidarity of working class people is destroying the lives of workers all over the world, and the members of the AFL-CIO as well. That the class war is also a classroom war is, due to de-industrialization, a significant particular, developing world-wide.

Inside the USA, both school unions’ leaders participated in the construction of the Bush No Child Left Behind Act, the Obama move of Race to the Top, and now the nationally regimented curricula, the Common Core standards which will redouble the frenzy around high-stakes testing—and merit pay. Elites know why they have schools, if the work force never considers it.

School workers produce value in capital’s markets. When educators and kids arrive in school, they confront a billion dollar business, more powerful than unorganized kids and teachers. This is part of the answer to the critical question that is rarely asked: Why have school? Educators shape the next generation of workers and military volunteers, labor power, and they generate hope, real or false; a lynchpin of social order, control. People in pacified areas become instruments of their own oppression.

---

<sup>12</sup> Gibson, R. (2010, March 23). Against Ravitch. *Substance News*. Retrieved from <http://www.substancenews.net/articles.php?page=1255>

<sup>13</sup> Lenin, V. I. (1916). *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*. Retrieved from at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/ch10.htm>

In 2012, Michigan labor, the AFL-CIO and NEA combined, placing a bill on the state ballot to make collective bargaining a legal right. They were reacting to a legislative right-to-work bill the Governor said he would not sign. In effect, the bill sought to win by a vote what had never been won in that manner—rather, victory through building seizures a la Flint in 1937, strikes, and related job actions.

In an atmosphere in which unions had proved themselves to be concession machines on the one hand, and gobblers of the public treasury on the other, Michigan electors rejected the measure. Seeing that, Governor Snyder signed the right-to-work bill, which became law in 2013.

Instead of a vote, why not build for a statewide strike?

The last thing a labor leader in the US (C. Wright Mills called them “whores of power” as long ago as 1948<sup>14</sup>) wants is a mass of truly class conscious workers who are ready to take direct action in order to control their work places on a daily basis. On the one hand, if that was the case, the labor leaders would have nothing to sell the bosses, i.e., labor peace would not be theirs to peddle, but democratically controlled by the members and, on the other hand, such a conscious mass of people would never tolerate labor leaders who make four and five times the wages of average rank and filers, live completely different lives, more in common with employers.

### **An Interlude to Address the Forgery that is US Unionism**

With respect to nearly anyone who is trying to fight back in our current context, I differ from what most people think about the current state of US unionism.

Of course, none of that can be split away from an analysis of our current circumstances: the rapid emergence of fascism as a popular movement.

It does not have to be that way.

Another scenario is possible if we take on the hard tasks of the immediate future. One of those tasks is to determine the role of the unions and the relationship of radicals to them.

What follows may, I hope, upend unionite (those unionist true believers) thinking.

Labor bosses at all levels are the nearest and most vulnerable of workers’ enemies. Rather than “move unions to the left,” better, build a mass class conscious movement to transcend the “system of capital.”

Why does that make better sense?

- Every major labor leader in the US adopts the corporate-state view of unity of Labor Bosses, Government, and Corporations in the national interest. These are hardly “labor” unions in the strict sense of the word. They are the Empire’s unions. They are the unions of what now is, surely, the US Corporate State.
- It follows that the Labor Bosses deceive people from the moment they join a union, the key lie being that none of labor’s elites believe that workers and employers have contradictory interests—the very reason most people agree to send them money.

---

<sup>14</sup> Mills, C. Wright (1948). *The new men of power*. University of Illinois, p. 169.

- The remarkable salaries of US Labor Bosses come directly from the fruits of US imperialism and war. They know that. They have been war hawks for decades, using the unions to promote the Empire's desires. As noted above, they sit on the boards of the Social Democrats USA, the National Endowment for Democracy (above), The Albert Shanker Institute, The George Meany Center, and other fronts for the Central Intelligence Agency. Following the history of the American Federation of Labor, which sought to organize white men into craft (skill-based) unions, and exclude most of the working class, the international operations of the AFL-CIO seek to demolish indigenous workers' struggles so that, in theory, American workers will do better. Clearly, this failed.
- Union tops trade a pacified or disciplined work force for money from employers. That is the nucleus of "collective bargaining." Employers collect dues (check off) on behalf of the union, send it to the union heads, while the labor tops promise labor peace for the duration of the contract. That is precisely the traditional exchange. Labor heads use violence to "protect the contract," because employers can sue them if the rank and file wildcats, unauthorized strikes within the contract's time period. Henry Ford fought unions for years. When he finally came to understand this devil's deal, he said, "You mean I'm the union's banker? Sign me on!" Today, Ford management organizes Ford plants on behalf of the United Autoworkers Union. The upshot is, labor leaders (1) condition the work force for passivity, (2) urge members to think of the union as a vending machine, (3) consider the treasury, and thus mis-leaders own jobs, to be more important than the interest of the rank and file members—the union becomes a bank.
- When labor tops cry, "Save Collective Bargaining," they really mean, "Save My Job and Pension!" The last 40 years of labor history show they are willing to concede everything the members have (wages, hours, working conditions, pensions) to management, often under the guise of "Save Our American Industry," but what they really want is to preserve their money.
- The vast majority of unions are corrupt and hierarchical at the core, usually mimicking the structure of the employers. So, those seeking to reform those unions are not learning lessons to transcend capitalism, but rather they learn every opportunist and corrupt maneuver that has kept US "unionism" afloat when it should have been put to death years ago.
- When one gets close to "reforming" a US union, one will face serious violence. That will come from not only the union bosses, but also their allies in the courts, the cops, joint union/Boss firings, intelligence, and the mob—one or all. Those unprepared for that should, at the least, be forewarned.
- The unions accept without question the multiple divisions of labor that, in part, lay at the base of the capitalist system. The unions divide people far more than unite people.
- The "Labor Movement" is full of police, prison guards, and others dedicated to the promulgation of the violence that is the stick behind capital's carrots (vanishing fast).<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Ridgeway, J., & Cassella, E. (2013). Big labor's lock em up mentality. *Mother Jones*. Retrieved from <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/02/biggest-obstacle-prison-reform-labor-unions> (Note the similarity of the fake "public versus privatized" prison system and the same bogus clash about schools.)

- Other labor unions are so mobbed up that it is impossible to distinguish the labor leaders from the gangsters—an indicator of the relationship of those who do crime, and the cops who often help them organize it. In this case, the relationship has a third party, the members, who are thrice robbed: by the cops, by the gangsters, and by fetish that is their union, but is not a union.<sup>16</sup>
- As stated above but to reiterate, the last thing the Labor Movement and its aristocrats want is a mass of class conscious workers who are willing to fight in solidarity to control their work places and communities. That would mean the Labor Bosses would have nothing to sell to the Big Bosses (labor peace/no strike clauses for check-off). Instead, the ability to control the work place becomes confused with ability to control the union, which is often a contradiction. There is no way to overcome this structural and psychological poisoning of the well.
- The Labor Movement is not about to teach people Grand Strategy (overcome capital), strategy (how to study concrete conditions about how capital works in specific places and make broad plans to fit the Grand Strategy) and tactics (sit down strikes, mutinies, etc.) not only because the Labor Movement bitterly opposes that, but also because there is nearly no one left in Labor who even knows how to fake it.
- The “Labor Movement” is not a movement and it is not where most people who work are. In fact, the overwhelming majority of people who are likely to be early change agents are not in unions: soldiers and students. To lure them into some bogus kind of US unionism, or nearly any other “unorganized” person, is just to add a layer of enemies for them. Why do that?
- Yes, some people are in unions and those who are serious about transforming capitalism need to be in those unions, attacking the leadership, the corruption, the hierarchies, the betrayals, the theft of treasuries, etc. But, they need one toe in and nine out.
- There are, nearly, no progressive lessons to be learned from the Labor Movement, except when the rank and file fights the union—with the goal of overturning it entirely. The IWW notion that “The working class and the employing class have nothing in common” applies to workers and their union leaders as well.
- Repeated efforts to reform “Labor” have either been silly like Stanley Aronowitz and others, “Scholars, Artists and Writers for Social Justice,” etc., or simply failed, if pretty heroically: Labor Notes.

The emergence of fascism will not mirror its predecessor movements in precise ways. However, if that were to happen, the US union offices would be where people would be instructed to pick up their brown-shirts.

It is well past time to get beyond the genteel idea that AFL-CIO president, Richard Trumka, the picture of narcissism, is going to be “moved left,” or voted out of office, just as it is well beyond the time to grasp what capitalist democracy is: capital trumping whatever democracy may be at every turn today.

---

<sup>16</sup> Fitch, R. (2006). *Solidarity for sale: How corruption destroyed the labor movement and undermined America's promise*. New York: Public Affairs Press.



## End of the Unionite Interlude

Simultaneous to the issuance of the Council on Foreign Relations report, the Michigan legislature passed a bill that would spread “Emergency Manager” school powers throughout the state in an Education Achievement Authority. The EM is to identify and take over up to 50 state schools, those in the bottom five percentile on test scores. The school workers may be effectively fired, as in Detroit, and, if re-hired, have no collective bargaining rights. New hires would be placed outside the Michigan retirement system.

The Detroit Federation of Teachers, since 1997, did fight back. The members launched both authorized and wildcat strikes—the latter led by radical dissident Steve Conn, a teacher at Detroit’s Cass Tech High School. Conn led the 1999 wildcat, initiating it by shouting, “All in favor of the strike walk over here,” in a mass meeting in Cobo Hall. At least 90% of the members moved.<sup>17</sup>

The DFT members struck again in 2006. Here’s one of the more famous quotes by a teacher: “We asked for nothing and won less.” Time and again, DFT leaders lied about the nature of the contracts put up for ratification, until well after the votes were counted.<sup>18</sup>

In each instance, the members were defeated, in the main, by their own elected leaders. In contract after contract, the DFT leaders, from John Elliot to Keith Johnson, urged concession on concession. Conn, who I believe was robbed of the DFT presidency in a fraudulent vote count in 2011, was “suspended” from membership for months—sidelined in 2012. He’s been silent since.<sup>19</sup>

On the management side, a low was reached in 2010 when General School Superintendent Teresa Gueyser complained that Otis Mathis, school board president and functional illiterate, “repeatedly fondled himself,” in front of her. Mathis was removed but not before current school board member Reverend (changed his name, not a “reverend”) David Murray complained, “Well men do have these urges. He’s a young man. That’s just the way it is.” Murray had his children removed from his care by Protective Services. And, he was re-elected.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> See: Gibson, R. (1999). The theory and practice of constructing hope. *Cultural Logic*, 2(2). Retrieved from <http://clogic.eserver.org/2-2/gibson.html>

<sup>18</sup> Gibson, R. (2006, September 26). Lessons from the class struggle: The Detroit teachers strike. *Counterpunch*. Retrieved from <http://www.counterpunch.org/2006/09/26/the-detroit-teachers-strike-2006/>

<sup>19</sup> Steve Conn is a leader in By Any Means Necessary (BAMN), a front for a Trotskyist “revolutionary” organization. That group is, fair disclosure, led to a certain degree by my former friend and lawyer, George Washington. They both stopped interacting with me about five years ago, apparently because I wrote about them in mildly critical ways in *Counterpunch* and *Substance News*. Conn’s retreat from resistance was described to me by several of his friends and colleagues: “He said ‘it’s over.’”

<sup>20</sup> “Fondled” and more of Murray’s comments here: Strauss, V. (2010, June 18). Detroit school board head quits after complaint alleging inappropriate behavior. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <http://voices.washingtonpost.com/answer-sheet/detroit-school-board-head-quit.html>. Mathis’ literacy problems are described here: Strauss, V. (2010, March 11). Should this man lead a school system? *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <http://voices.washingtonpost.com/answer-sheet/writing/should-this-man-lead-a-school.html>

From the material angle, Detroit's Takeover School boards, imposed by a succession of Governors beginning in the mid-nineties with former Wayne State University president David Adamany, did nothing to improve DPS by their own standard: test scores. School reform in the absence of social reform fails: think devastating poverty.<sup>21</sup>

The Takeover leaders did build a dozen new schools in a district losing ten thousand students a year—and completely refurbished others, to the delight of suburban developers.

Now, the new schools sit empty, stripped by “Scrappers,” a respected local profession. When the district put fences around the empty buildings, scrappers took the fences.

In 2012, Arne Duncan, education attack dog for the demagogue Obama, called Detroit “the worst school system in the country.” It's a tough competition for the bottom, especially in Michigan, what with Flint, Benton Harbor, and other cities destroyed much like Detroit, but smaller.

When the Michigan right-to-work law banned dues check-off in 2012, DFT's Keith Johnson complained in the union's newspaper, the “Detroit Teacher,” that 86% of the teachers quit and wouldn't re-sign.

Only a subsequent judge's injunction now kept the DFT financially afloat, a double-edged indicator—the courts want the union to exist since it has so helped heap concession on concession on the work force (10% pay cuts last year, gutted health benefits, etc., and this year, the contract imposed by the Emergency Financial Manager—EFM—even worse).

Interviewed in late 2012, Joel Scott, a former 15-year Cass Tech teacher, said, “Keith and AFT's boss, Randi Weingarten, killed their own golden goose. What were they thinking? They must have known that even the last contract would kill the union, and now this one did. I think they must believe that the end is coming; they'll grab whatever they can, keep deceiving people, and run away at the last moment. They're the flip side of finance capitalists.”

Scott went on, “The real tragedy is for the kids and the rank and file members. Detroit kids will get doubly mis-educated, learn again not to like to learn, and the members are going to lose homes, after all their sacrifices.”

Now in Detroit, Scott says, “It's a vampire city. All the lights on Warren are off; pitch darkness. (Warren is a major street on the west side). Nobody is going to send their kids to a failed Detroit school. That will be the end of the system. It's done.”

Emergency Manager Roberts projects a gloomy DPS future—but brighter than probably reality. He believes there will be 38,488 students by 2015. His predecessor, Robert Bobb, a Broad Academy graduate, paid \$450,000 a year, projected 58,000, but the slide continues while false hope in shape shifter forms is dangled before the kids and parents of the city—perhaps in real hopes of preventing another urban uprising.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> For an earlier (October 2000) examination of the Takeover Boards see: Gibson, R. (2000, October). The struggle for hope in Detroit. *Substance News*. Retrieved from <http://richgibson.com/struggle.htm>

<sup>22</sup> For an outline of the convoluted methods of Bobb's pay and The Broad Foundation supplements see: Robert Bobb, Broad Superintendents Academy Class of 2005. <http://thebroadreport.blogspot.com/2010/07/robert-bobb-broad-superintendents.html>

The steady loss of students places the school system, like the city, on the edge of bankruptcy.

The ongoing sorting to the suburbs and to charters means that 20% of DPS kids are in special education, requiring extra finances the system does not have.

In December 2012, the US Department of Education issued a report saying but 7% of DPS kids in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade were “proficient in reading.” Only 4% were found proficient in math.<sup>23</sup>

Schools, as everyone from the Skillman Foundation to for-profit reporters to me knew, are the key to the city’s survival. Detroit needed young people with kids, central to recreating the city’s tax system, filling the empty homes to overcome the scary crime rate and to make Detroit truly livable, as it was, a delight, 40 years ago.

In the nineties, several literacy studies reported that nearly 50% of Detroiters are functionally illiterate. That is not my experience, not at that level, and having lived there half of my adult life, I say it’s a stretch, but I’ll agree the adult educational levels are more than troubling. A recent study concluded that half of Michigan residents read below the 6<sup>th</sup> grade level. In many cases, four generations of Detroiters never had a job. Unemployment among city youth is well over 50%.

Crime grows. Rapes and robberies were up 23% in the first months of 2013. Murders often do not get investigated: statistics are murky. Officially, murders were up about 10% at 379. A top official said, “We have lost respect for life in Detroit.”<sup>24</sup>

Two-thirds of the buildings in the city, public and private, are vacant, the Mayor making unfulfilled promises year after year to bulldoze thousands of them.

An estimated twenty thousand to fifty thousand wild dogs roam Detroit streets.<sup>25</sup>

Like the schools, Mayor Bing (yes, the suburban basket-baller) wants to divide the city into Good Area/Bad Area zones. Pockets of the city are still peopled. Bing hopes to force those in areas that are mostly vacated to move into the more densely populated areas. But homes in Detroit are nearly worthless. Who will pay the moving expenses?

Detroit city government itself was taken over by an Emergency Manager on March 25, 2013. The city, like the school system, is broke—in every conceivable way.

Former Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick and his father were convicted, in March, of a variety of felony embezzlement charges. Kilpatrick and many in his utterly corrupt administration were graduates of prestigious Cass Tech High. The former police chief is in jail. Monica Conyers, wife of Congressman John, was just released. The chief of homicide has been charged with corruption and perjury. Stephen Hill, the former risk management specialist of DPS, was

---

<sup>23</sup> Reading and math proficiency <http://thebroadreport.blogspot.com/2010/07/robert-bobb-broad-superintendents.html>

<sup>24</sup> A neighborhood crime map <http://www.neighborhoodscout.com/mi/detroit/crime/>

<sup>25</sup> On wild dogs, see: Binelli, M. (2012, March 20). City of strays: Detroit’s epidemic of 50,000 abandoned dogs: As the city failed and its people fled, the animals took over. *Rolling Stone*. Retrieved from <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/city-of-strays-detroits-epidemic-of-50-000-wild-dogs-20120320> (Binelli is also author of *Detroit city the place to be: The afterlife of an American metropolis*, Metropolitan Books, 2012)

convicted of submitting more than \$3 million in fraudulent bills to the poverty ridden system. Nine other DPS employees are awaiting trial or sentencing. City Council President Charles Pugh had his home foreclosed.<sup>26</sup>

The city has not produced a single honest and competent top leader since the death of popular radical lawyer Ken Cockrell Sr., more than twenty years ago: 1989.

Emergency Detroit Manager Orr is a bankruptcy specialist who worked on the auto bankruptcies. Many, probably most, see him using the weapon he plainly declared he held: a bankruptcy that could wipe out contracts, wages, benefits, and pensions, a la the auto bailout which cut auto workers pay by nearly half, with the UAW's blessing and their cheers for the demagogue, Obama.

One way rulers stay in power is to choose and back the opposition's leaders. Orr promised to keep City Council members', and Bing's, pay at current levels. A hug-fest ensued.

Poverty hustler Jesse Jackson quickly arrived in Detroit while the local preachers mounted a fake resistance. Mysticism, on the rise worldwide, will not solve Detroit's crisis. Proof? The counterfeit Arab Spring.

Other than the courageous fall 2012 Chicago Teachers Union strike, which has profound problems with its cries to "Save Public Schooling," and "Save Our (sic) Schools," an ideological cul-de-sac which fails to address the whole of the problem. Silent about the wars as well, there has been virtually no resistance from the US school worker force, the most unionized people in the US.

The absence of resistance has historical roots. Teachers are typically conservative, seeing themselves as agents of the state. Other than days very early in the Russian Revolution and the teachers of Oaxaca, Mexico, recent history suggests that teachers will be volunteer fascists, as were their organizations in Nazi Germany and fascist Japan.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, even after four years of bashing from Democrat Arne Duncan, the personification of George W. Bush's education program on hyper-speed, more than 95% of the 9,000 members of the NEA, rank and file teachers assembled in the yearly convention, voted to endorse an Obama second term. By the same percentage, they voted not to discuss the bi-partisan wars, an indication of the power of the empire's bribe.<sup>28</sup>

What explains the absence of resistance in poor and working communities? Surely, there have been false flags. The Occupy movement, declaring neither leaders nor ideas, occupied

---

<sup>26</sup> On the Hill conspiracy, see: The United States Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Michigan. (2011, September 19). Former Detroit public school officials sentenced. Retrieved from [http://www.justice.gov/usao/mie/news/2011/2011\\_9\\_19\\_shill.html](http://www.justice.gov/usao/mie/news/2011/2011_9_19_shill.html)

<sup>27</sup> For the Russian resistance, see: Seregny, S. J. (1989). *Russian teachers and peasant revolution*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. For the complicity of teachers with fascism, see, for example, Mann, E. (1939). *School for Barbarians, education under the Nazis*. New York: Modern Age Books.

<sup>28</sup> The NEA Representative Assembly report, part 3 of 4, is here: Gibson, R. (2012, July 9). NEA Convention report, day three. *Substance News*. Retrieved from <http://www.substancenews.net/articles.php?page=3392&section=Article>

nothing significant, was swept away by “hope and change!” and some minimal, if coordinated, police violence.

More:

- The initial anti-war marches involved hundreds of thousands of people early in 2002, yet they have vanished, evaporated. Why?
- The massive Mayday Immigrant Rights marches have been repeated, but only under nationalist and religious banners as they begin to disappear.
- The anti-tuition hike actions, mainly in California but all over the US, were attacked, and seduced—gone.
- Wisconsin and Michigan were farcical electoral moves and both states are now right-to-work bastions by popular votes—where once unionism originated.
- The Arab Spring, posed in the corporate press as a series of revolutions, became the Muslim Brotherhood’s Summer.

Consumerism plays a role. With two-thirds of the US economy based on debt-driven consumption, American society is not likely to produce the solidarity built into industrial work places. Rather, the buyer faces the seller, at odds, each playing to get the better of the other.

Spectacles: the best in the Southwest being the annual Miramar (north San Diego) Air Show’s conclusion: The Wall of Fire. There, 250,000 people, adults holding babies aloft for a good view, witness a massive series of explosions, not merely a wall of fire, but burning napalm. Nobody seems to remember the burning children of Vietnam, echoing Chalmers Johnson’s thought: “Americans know so little history they cannot connect cause and effect.” Johnson predicted, before his death, the Drones would fly at home. Now they do.<sup>29</sup>

Militarism: war means work, and now the military poses its mission as “a job, not an adventure,” as it moves to recruit women for combat because American men are too uneducated, too addicted, too convicted, and too unfit to fill the numbers needed for cannon fodder.

Nationalism. Racism. Sexism. The usual suspects added in do not sum up to a good explanation of the mass hysterical conversion crisis that produces a world of barbarians, top to bottom, Obama to Hillary to Kerry to Afghanistan’s Karzai to Morsi of Egypt to the guardians of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo and the lowliest 14-year-old suicide bomber purchased by the Pakistan Taliban, or Al-Qaeda, for \$4,000.<sup>30</sup>

With many people of the world rejecting Soviet-style socialism, never much more than capitalism with a party at the top promising benevolence in the distant future—which was all of socialism—and either rejecting, or failing to grasp, the West’s twins, capitalist exploitation and imperialist war, the project noted at the outset, connecting reasoned class consciousness to unified power for equality and justice, is more urgent than ever, and surely more interesting than the shopping decade of the nineties.

---

<sup>29</sup> From my interview of Chalmers Johnson (May 4, 2004) in regard to his book, *Blowback: The costs and consequences of American empire*. New York: Holt. 2000.

<sup>30</sup> Rashid, A. (2012). *Pakistan on the brink*. New York: Viking, p. 183. (\$4,000 suicide bomber.)

More united than ever by systems of capital—transportation, communications, technology, science, exploration, marketing and more—the world is as divided as ever through nationalism, racism, sexism, mysticism, and the rise of fascism as a popular movement in varying forms—picking sides perhaps for World War III.

Even so, school workers are situated at the centripetal organizing point of North America’s de-industrialized life. They do not have to operate the school-to-war pipeline. Indeed, if they begin to recognize the contradiction between why they think they are there, and why elites want them there, perhaps those educators can rescue education from the ruling classes—then help to expose the false mandate from heaven that offers dishonest and incompetent leaders legitimacy they do not deserve.

How dishonest and incompetent – and unfit to rule?

- The 2008 financial collapse—foreseen by nobody holding power—bank bailouts that can never be reversed;
- In response to the collapse, the government as an executive committee and armed weapon of the rich was finalized;
- Inside their committee, elites worked out their differences – finance vs. industrial capital, for example, or finance vs. finance (JP Morgan vs. Lehman) and industry vs. industry (Ford vs. GM and Chrysler), and then they turned on the populace: GM and Chrysler wages cut nearly in half under five-year, no-strike contracts—bankers were never prosecuted, promised to give loans and not take bonuses—now they don’t give loans and they take bonuses;
- Two lost wars based on lies (Iraq and Afghanistan/Pakistan—when guerrillas fight you to a standstill, they win) and more losing to come as the US tries to manipulate rising Islam without taking on religion at its core—not saying, “people make gods, gods do not make people”;
- Unprecedented secrecy of all government operations under Obama and the continued prosecution of Bradley Manning and other whistle-blowers;<sup>31</sup>
- Inequality at levels that cause shivers among elites with social mobility not just frozen, but mobility downward;<sup>32</sup>
- Dissolute and inept leaders like General Allen and General Petraeus—think Paula Broadwell and the Kelley twins;<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Beyond Manning, see for example the CIA prosecution of their former agent, John Kiriakou described by Steve Coll in “The spy who said too much,” *The New Yorker* (April 1, 2013), retrieved from [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/04/01/130401fa\\_fact\\_coll](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/04/01/130401fa_fact_coll)

<sup>32</sup> See for example the Council on Foreign Relations: Mueller, J. (2013, March/April). Capitalism and inequity: What the right and the left get wrong. *Foreign Affairs*. Retrieved from <http://www.cfr.org/economics/capitalism-inequality/p30099>; and Markovich, S. J. (2012, September 17). CFR Backgrounder: The income inequality debate. Retrieved from <http://www.cfr.org/united-states/income-inequality-debate/p29052>

<sup>33</sup> Voorhees, J. (Nov. 15, 2012) Your guide to the Petraeus scandal’s cast – Now with photos. *Slate*. Retrieved from

- 900,000 military veterans on wait-lists for disability benefits, stalled for years;<sup>34</sup>
- More and more use of force over persuasion worldwide, and in the US dissolving the legitimacy of the regime;
- Grotesque nepotism probably best personified by the Bush/Clinton/Kennedy dynasties;
- Republicans and Democrats united on bailouts, wars, torture, but unable to produce a budget to fund their schemes, currently called “sequestration”;
- A profiteers’ war on the earth itself from the BP Gulf oil spill to the death of 1.2 million Chinese due to air pollution,<sup>35</sup>
- A stock market that has once again split the finance capital head from the industrial production body, the Dow at 14,500 at this writing,<sup>36</sup>
- In schools, the fanatical focus on testing for obedience and loyalty to a regimented, Core, Curriculum, led to a culture of fear and dishonesty, cheating, upending any pretense of an educational project.<sup>37</sup>

If there is no legitimacy crisis, why?

The core issue of our time is the reality of the promise of perpetual war, booming inequality and armed mysticism met by the potential of a mass activist, class conscious movement.

What defeats men with guns?

---

[http://www.slate.com/blogs/the\\_slatest/2012/11/13/david\\_petraeus\\_paula\\_broadwell\\_jill\\_kelley\\_a\\_list\\_of\\_who\\_s\\_w\\_ho\\_in\\_the\\_petraeus.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slatest/2012/11/13/david_petraeus_paula_broadwell_jill_kelley_a_list_of_who_s_w_ho_in_the_petraeus.html) Note also the dismissal of General McChrystal, Petraeus protégé and helicopter General caused by Michael Hastings article in Rolling Stone: Hastings, M. (2010, June 22) The runaway general. *Rolling Stone*. Retrieved from <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/the-runaway-general-20100622> Petraeus is the primary author of the US military’s “Counter-insurgency Manual,” in which he completely misunderstood counter-insurgency, thinking he could take a template from Iraq (failing now) and plunk it down on Afghanistan (failing now).

<sup>34</sup> “Currently, 900,000 veterans are waiting for their disability claims to be processed. The average wait is 273 days”: Adams, L. (2013, March 30). Nearly 1 million American Veterans waiting on benefits. WPSD. Retrieved from <http://www.wpsdlocal6.com/news/ky-state-news/Nearly-1-million-American-veterans-waiting-on-benefits-200727431.html>

<sup>35</sup> “Outdoor air pollution contributed to 1.2 million premature deaths in China in 2010, nearly 40 percent of the global total, according to a new summary of data from a scientific study on leading causes of death worldwide”: Wong, E. (2013, April 1). Air pollution linked to 1.2 million premature deaths in China. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/02/world/asia/air-pollution-linked-to-1-2-million-deaths-in-china.html>

<sup>36</sup> For the best description of the 2008 bubble/collapse, see Magdoff, F., & Foster, J. B. (2009). *The great financial crisis: Causes and consequences*. New York: Monthly Review Press. For the best review of the 1929 Depression, see: Corey, L. [aka Louis Fraina]. (1934). *The decline of American capitalism*. New York: Covici Friede Publishers. Retrieved from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/corey/1934/decline/>

<sup>37</sup> See for example, the Atlanta test cheating scandal involving nearly 200 teachers, principals, and the superintendent described here: Winerip, M. (2013, March 29). Ex-schools chief in Atlanta is indicted in testing scandal. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/30/us/former-school-chief-in-atlanta-indicted-in-cheating-scandal.html?pagewanted=2&hp&pagewanted=all>

Ideas—the only worthy lesson of the Arab Spring. Good ideas cause troops to turn their guns around: Egypt.

The project must be connecting Reason To Passion, Passion To Ethics, Ethics To Organization, and Organization To Action.<sup>38</sup> At base: it's vital to grasp the whole of why things are as they are and that it is right to rebel. Justice, again and again, demands organization. It is that, or barbarism.

---

<sup>38</sup> This project is described in detail in: Gibson, R., & Ross, E. W. (2009), The education agenda is a war agenda. *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor*, 16, pp. 31-52. (<http://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/workplace/article/view/182226>). In addition, Chalmers Johnson wrote extensively on the matter of revolution while working for the Central Intelligence Agency. A summary of his writing is here <http://richgibson.com/johnsonquotes.htm>