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## **The NEA Representative Assembly of 2010: A Longer View of Crisis and Consciousness**

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When I left the 2009 National Education Association Representative Assembly (RA) in San Diego, new NEA president Dennis Van Roekel was hugging Arne Duncan, fawning over new President Obama, and hustling the slogan, “Hope Starts Here!” but calling the No Child Left Behind Act a “crappy law.”

At the very close of the 2009 RA, delegates were treated to a video of themselves chanting, “Hope starts Here!” and “Hope Starts with Obama and Duncan!” and “He gives us hope!” while red, white, and blue bunting flashed in the background.

NEA poured untold millions of dollars, and hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours, into the Obama campaign. 219 NEA officials were on the floor of the Democratic nominating convention, more than any other organized group.

In 2009, Van Roekel promised to tighten NEA-Obama ties. “I feel very good about how they want to direct education,” despite Obama’s clear support for merit pay, attacks on tenure, high stakes exams, and his promise to extend the Afghan wars.

What happened in the year’s interim? What was the social context of the 2010 RA?

### ***On Background—The Lay of the Land***

Reports of the death of the third, 2008, Great Depression held no water for the mass of unemployed workers and laid-off school workers in the US. An official jobless rate of 9.5% reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics on July 2, 2010, probably means real unemployment at 15% or more as discouraged workers fall off unemployment benefits and go uncounted. Congress chose a July 4<sup>th</sup> recess, allowing hundreds of thousands of more jobless people to lose benefits. By official count, at least 15.3 million people were unemployed on the eve of the RA, despite millions in stimulus spending.

Depending on your source, up to 300,000 education workers were scheduled for lay-off in the fall of 2010.

Unemployment is still color-coded, as is inherited wealth, a huge leg up.

Black unemployment is officially at 15.4% but in Detroit it is over 50% and for black youth, far beyond even that. Official Hispanic unemployment is at 12.4% while 8.6 million people are counted as “involuntary.” The total unemployment picture will only grow worse as 700,000 census workers are cut loose (*The New York Times* July 12, 10). In 2009 alone, 3.9 million people lost work (CNS, January 25, 10). More—wages continued a steady decline.

Inequality in the US and around the world grew at unprecedented rates. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities released a report on June 25, 2010, saying that the gap between rich and working class Americans more than tripled in the last 30 years.

No major formation or union organized the unemployed. The professional Quisling, Bob King, president of the United Auto Workers union who assisted in organizing the wreckage of that union as well as its members lives, for three decades, announced on July 12 that he and the poverty hustler, Jesse Jackson, would start a campaign. Jobless—hide your wallets and cover your ears. King then bargained at deal at the General Motors Orion, Michigan plant that cut younger workers’ wages by half. The entire plant picketed the UAW’s Solidarity House when the members were not allowed to vote on the sellout.

The US was busy being fought to a standstill in Afghanistan, forced to fire its top general, McChrystal, for speaking his reactionary mind, yet the Obama regime clung to the Vietnam-like corrupt Karzai regime and the silly counter-insurgency scheme, written by McChrystal along with his boss and mentor (that connection is important), Petraeus, a plan which seeks to make friends of the Afghan people—an impossible task as the Afghans rightly know the US is there to rob and kill them for reasons of imperial muscle-flexing, regional control, and pipelines.

In Iraq, the US asserted withdrawal falsely. The Sunni “Friendship Alliance” began to unravel as Shiites drove them out of power positions in the oil rich country. Given the presence of the seven largest US bases in the world, staged neatly by oil fields and in the capital, the pretense of withdrawal was clearly hollow, even as the Chinese, British, and others were quietly hiding behind the US military with syphons of their own, as is the case of Afghanistan too.

Imperial challengers looked on as the US military appeared more and more exhausted, led by incompetents who order troops, forced to do four and five tours, riddled with PTSD, into poorly planned battles, using them as bait for, later, air attacks—while urging the troops to be nice to the locals; a confusing proposition for trained killers, a problem the British had in the Great Game of 150 years ago. Nevertheless, the necessity to chase capital coupled with imperial hubris kept the US playing worn old cards.

The concept of perpetual war became an acceptable part of daily discourse. National socialism, evidenced by the mergers of corporate and government life in finance and industry (auto) as well as 1.7 million troops engaged in nine years of warfare, with no end remotely in sight, settled fairly peacefully on the land.

The BP oil gusher relentlessly poured into the Gulf of Mexico, not only demonstrating the rule of profits over care for the earth itself, but also showing how enmeshed the US working class, and others, are within the capitalist economy. Oil workers joined oil bosses in demanding the ban on deep sea drilling be lifted, fast.

The unemployed (and some prisoners) poured into the Gulf region, offering or being forced to risk their lives on clean-up while fishermen and women vied to get hired by BP (the Feds dodged the engagement). The interlocking nature of US government and the corporate world, a deepening corporate state, became clearer as government relied on BP science and (largely censored) knowledge to control the spill while BP relied on government, profitably, to obfuscate the issue. The public, not BP, will pay. Obama, after all, was the top recipient of oil money in the last campaign.

The thousands of armed people in the US south, so far, failed to act.

Banksters who, according to Bloomberg, made off with \$12.9 trillion from the public trough as Obama engineered the final steps of merging the corporate with government worlds, continued to dodge repaying what was called “loans,” but in fact was the most massive robbery in the history of the country. Then they gave themselves bonuses, again, as the stock market bounced between 9400 and 10,400; a worrisome indicator of instability. Banks refused to loan, or even modify mortgages, to people who were more and more jobless. Foreclosure crises leapfrogged from one moment of respite to another report of disaster. Bank failures continued apace.

Trust, a cornerstone of finance capital, was fully contradicted, overturned, by its other motivators: greed and fear—combined in panic.

The banks were bailed out on the grounds that the 2008 market crash could demolish capitalism itself and, worse, “our” economy.

J.P Morgan’s Jamie Dimon made the limits of his patriotism, his sense of “we’re all in this together,” when he said, “I would do anything for...this country, but not if it’s going to jeopardize J. P. Morgan (“Too Big To Fail”, Sorkin, 2009, p. 478).

Inequality boomed in the US and throughout the world as, everywhere, governments functioned as executive committees and armed weapons of the rich. Inside those committees, elites worked out, or fight out, their real differences (industrial vs. finance capital as we saw in the auto versus bank bailouts), then turned on the masses of people with a vengeance. Children of the poor, everywhere, fought and killed other children of the poor, on behalf of the rich in the homelands, proud under colorful nationalist flags.

The joint ruling classes' determination to appear to deal with un-credentialed immigration, while not dealing with it, led to Obama regime raids throughout the country, reportedly even more workplace raids than initiated in Bush's last year—making the emerging police state more and more acceptable to many citizens on both sides of the debate.

A labor boss backed health care bill passed with support from health profiteers, promising a step toward universal health care, but the Obama administration had nixed a single-payer plan from the outset. Even progressive doctors warned the plan would fall apart in time. Chris Hedges at Truthdig wrote on July 12<sup>th</sup> that the bill will leave 23 million people without health care and will permit prices to climb so that many will need to pay 10% of their annual income to get coverage. "\$447 billion in tax subsidies will be handed to insurance firms."

NEA mailed every delegate a 18x24 cardboard color poster touting that "victory."

NEA, however, said nothing about labor's abject failure to get what had been seen as a "must have;" the Employee Free Choice Act, an effort to ease labor bosses' access to check-off, even out of committee.

Labor union membership languished at 12.4% in 2009. Private sector membership is at 7%.

Arizona passed a draconian law that Obama pretended to fight while he, at the same time, employed Alan Bersin (who made a lifetime career of dividing people by class, race, and nation in schools and out—employing violence in the workplace and in the streets) as "Border Czar," the fist-in-the-face of immigrant communities whose votes Obama covets.

The Patriot Act remained in full effect.

At Southwestern College, on the Mexican border in San Diego county, four professors were arrested at their homes for having appeared to support a student demonstration against cutbacks on their campus. Suspended briefly, they were restored to work, but no more demonstrations popped up that semester. They accepted reprimands in their files while touting the power of the union.

Superfluous superstars fascinated much of the nation. Lindsay Lohan's "F...you" fingernails took up prime time news as a country, whose citizens rooted two-thirds of the economy in consumption, shopping, learned they could not shop. What to do?

Hysteria centered on the demagogue, Obama, ebbed, as, strangely, he did what he promised: extended war, attacked education through his warrior and pal, Arne Duncan. But the demagogue was replaced by—nothing. Who is the next demi-god? Or what?

This is the setting that NEA rejects. Worse, does not want to consider. The idea that schools sit inside society is dangerous to NEA leadership.

### ***Ruling Class Attacks on Material Life and Reason Itself in Schools and Out***

In education, the Obama's "Race to the Top" (RaTT) initiative played out—fast—as states competed for the paltry dollars attached from the federal government. The RaTT reflected the marriage of romantic nationalism to social Darwinism that forms the crux of national socialist ideology. The RaTT is:

- Regimented national curricula promoting nationalism, ending free inquiry;
- Racist, anti-working class high stakes exams in an already segregated school system;
- Merit pay, wage and benefit cuts, layoffs, and attacks on tenure with full time positions becoming temp jobs—school workers are among the last people in the US with benefits, fairly predictable jobs, and pay—an injury to other workers now becomes an injury to all;
- Dramatic fee and tuition hikes, driving students out of school or into perpetual debt based, mainly, on inherited wealth-building segregation;
- Militarization in poor and working class districts and “national service” created to syphon off resistance in middle class and upper class districts.
- Routinization of college and university curricula and methods as the disciplines are aligned with the k-12 world, a result already largely in place;
- Limited forms of charters and privatization but the fundamental effort, not-public but tax funded mis-education, will persist in the main.
- Tamping down student hopes, abolishing the vision and abilities it takes to win and run a just, equitable, society.

Both school unions (NEA and American Federation of Teachers) were deeply involved in creating and selling the RaTT and its little brother: NCLB.

The two unions fit neatly into the emergence of the harsh rule of the US corporate state. As with every major U.S. labor leader, the presidents of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association reject the reason most people believe they join unions for: the contradictory interests of employees and employers. Rather, the union bosses believe in what former NEA top, Bob Chase, called, “New Unionism,” that is, the unity of corporate heads, government officials, and labor mis-leaders, “in the national interest.” In effect, that means labor bosses will sacrifice the needs of their members in favor of corporate desires, as, for example, the demise of the United Auto Workers’ union, down from 1.5 million members to around 333,000, illustrates.

Moreover, both unions are involved with the overseas adventures of the US through groups like the National Endowment for Democracy and Education International (which NEA funds to the tune of \$4.5 million). The fruits of empire help pay for the remarkable

salaries and lifestyles of the labor's top officials. NEA boss Reg Weaver picked up a tidy \$686,949 in 2008. Jack Scott's and George Schmidt's early work on labor imperialism, followed by Bill Blum, Kim Scipes, Paul Buhle and myself, linked to Lenin's *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Rosa Luxemburg's riposte, and Al Szymanski's *Imperialism*, add up to weighty evidence of the result of support for capitalism inside the empire, and imperialism out—each relying on violence to whipsaw workers at the end of the day.

Logically following union tops' complicity, an entire school work force in Central Falls, Rhode Island, was fired for not matching the RaTT; making insufficient concessions. They were later hired back when their AFT local made every concession earlier on the table.

The American Federation of Teachers, in the lead for selling out their members for a decade and more, negotiated contracts hinting at a dreaded future. In Washington DC, AFT behind its dissembling boss Randi Weingarten, rammed through a contract that gave up tenure and accepted merit pay. In order to do so, AFT tops had to intervene to prevent an election of local leaders, staving that off to the fall. Michelle Rhee, Czar of DC schools, wrote paeans to Weingarten, suggested she take that contract to the bellwether AFT local in New York. Weingarten demurred.

In Detroit, the DFT gave up \$500 per member paycheck, merit pay, tenure, gutted health insurance, and offered surcease to a takeover of the district by the Broad Foundation's Bob Bobb and suburbanite basketball player, ex-Piston, Dave Bing.

Weingarten intervened forcefully in Detroit, insisting that anything less than these concessions would cost many jobs—in a city where at least one lesson is clear: concessions do not save jobs, but like giving blood to sharks, bosses only want more. Weingarten routed her members. 63% voted in favor of the sellout as covered in *Substance* in January (<http://www.substancenews.net/articles.php?page=1063&section=Article>).

Shortly after ratification, the district issued more dire warnings about the budget, and more layoff notices. With what is likely to be a tsunami of retirements given the upcoming working conditions, it may be that jobs in Detroit will be saved, but decades of teacher militancy which won vital job protections, including the protections that make it somewhat possible for one to keep his/her ideals and still teach, are gone—this generation spitting on the small victories won in hundreds of battles of the past.

In AFT's top local, New York City, Weingarten stage-managed a pay-for-performance contract and supported Mayoral control—leading to school closings. Then she popped in “value added assessments,” ground zero for sharper merit pay.

In California, NEA teacher contract after teacher contract reflected concessions of one form or another: furlough days, layoffs, benefit cuts, higher class size, more assaults on

academic freedom. joblessness for substitute educators bumped by colleagues, while recent teacher education grads waited on tables.

In universities, students faced dramatic tuition and fee hikes, driving people out of school with razor sharp precision based, for the most part, on parental income, race, and nationality. The bellwether California higher education system is a good example. Community colleges enrolled 21,000 fewer students in the 2009 school year, enrolled students found classes closed, untenured faculty laid off by the thousands. Mt. San Antonio College, east of Los Angeles cut 800 class sections, 10 percent of its load (*The New York Times*, June 23, 2010).

The workhorse California State University system, with the cooperation of the NEA-affiliated California Faculty Association, cut faculty pay 10% via furlough days, raised fees (tuition is illegal in California where k-university education was once nearly free of charge) 195% since 2002. The pay cut was ratified by a narrow CSU faculty vote when the Executive Board issued a “no recommendation,” statement, rather than building a base of resistance. Fees were raised 32% in 2009, another 5% in 2010. The racehorse, elite, University of California system, fully segregated as its San Diego branch illustrates with a black enrollment of less than 1%, raised fees 32 percent in the 2009-10 school year.

In Texas, the Christian-mystic dominated school board re-wrote history to praise Joseph McCarthy in textbooks and to, Soviet-style, wipe out Hispanics altogether while they also moved to tear down the wall between church and state. As in the Third Reich, the school board wants history read as through white American, mystical, eyes.

Then, Arizona moved to abolish ethnic studies programs.

On the whole, school workers continued in their role as missionaries for the system of capital and schools as its houses of worship as they bowed to regimented curricula, high-stakes racist exams, militarization in working class and disenfranchised areas, and the entire Obama Race to the Top (RaTT) project.

A few fought back.

### ***They Say Cut Back! We Say Fight Back!***

Teacher-led resistance did appear on email lists, like E-pata initiated by California’s Joe Lucido, while Susan Ohanian’s web site ([www.susanohanian.org](http://www.susanohanian.org)) drew attention from middle-of-the-roaders and radicals alike. *Substance News* ([www.substancenews.net](http://www.substancenews.net)) upgraded its work to a modern online edition while retaining the hard-copy. The leftish Rouge Forum ([www.rougeforum.com](http://www.rougeforum.com)) continued its weekly updates and held its yearly conference, helped provide intellectual and material leadership to the March 4<sup>th</sup> actions ([www.defendededucation.org/](http://www.defendededucation.org/)).

In 2010, school workers are the most unionized people in the US. They sit in the central organizing point of de-industrialized America. Their task, ostensibly constructing reason, gives them more freedom than nearly any other workers and, hence, they hold phenomenal potential power.

A society writhing in inequality and recruiting youth for endless war will make peculiar demands on its schools. “The psychological preparation for and acceptance of war was a conscious aim of National Socialist education...” (Blackburn, *Education in the Third Reich*, 1985, p. 69).

While there is little history of masses of teachers taking progressive or revolutionary paths (today’s Oaxaca and revolutionary Russia aside) there is much more history to worry they would be willing fascists as in Germany and Japan—it remains that even a few school workers can have a notable, decisive in some instances, impact. When hope in schools vanishes, uprisings happen: France 1968. And, as in that instance, students can and do often take the lead in forging social change.

Resistance in 2009-10 rose as people began to recognize that they must resist in order to live. At issue was whether or not people made sense of why they must fight back, that is, capitalism and its birth partner, imperialism, and launched their attacks at the core, or if they would only address the appearances of oppression, hence recreating their own subservience in slightly new ways.

In September, 2009, faculty at suburban Detroit’s Oakland University went on strike at the start of the school year, a smart move that lets students and community people prepare, overcomes the need to call people out of an ongoing semester. They claimed a modest victory.

The high point of resistance began in California with a student-initiated call for a state-wide school strike on March 4<sup>th</sup>. Spreading through the elite University of California system, into the workhorse California State University system, and into the community colleges and high schools, the idea leaped beyond the state’s borders and, eventually, involved tens of thousands of educators, community people, and students, not only in strikes and demonstrations, but also, in a few instances, freedom schooling where people actually gathered, using the inspiration of the strike, to gain and test knowledge about why, really, things are as they are.

The Oakland, California, Education Association led a one-day strike in response to unlawful bargaining practices on April 29, 2010, involving the community and the local labor council as well. That strike, along with the M4 actions demonstrated the greater militancy and deeper consciousness of Northern California workers, perhaps because of the long history of dockworker and related action.

However, southern California constituents need to be reminded that the presence of the massive military complexes are actually double edged swords. In San Diego, it was Navy personnel who, responding to civilian and military anti-war appeals alike, kept three ships

at the docks for two years with mutiny upon mutiny. Military personnel were a significant force in the old antiwar movement.

Following the March 4th, M4 committees met in Northern, Central, and Southern California, agreeing to a second call for strikes and action October 7<sup>th</sup>. Despite what seems to be growing splits along leftist party lines, the idea for that action looked like it had a life of its own. A national draft of a call circulated in early July 2010. However, within the M4 movement, backward elements attempted to break the crisis in education from imperialism and the system of capital, mirroring the union tops' desires to ignore, divert, demolish, and if necessary, take credit for, what came on October 7<sup>th</sup>—as they did on March 4th.

In Chicago, the once-mighty Chicago Federation of Teachers upended its authoritarian leadership and elected a patchwork coalition of reformers who, one can only hope, will grasp the necessity of a direct action fight-back rooted in the community, students, parents, and education workers, united. Since Arne Duncan was Chicago's school boss, the relentless closures of dozens of schools has led to a spiral of tragic youth violence and death—such is the barrel of the gun pointed at the appearance of safe schools.

### ***Wham BAMN Thank You—Oh Damn!***

In Detroit, resistance rose and ebbed around the peculiar moves of the By Any Means Necessary group led by Steve Conn. As BAMN appears at the 2010 RA, its path is worth more than a moment's attention.

BAMN, many RA delegates told me, ratifying my own background knowledge, is a front for the Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers' League. It's led by a former friend and attorney of mine in Detroit, as well as teacher Conn, his wife Heather Miller, and others.

BAMN's distinguishing claim: “we are the new civil rights movement.” Preposterous.

Steve Conn teaches math in Detroit's premier high school: Cass Tech. He made his stripes in the Detroit Federation of Teachers about ten years ago when his courageous actions sparked a wildcat strike that lasted nearly two weeks (see <http://clogic.eserver.org/2-2/gibson.html>).

He suffered a setback when he was fired, later, for leading a group of students who sought to initiate a walkout at another Detroit school. That action, reckless to many DFT members, cost him credibility and a base—as did the isolation of being discharged.

His dismissal, however, was reversed by an arbitrator, and mutual acquaintance, who ordered him restored to work and be made whole. The historically outlandish, corrupt, and incompetent elected Detroit school board refused to return him to work but the BAMN attorney quickly won a court case. Conn returned to work, reputation enhanced—slightly enriched.

Then came DFT president Keith Johnson and AFT president Randi Weingarten, united with city bosses and the press, to beat through the sellout contract of 2009, which included a \$500 cut per paycheck from every teacher.

Conn and BAMN led the resistance to that deal, obtaining a petition against Johnson that included more than 1200 signatures, building a caucus of more than 100 people that met regularly, and leading open opposition in DFT meetings.

Johnson apparently decided to rid himself of Conn, charged him with attempting to wreck the DFT, and actually held a trial that lasted nearly until midnight in early 2010. Conn used the ludicrous trial as an organizing centerpiece and, given the quality of his legal representation, most surely would have won.

Conn and the BAMN led caucus were at the height of their popularity.

Then Conn moved, again, to overturn his own hard work. He appears to have made a deal with Johnson. The trade-off: Johnson would drop the charges in exchange for Conn backing off his criticism. Conn would get DFT support for a BAMN demonstration in Washington DC (the Detroit bus never made it) and the DFT would support a demand to the Detroit school board to retain Bamn's legal team to represent the board in a suit against Bob Bobb, the Broad funded appointee who is serving as the boss of the Detroit Public Schools (DPS), through his title as Financial Director.

Bobb's effort in Detroit is, against his critics' claims, not so much privatization, but to fashion false hope and social control via the schools. Profiteering via privatization is well down his list even if he did move fast to steer DPS contracts to cronies and former employers.

For example, Bobb cobbled together an agreement with three Detroit high schools, including the once-great Henry Ford High School, to turn their curricula and instruction over to Walmart. This is not privatization, but a reflection of the context of a corporate state.

The principal boasted to me that a percentage of grads would "actually get Walmart jobs." Queried about where the Walmart was in Detroit (there isn't one) he responded, "Yes indeed! Our students will get a multi-cultural experience by leaving the city!" How they will get there will be a lesson in itself. Detroit/suburb public transportation is notorious.

BAMN, then, tied their stars to the DFT leadership and the Detroit school board, abandoning the progressive oppositional stance that won its reputation as a nerve center against both bosses and sellout union mis-leaders. The BAMN attorney became the school board's attorney.

Not surprisingly, the caucus began to shrink until, according to one member, it could muster less than ten people at its meetings.

DFT's Keith Johnson could now tout the sellout contract as an achievement, not having to shy away from organized complaints, nor worrying about impeachment.

The Detroit School Board could claim BAMN support and vice versa, a toxic marriage.

The school board, as noted above, is to say the least, a nerve center of weirdness, an object of scorn from most Detroiters despite the fact that the current elected board was seen as preferable to a state-appointed Takeover Board that looted the system from 2000-2005 for its own, suburban, desires. Now, the total Detroit school debt is well over \$330 million, the official figure that cannot be trusted as no figures from DPS can be trusted. About two-thirds of that debt belongs to the headless actions of the Takeover Board which spent millions building new schools in a district that has lost 10,000 students a year for a decade and more. Now, many of the new schools sit empty, stripped (even protective fences are stolen) and DPS spends a million a year guarding them.

The most glaring example of current school board outlandishness came in June 2010, when the appointed superintendent, Teresa Gueyser, filed a complaint against board president, Otis Mathis. Gueyser complained that Mathis, in meetings with her, masturbated (see: <http://www.freep.com/article/20101002/NEWS01/10020346/Ex-DPS-superintendent-files-harassment-suit-against-board>). Oddly, this was not the first time. "On many occasions, I have asked him not to touch himself," Gueyser wrote in her complaint. Mathis resigned, then sought to reverse the resignation on the grounds that he has a "disability." Days later he was charged and arraigned.

He was supported by board member Reverend David Murray (he's not a minister, he had his name changed) who suggested that since the 55-year old Mathis is a "young man," such a habit might come naturally. Murray said in the *Detroit News*, "Some women are more sensitive about this than others." Much earlier, Murray's six children had been removed from his care by Child Protective Services.

In early July 2010, the DPS board had two vacancies up for election. Who registered to run? Nobody.

Detroit is a growing tragedy waiting to happen, dying a death by a thousand cuts. Fifty per cent of the city is illiterate and unemployed. It is a 90% plus black city, a ghetto in the real sense. The schools are in near collapse. Detroit has a long history of urban rebellions. Racism would make it more than possible for state and federal forces to use fearsome violence. There is nothing much in Detroit for rebels to hold hostage, or defend. Rebels are completely unprepared. An uprising would be a disaster. But, given the absence of press (two Detroit papers only irregularly publish daily print editions—as in 1967), arbitrary police violence and repression (as in '67), massive unemployment ('67 again), the daily insults of prejudice, and hopelessness—a rebellion is possible if an organized, reasoned, counter-force, cannot be reconstructed.

The only organized group with the background, potential power, and material interest to restore some semblance of real hope, reason, democracy, social justice, and equality in Detroit was the DFT, which like every AFT local, was and is led by quislings. Within DFT, the best hope people had was the BAMN led caucus. Tragically, that hope is nearly extinguished by BAMN's peculiar decisions about who good allies are—and its failure to openly address why things are as they are.

Now, the citizenry is faced with a dismaying choice: BAMN and its lawyers-plus-youth-wing united with the corrupt DFT leadership and the looney school board or the city elites, led by the Piston, Dave Bing, and Broad's Bobb.

The citizen's choice was made clear even before the Mathis exposures. They voted by a two-thirds majority to back Bobb's plan for massive construction expenditures in the city—while hundreds of teachers will be laid off. Now, after the BAMN maneuvers, it is unlikely they have changed their minds.

Shortly after the BAMN caucus largely evaporated, Bobb announced he would turn over the terrible contract the DFT signed, upping any limits on class size. DFT's Johnson swore, this time, he would fight. He will not, cannot.

The question to Detroit today, community or barbarism, remains unanswered. Such is the social context, the class war, that serves as the platform for the NEA RA, and such is the limited, but growing, state of resistance.

### ***New Orleans? Shmoo Orleans and the RA***

Before taking up the NEA Representative Assembly, a note on New Orleans the city.

Katrina's impact of 2005 is well known. New Orleans has not begun to truly recover. But the locals aren't talking, not even the locals hosting the RA, clearly because of the disease that infects most tourist towns: the secrets must be kept as we cannot let the rubes know the troubles they dance past—and we need the tips.

No one underlined the wreckage of New Orleans's schools before or during the RA, nor did they even discuss the rate of charterization, the end of so many teaching careers, the role of Chicago's former thug Superintendent, Paul Vallas, not even the rote curricula New Orleans' teachers are expected to follow. At the close of the 2009 RA in San Diego, the leader of the New Orleans host committee merely urged delegates to come to town, party, and gamble. All is forgotten.

Hosts in hotels and restaurants were more than reluctant to discuss the fact that tourism is way, way, down in New Orleans—add in BP to Katrina. They poo-pooed the idea that the fish, or bottom feeders, might be contaminated. They praised the importance of NEA's RA (what local host delegations get as a reward from other locals for drawing in the RA to their city goes, politely, unasked in NEA).

The infamous Ninth Ward, ruined by Katrina, is still in ruins. I rode the route in a car. About 60 months on, houses are still in ruins. A FEMA trailer sits in a front yard. Don't take the tour. Rent a car.

The New Orleans Louis Armstrong Airport is an aging dump. The old Morial convention center, which housed 20,000+ live people who broke in during Katrina, and some dead decomposing bodies, was stressed by the presence of the black music Essence conference (50,000 people) at the same time as the RA (15,000 people with guests included). The deteriorated center isn't properly ventilated, leaving delegates to complain from the floor, time and again, about the temperature.

NEA California delegates, busing the 4 blocks to their hotel, were trapped in a huge Essence traffic jam, spending an hour on the bus in one instance, being trapped in a tunnel under the center for another hour when their drive sought to elude the back-up. They stayed on the bus, but for four of us who had to overcome the bus driver's "You cannot exit this bus!" We exited, but the rest sat, obediently.

Bill Sammons posted online; ".the city didn't..care about how long it took me to get from point A to point B or how long (bus) lines were, it just cared about my money...I hope NEA considers not returning to New Orleans if it means we are there at the same time as the Essence festival."

Now, on to the New Orleans RA itself:

### ***NEA politics, culture, and class war***

Who comes to RA's? By far, it's K-12 teachers and related school workers. There are education support personnel (ESP's), college and community college profs. While dozens of NEA staff attend, they are ostensibly not allowed on the floor of the RA. In the past, NEA discouraged staff attendance at the RA.

NEA staff, though, are a proud lot, and rightly so. Highly educated, honest within the confines of NEA's vision (I've never known them to cheat on vote counts, for example), offered high-power training throughout their careers, very well paid (NEA long ago deliberately put staff on a Cadillac plan—the UniServ budget), NEA staff produces, each day of the convention, the "RA Today," typically a 16 page broadside carefully listing past and present business. That alone has to be seen as an achievement, expensive as it may be.

NEA has, unlike other unions, for years drawn a clear line between staff and members, called "governance," but that line blurs as members vie for lucrative, often fun, staff jobs. Many members bring spouses, kids, and guests, combining the trip to the RA with extended vacations.

Other delegates include some administrators, substitute teachers, and retirees.

8,174 delegates came this year, far down from the 8,925 in 2009. 5,290 non-delegates registered.

NEA claims 39% of the delegates listed themselves as minorities (NEA is one of the few US unions that has and enforces affirmative action policies). That near-40% number was not what I saw, but in a room that big, seeing is not believing.

Delegate/school workers are: polite, usually staid, very hard-working, persevering, fairly well-spoken. They sit relatively still for hours on end and pay attention—14 hours a day and more. They are disciplined in the sense that, given a state-adopted t-shirt (as in California: “Education—It’s a Right: Not a Race”), they’ll wear it—but they will vote their own minds even if the state caucus takes a formal position.

They nurture novices (“I’m a first time delegate, first time at the microphone...” supportive applause). They respect military vets—the “support our troops means support the wars,” mantra worked: trapped them. Some persevere over parliamentary procedure.

For good reason. NEA has its own culture of parliamentary procedure that allows leadership to silence debate about items they don’t like, using a maneuver called “object to consideration,” which, in Robert’s Rules, means something so contentious, irrelevant, repugnant, or unprofitable that nobody should discuss it. In NEA’s case, the cultural Robert’s Rules means the leadership shuts down debate on war, bank bailouts, and direct action—as we shall see.

Even so, in the spirit of “we’re all in this together in the education family,” delegates forgive president Van Roekel and Secretary Treasure Lily Eskelsen for repeated errors about what’s on the agenda, an outright insult from Eskelsen (“a call to divide the body, you gotta be kidding!”), and dubious calls about vote counts.

Delegates are more suburban than their counterparts in the much smaller American Federation of Teachers—even if some of the delegates are from Los Angeles. That means the attacks on NEA schools have come later, weren’t as harsh, not at the outset. Urban districts got hit first, worst, parental income and race being deciding factors on test scores—and everything in school. But the attacks came after NEA let AFT, as in Detroit, swing in the wind—proof that an injury to one only precedes an injury to all, that racism is one of many Achilles’ heels of the movement for equality.

They are educated, of course, but in America’s shabby public schools. Were they the good students? They liked school, and stayed.

The vast majority of delegates believe, religiously, in the US political system, capitalist democracy, rejecting evidence that it is an executive committee and armed weapon of the rich, seeing bankster bailouts and endless war as anomalies, just as smorgasbord Catholics tithe. They make the same fetish of unionism itself, religiously.

They're pro-choice, but back the incarceration of juvenile criminals, for life. Like most people, they hold profoundly contradictory notions. They are older—young members look like children in RA crowds, and they need to watch their pounds, as do I.

Delegates arrive early to stake out and mark seats for the entire RA although the best spots are already reserved for "leaders." Nobody complains. Moving to a new spot draws, "Say, you're in my chair." Politely. One moves along, in good cheer.

### *Day One*

The RA opened on July 3<sup>rd</sup> (most delegates arrive a day or two early for state and interest-group caucus meetings).

It seems to have become a modern tradition; the RA began with loud rock music, flashing lights, dancing delegates, trumpet calls, and, on the big screens (from two hundred yards, my seat in the nose bleed section, they're not all that big) red, white, and blue bunting as background to, "Turning Hope into Action! We are America's Future!" followed by a standing ovation for the arrival of President Dennis Van Roekel (affectionately: "DVR," "Dennis" or, formally, "President Van Roekel").

Then the day-after-day school opener drill—the Pledge of Allegiance—followed by a room-full-of-heads-bowed invocation fronted by an armed color guard. "Prayer to God who is known by many names (hey, what about no other God before me?)...everything that we have comes from you (BP, unemployment, endless wars, the plague?)...bless our country, our president, our city, bless the NEA, but in all things—we're for you." Massive chorus: "Amen."

DVR introduced a line up of past NEA presidents—he didn't mention most of whom went on to work for Education International, the inheritor of the CIA sponsored cold war unions: Mary Hatwood Futrell. Michigan's John Ryor (who went to the Carter administration, then on to run what is now Florida Education Association, and who was one of the architects of the originally secret, then failed merger, with the AFT-AFL-CIO). Keith Geiger from Michigan. Don Cameron of Michigan, a former Executive Director. (back in the day, the "Michigan Mafia" really did run NEA). Reg Weaver (who, remember, took home a cool \$686,949 in his last year but couldn't memorize one page press releases staff wrote for him). Standing applause for "great NEA leaders."

DVR followed with his opening speech, and fell flat. A football allegory to the New Orleans champagne Saints? Yes. "Like the Saints, we need to play offense and defense. We face tough challenges but we must remain hopeful about public education." A bomb of a blastoff.

He fobbed the mike off to Lily (pronounced Lilly) Eskelsen, NEA Secretary Treasurer.

Eskelsen is the person who signed Reg Weaver's \$686,949 paycheck, at least \$230 thousand more than any NEA leader before or since. On May 19, 2010, I began asking

the NEA press office how that could be explained. No response ever came back, despite repeated calls.

Eskelsen is a smart, tough woman. You don't get to the top of NEA being otherwise. But she hides behind a perky, even snarky, yet lovely, Sandra Bullock imitation that demeans her. Catching her in passing, I said, "Lily, you paid Reg Weaver \$686,949. Why? That was wrong." She gave me a grin and a flash of perfectly manicured nails, and quickly moved on.

Bullock, no, Eskelsen, engaged DVR with what was meant to be a series of funny jokes about his age, and her chocolate appetites. Once a joke, this becomes, three times in, tiresome. I lost count of the repeated banal repartee.

On to the DVR gusher: "he's strong, dedicated, strategic, competent, a man of undeniable character, a father and grandfather, he has my deepest respect and he is teaching me everything I need to know (the NEA pecking order sets her up as the next president), our brother, our friend, our president, Dennis Van Roekel!" Eskelsen seems to have been hanging out at too many fat-white boy AFL-CIO conferences. This reads like one of theirs.

DVR, now introduced twice: "I was inspired by all the change Obama's election promised. We were ready to fight for change, poised for 4 years of collaboration. Things got in the way. The economy ... who could have anticipated the free fall of confidence in governments or the politics of anger (I did, and so did many others)? The very fabric of our public education is at risk (NEA loves to tout the "public" education myth)...California faces \$4 billion in cuts, 20,000 layoffs ... congress still hasn't passed an education jobs bill ... they bailed out the banks (who is "they"? ) and auto, and gave themselves bonuses...We've seen too many members unemployed ... class size will boom ... children will lose ground (NEA loves the Kiddie Card)...pensions are under attack ... Is the middle class the rich? ... Our members are angry ... is this the change you hoped for (loud "NO, No, No!").

"This is the most anti-education environment I have ever seen ... we had hope and we got the Race to the Top ... Too many states restructure yet get nothing ... the National Council of Churches (sic) is 'deeply' concerned about the RaTT and demonization of teachers ... look at those Central Falls Rhode Island firings....Who will be next?...Obama 'advisors' are to blame for Rhode Island ... and bubble students ... I have had enough of standardized tests...the status quo is not acceptable ... I want more ... I DEMAND more ... We are the people who make all public schools great...

"Our union is strong...Let's fight for the students of America...we can turn hope into action...we will host a national education summit...We must not allow another bad ESEA...I'd use TNT to blow that apart...(ooh the Homeland Security lights should go on)...We are going to take *ACTION*, that is, write *POSTCARDS* to Arne Duncan! And have a day of action between now and September! We outnumber Congress 6000-1 (but they don't stay bribed)...

“Some of us are disappointed and angry with the politicians and feel betrayed...they want us to stop political work...sit out the election...but we will be the victims if we are not activists ... we simply cannot sit it out...

“Let us embrace a new course...be the ones in charge...question our own status quo...more than being at the table, running the meeting (or, as delegate Craig Gordon later quipped, ‘on the menu’)...You have the ability to create a whole new system of public education...Come with me into the bright sunshine (sic)...support public education! ... Seize the moment (Huey Newton, DVR is not) ... You are never alone ... *YOU are a NEA MEMBER! Now is the time to turn HOPE into ACTION! We ARE NEA!*”

Colored lights flashing. Rap music (!). Dancing in the hall, projected onto the Big Screens. HooBoy. Not a humdinger. Lane Kirkland, the cerebral, corrupt, AFL-CIO boss of old, could have read this script. A better start than last year’s flop, but not a tub-thumper. Woo hoo or boo and phooey?

Candidates for NEA Executive Board dutifully spoke in turn, beginning with the Oakland Bamnsters (By Any Means Necessary).

BAMN’s peculiar stands have made them something of a pariah among the commonplace left and the middlers as well. Their “radical” group hides behind rhetoric from the civil rights movement, “education is a civil right,” claims to be inheritors of the pacifist Martin Luther King, files expert lawsuits, became known to smear anyone who opposes them, and, at times, employees youth to launch quasi-violent attacks.

BAMN may become a poster-child for the linkage of sectarianism and opportunism. Sectarrians drive off people and arrive with no one. Opportunists may or may not arrive with a base, probably not (see the vanished anti-war movement), but that base of people know little of import.

Bamnster candidates Tania Kappner, Mark Airgood, (who had repeatedly lost elections in the Oakland, Ca, EA but were elected as delegates), and Cereste Smith, made some fine and courageous speeches (“not another dollar to the billionaire boys club...”) as Kappner has for a decade at RA’s, but rather than radically expose “public” schooling as capitalist mis-education, they stuck to their ostensibly more appealing lines about defending “professionalism.” So appealing, indeed, that libertarian education blogger, Mike Antonucci endorsed them, in hopes they would “subject NEA to ‘divisive mischief,’ and ‘tiresome tirades.’” They lost, handily.

Treasurer Becky Pringle, second in line for the presidency behind Eskelsen, reported a budget increase this year of 6%, to \$357,739,880. However, Pringle warned of coming membership losses, maybe 18,000 joining the lost legion of unemployed school workers. NEA rarely loses members, making up for teacher losses in the Education Support Personnel ranks. We shall see if education workers actually do feel that setback, or if

NEA tops do, given the enormity of the budget. There was no mention of belt-tightening coming from the NEA brass.

### ***Day Two***

State caucuses typically meet from 7:00-9:00 a.m, and people arrive (they take attendance, no kidding) early. In the caucuses, dissidents and entrenched leaders alike practice, work out, what is likely to happen on the conference floor.

Little debate took place early on, but for a motion, which would have inserted the names, Arne Duncan and/or Obama in this New Business item, #2:

“While the National Education Association Representative Assembly supports and appreciates the significant increase in federal funding for education, the NEA takes a position of no confidence in the US Department of Education's Race to the Top competitive grant policies and guidelines, the use of competitive grant policies and guidelines as a basis for the reauthorization of ESEA, and similar initiatives and policies that undermine public education.”

It was more than abundantly clear that NEA leadership had orchestrated state leaders to defeat that move in the caucuses, then finish it off in the assembled RA. One delegate from Illinois, Eric Brown, took a mike and said, “this could put Dennis in a terrible position ... press will say we are at odds with the Obama administration. We will offend our friends.” Another Illinois delegate working a blog called Brown a “surrender monkey.”

New Business Item 6 referred to the fact that the AFT continues to raid NEA locals throughout the south, despite a no-raid deal the NEA signed with the AFT and AFL-CIO years ago. Leadership sought to duck a direct confrontation with AFT. This resulted:

NEA leaders will seek communication with AFT leadership reaffirming the Jurisdictional Agreement between NEA and AFT which states (in section: D. Membership 1): "with or without a state-level Jurisdictional Agreement" neither organization will promote "reduced dues to members of the other organization as an inducement to join and will not provide any forms or instruction for withdrawing membership from the other organization. The NEA message shall include a recommendation that AFT communicate with the Alabama AFT affiliates to respect and obey the terms of the NEA/AFT Jurisdictional Agreement.

Merger with the AFT and AFL-CIO lingers as a core, if somewhat secret, NEA bosses' effort even though, hidden deep in the thick NEA delegate handbook is a line stating the NEA-AFT partnership is no longer in effect, no longer will be funded. The handbook says “new mechanisms are in place but DVR dodged the question of what they might be. Nothing is said about the NEA-AFL-CIO partnership that the bulbous former NEA

president, Reg Weaver, and the equally portly John Sweeney, signed in San Diego in 2006, covered in *Substance* ([http://www.substancenews.com/index2.php?option=com\\_content&do\\_pdf=1&id=352](http://www.substancenews.com/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=352)).

NEA leaders were certain a merger would pass the 1999 RA. It did not, an indicator that NEA does count the votes, when they are actually counted, as they are cast.

Even though the AFL-CIO is bankrupt, really at least \$2 million in debt, lost 800,000 people in 2008, and is only good at fighting its own members, jobs for tops and plenty of cash exchanged means both sides would like the simulation of a merger to happen, soon. The upshot would probably be that NEA would adopt many of the AFT-AFL-CIO's patently undemocratic structural problems, and NEA rank and filers would have a new layer of enemies not only on the floor, but also on the picket line—and picking their pockets. Private sector AFL-CIO unions would lobby against tax plans for public schools.

NEA Executive Director John Wilson took the mike to issue an hour long drooling sonata for dead President Lyndon Johnson and his “Great Society,” without ever directly mentioning two million Vietnamese deaths, nearly 60,000 US dead, hundreds of thousands of lives ruined, and the utter destruction of the US economy and military. This dishonest divide of homeland and world, like school and society, played throughout the assembly

Wilson shared the podium with the “All NEA Choir,” singing praises of America, and a series of NEA executive board members who outlined the phantasmagoric achievements of the Great Society, like Head Start. Wilson's transparent design was to convince delegates that endless war has nothing to do with domestic policies, that capitalism can be made to work, the poor can vote the rich out of their riches. From the vacillating middle class, or most of it, Wilson got a standing O.

The delegates rejected Amendment 15, proposed by BAMN's Mark Airgood which would have added this to NEA's concerns about the Federal relationship to education: “The Association opposes the disbursement of federal funds based on competition between districts and states.”

That mild piece went down via a commonplace NEA tops' blocking move: using the “Issues Committee,” made up mostly of rank and file members, to attack it. “This would place NEA in opposition to numerous competitive grant programs.”

In fact, Tennessee, Delaware, Illinois, Ohio, and Florida are all serious contenders for RaTT money, with other state NEA's also fighting it out, if eliminated from the race earlier, for competitive dollars. That makes it hard, embarrassing, to dig out why it is the RaTT exists, who it serves, and what should be done about it. And, again, the narrowest interests are served; opportunism, attending to the interests of a few at the expense of all, wins.

At the close of the day, NEA Pac gave Jeff Tyrell \$7500 from a drawing. Quasi-merit pay for sitting.

### ***Day Three***

The day began with yet another tedious exchange between Eskelsen (Bullock), and Van Roekel: “You’re old.” “You eat chocolate.”

We’ll skip to NBI 24:

NEA will encourage and assist state affiliates in passing state laws which promote parental consent and student privacy on the Armed Services Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) through the selection of Option 8.

Defeated by comments like, “we need our best and brightest to protect our freedom,” and

...

“I am a guidance counselor and these exams help students determine what they can do. It’s the best exam there is...”

Enough said.

Another move to obstruct serious consideration of motions related to banksters, war, or the environment (“focus, focus, focus, this is not about education” “this is a side issue”) is to attach outrageous cost estimates to New Business and other items.

For example, Jack Gerson, a long-time activist from Oakland, and the requisite 50 others, submitted NBI 28 which, in part, reads: “NEA shall take the lead in organizing a campaign of...groups...to demand the federal government compel banks to repay their loans with full interest and those loans will be used to reverse cuts to the public sector by restoring jobs and programs that were cut.”

NEA attached a “cost implication” to that of \$52,872,500. Scary, eh? San Diego EA president Camille Zombro moved to shut down debate in the California caucus which opposed the motion.

On the RA floor, a Washington state delegate: “The war and bank bailouts are tangential issues.”

Chris Gordon of California: “We need to get out of our seats and into the streets!”

The motion failed, overwhelmingly.

NEA gave an award to Governor O’Malley of Maryland, calling him the “best education governor in the country,” plus–big hug from DVR. Nobody mentioned O’Malley’s plans to gut the state workers’ pay on the grounds that “we must all share in the pain,” demonstrating the limits of Solidarity Unionism. “Save Public Education,” can mean,

“Lay them off, not us,” and, “Tax the workers to pay the teachers.” All that is history on the books already.

Indeed, San Diego delegates returned home to find their local SDEA president, Zombro, allied with the school board in a scheme to institute a “parcel tax” to pay for schools. Zombro was a key player in the California RA. While playing the electoral game with considerable expertise, she too made concession after concession in San Diego, selling organized retreats, decay, as a way to save jobs. Then the San Diego board, a majority elected by teachers, threatened layoffs while SDEA bowed to furlough days.

John Stocks, PAC staff for NEA responded to an inquiry: “NEA is on par with other political PACs in money spent.” Actually, NEA ranks near the top of the list in PAC spending, year after year, steering people into voting booths, like pews.

Stock made the case for the continuing effort to out-bribe the banks, industrial capitalists and others by sticking fast to the political arena as the centerpiece of NEA action.

“The political context of the ESEA (NCLB)...we now face a wave election involving three factors (1) mass unemployment, (2) perceptions of Obama vis a vis war and the oil spill, (3) the enthusiasm gap...Republicans are enthused and Democrats are not. If the election were held today, Democrats would lose the house. Pelosi would lose her speakership.

“Our campaign objectives are to (1) save education jobs under the Obama veto threat on the war/education funding bill, (2) ensure the health of state affiliates, (3) get as much federal money to the states as possible, (4) erase, re-write, and re-authorize ESEA.

“We accomplished a \$10 billion education-jobs bill....Senator Feinstein is key. She’s a challenge. Secondly, we need to fund the community colleges, pension funds, and \$36 billion in Pell grants.

“Our strategy...we have to focus on secondary targets, surround George Miller, Feinstein, and others with people who agree with NEA.

“Grassroots power is the new currency (sic) in Washington, D.C.

“We have to have an entire electoral structure to address ESEA. That only happens when we sing from the same song sheet ... we also need an offensive campaign...an example would be our Priority Schools campaign...

“WE MUST HAVE YOU AS LOBBYISTS. IT IS UP TO US!”

Stock got a lukewarm reception.

Delegates then rejected, by a big standing vote, New Business Initiative 42 which urged NEA to “call on the US government to end the war in Afghanistan...” with no particular end-date, worse than the Obama make-believe July 2011 deadline.

NBI 44, demanding that Obama replace Duncan with someone aligned to NEA’s goals, failed.

A New Jersey delegate blew a vuvuzuela. Awful. Blow anything but that. It’s what RA’s are for.

One delegate said, “he’s the devil we know over the devil we don’t.”

Another, “if we are unhappy with Obama, we need to talk about Obama ... but we already made it clear we need to work with Obama...the main thing is not Arne Duncan but ESEA...that should be our focus...”

BAMN’s Airgood, “If we get rid of Duncan, the next person will be on notice...”

George Sheridan, a rural California delegate and Abe Lincoln imitator, who most assuredly is not a Lincoln but is quaintly backward nevertheless, “This says DVR should call for Duncan’s resignation. That could wreck our relationship with Obama.”

*An interlude: The NEA RA is the key moment of any year for NEA’s tops at both the state and national levels. There, they must prove themselves to lower levels of the hierarchy, demonstrating the efficacy, competency, of the union’s highest officers who, ostensibly, are “just like other educators,” while their salaries, hotel suits, limos, related perks and expense accounts hover at \$300,000 and far more.*

*The RA offers intermediate leadership in the states the chance to work their own, narrower, and often trivial issues, appearing to respond to the rank and file while gaining some measure of fame on the big screen and in print/online editions of “RA Today.” It’s appearance of “democracy,” which simply places a smothering warm blanket over real dissent, masks a very real, firmly fixed, hierarchy, which mirrors the hierarchies within the education system itself, as with most unions.*

*Like the Church, NEA tolerates many forms of dissension, but one cannot say, “there is no God” (“this is one of capital’s unions, mainly serving capital’s desires) and one cannot say, “Don’t tithes,” (“don’t pay dues extorted in trade for pacifying your ability to open and close your work place).*

*This kind of democracy is not designed to work out real differences around a common project that would address what really is the whole source of educator (and all disenfranchised) oppression, that is, capital and empire, but rather it’s a form of democracy used to pit constricted interests against each other, perverse pluralism creating a cycloptic view driving delegates to middling concerns, and restricted issues,*

*aiming with one sight, nibbling around the edges of bull's-eye, never hitting the real target, set up for loss after loss on, even, simple reforms.*

NBI 54 attacked the National Reading Panel's summary report, which inverts the substance of the longer document published by researchers, passed. This item's passage, coming at no cost, means the NEA will create a link to a web site showing that the lengthier piece by researchers indicates opposition to one-size-fits-all education, from it: "it seems...that teachers will be most effective when they are enthusiastic in their teaching and enjoy what they are doing in the classroom."

#### ***Day Four–The Last***

In the California caucus, college leader Dean Vogel gave a tribute to termed out CTA and UTLA president David Sanchez, near tears. "He's always stood strong. Every time we asked him to go to war for us, he has done that.

Sanchez: "My main goal is to elect Jerry Brown as governor. We cannot do this without you. I never expected we'd have an economic downturn, nor elect a President who would disappoint us. But, at least we are dealing with him—we are at the table."

Kisses all around. Hugs. Standing O.

In the conference hall, delegates started the day dancing to, among other rock classics, "Taking care of business.

The usual mundane announcements about who had raised what for the NEA PAC took some time. New Jersey is up over \$600,000. Whew.

#### ***Ravitch: Vote. Sell Bumperstickers. Hope! Action?***

Then came the fishhook from the ruling class, Diane Ravitch, to demonstrate that one could be a former warrior for NCLB, in favor of war, fight for all the elements of what is now the RaTT, destroy others careers along the way, and vacillate, create an appearance of shifting sides, and get the Friend of Education Award from the tops at NEA, as well as the innocent the rubes who follow them and fawn on Ravitch.

Perhaps it is because she floats around in the really thin air that is the field of education that the unsettled reactionary, Diane Ravitch, gets cheers from those who condemned her in her No Child Left Behind days. I have to remind myself that there are also bad historians at Harvard.

What makes Ravitch consistent, and consistently reactionary, is her dishonest rejection of the social context of the NCLB and its monster sibling, The Race to the Top, that is, her failure to locate these regimented education moves with the continuing crises of the system of capital, today losing wars and forging booming inequality.

That then allows Ravitch to appear to shift sides, when her real side is simple to see: class rule.

At issue is the method, form, which seems to fascinate and distract education workers. Will it be the iron fist or velvet glove, ensuring oppression one way or another?

If the problem is poverty, as Ravitch says, where does poverty come from? Who gains?

Ravitch is a patriot, promoting the false notion that "we are all in this together for good education," when every signal from daily life says this is an international war of the rich on the poor. Those children of the poor need to be drilled with the nationalism Ravitch backs, or they will not go fight imperial wars, and their parents won't accept the poverty that Ravitch complains about.

The last thing that the nationalist Ravitch (and the NEA and AFT mis-leaders) wants to see rising up is exactly what is beginning to rise up, a mass base of class conscious activists willing to take direct action to transform the system of capital, and its schools.

Here is pap from a reviewer, praising Ravitch (<http://edrev.asu.edu/reviews/rev892.pdf>) from the dripping conclusion quoting her: "...we must preserve American public education, because it is so intimately connected to our concepts of citizenship and democracy and to the promise of American life. In view of the money and power now arrayed on behalf of the ideas and programs that I will criticize, I hope it is not too late."

The reviewer claims that even within the Bush administration, "she was never a Republican. She was a Democrat, now she is an independent." Proof twice: little difference between Republicans and Democrats; not independent of, but enamored by, capitalism.

Ravitch, however, witlessly claims she's not on any side. She is: Exploitation.

Democracy? It's becoming the new religion. Creationism. Take this from three easy angles. The \$12.9 trillion that Obama gave to the banks in the most grotesque transfer of public to private wealth since the oligarches stole Russia (Stiglitz) was opposed by two-thirds of people in the US. That's sheer class rule: power. So are the two wars. opposed. yet endless: imperialism on its relentless search for cheap labor, raw materials, markets, and regional control.

From another angle: Ravitch claims to oppose the firing of Rhode Island teachers. How many fired Rhode Island education workers were there? How many people fired them? The educators outnumber their enemies by 10-1, maybe more. Democracy does not apply at work, the place where most people set up nearly everything in their lives.

Third: massive demonstrations of students, school workers, and community people on March 4<sup>th</sup> show terrific unrest. But those participants represent less than 1/ of the combined student/faculty bodies. A meeting of about 800 people decided on March 4<sup>th</sup>,

the demands, and the substance of the demonstrations, declaring itself “democratic.” True? In a sense, yes, in much the same way that about 1/3 of the people in the American colonies sided with the 1776 revolutionaries. Democracy is a problem.

The “Public Schooling” she touts? Another fantasy.

Education, leading out, is what everyone must have from birth, to live. It is always social, collective, interrogative, curious, combining theory with practice—something of a natural dialectical materialism offered to newborns.

Schooling is what capitalism does to people to make them marginally clever, but not wise, loyal, and obedient. Schooling is a fetish for education.

Schooling in the US has never been truly public, but fully segregated by class and race. Kids from different social classes get taught differing facts, under varying methods; mis-education fashioned through a tax system that favors the wealthy. The point is not to preserve public schooling but to rescue education from the ruling classes, to truly transform education.

There will be those who say that we need to have the Ravitch's to lead people, by baby steps, to new conclusions. There is no evidence that people learn that way, and, incidentally, events show that time is short.

The corporate state is here. Whether or not 2000 small bank failures in 2009-10, caused by the collapse of commercial real estate, will mean yet another collapse is unclear, but the deepening of financial, military, and social crises should be obvious---as should be carrot and stick methods of hegemony.

From the RA bully pulpit, Ravitch denounced merit pay, high-stakes exams, charters, privatization, and layoffs—all the issues that spin off from the society she supports, one devoted to capitalism and war, which she does not mention.

What’s her proposal? Two things.

- 1) “Vote!”

- 2) Buy 4 million bumper stickers with the slogan: “I am a public school teacher. I vote.”

The end of her. Wild music. Hugs from DVR. Photo ops for all. A plaque.

Even NEA delegates, later, voted that bumper sticker imbecility down. Was it the cost implication?

Delegates followed that elevated moment for hysterics with an equally significant debate: whether, in the middle of a written motion, to use the term, “Staph,” or

“Staphylococcus.” Unlike the non-existent debates about the war, or banksters, this battle went on for 24 minutes.

Presidents from the 50 states then marched their dangerous, intimidating, postcards to Obama to the front of the podium facade where they lay in one, small, lifeless pile. DVR shouted that he would mail them!

One delegate said to me, “What this RA has done is ratify my belief that we are all in the same boat, as educators, as Americans, as NEA.”

On July 10<sup>th</sup>, Joyce O’Neal posted this on the “Dennis2Delegates” on-line discussion board:

“I was a first time delegate and was absolutely blown away....Dennis and Lilly (sic) did a superb job....keeping up with every parliamentary procedure and making sure the procedures went smoothly....I learned a lot about how we must continue to fight the fight for public education...I don’t want to miss another one. I can’t wait for Chicago.”

Two weeks earlier, I was banned from that discussion group for posting my question about Reg Weaver’s salary; reinstated when other delegates protested the ban online.

Most of the post-RA debate on the Dennis2Delegates list was about the quality of New Orleans hospitality.

No one noted that San Diego keeps its poor in Mexico, while the poorest of the poor are stuck in New Orleans.

Tom Pittman wrote on July 12, “This was my second RA, the first of which was San Diego, so I cannot imagine two more polar opposite places. San Diego was idyllic and New Orleans was not. My wife and I were robbed in broad daylight in the French Quarter, the weather was lousy, and I’ve stayed at Super 8 motels that were nicer than the Riverside Hilton. I wouldn’t mind if New Orleans was permanently removed from the list of RA locales.”

Tina, Spiegel, writing on July 12, thanked Dennis, “for a wonderful job keeping us in line.”

Another delegate, a long time friend who has more than paid his dues in NEA, leading strikes and job actions, bargaining contracts, organizing new locals, even raising PAC funds, said to me as I left, “This was all expensive bullshit, Rich. Bullshit. But did you get your question about Reg Weaver’s \$680,000 (actually 686,949) salary answered?”

No, I never did.

Three states (Michigan, California, and New Jersey) raised more than \$1.26 million for PAC work.

The big winner was New Jersey delegate Debra Sullivan who will take home \$15,000 from the Pac Drawing. More quasi-merit pay.

What the RA exhibits well is the limits of liberal opportunism or, more precisely, U.S. unionism as it is today. The second-tier aristocracy of intellectual workers is willing to accept, even promote the exploitation, and death, of others, but they don't like their freedom to close their doors and teach abused, nor do they want their jobs cut, nor pay attached to test scores. That they cannot connect war, inequality, and schooling means not simply, that their intellects are limited, but they will lose even the reforms that drive their hope and actions. This, then, is fascism developing democratically. Those, like Kim Scipes in his new book, The AFL-CIO's Secret War who want to use "democracy" to defeat an enemy with a powerful ruthless military and police force, a long history of mentoring for command, and, on the other hand, want to use "union democracy," to transform the rigid rule of unionism, might want to think twice. Democracy versus force makes no sense. What if labor imperialism is popular as it was in the RA?

The many hierarchies that fashion exploitation, and voluntary servitude, will roil the land until front and rear sights hit on the true target.

### ***US Unionism—What to Do?***

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, which I believe is the rapid emergence of fascism as a popular mass movement.

It does not have to be that way.

Let us hope that 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.

Labor bosses at all levels are the nearest and most vulnerable of workers' enemies. Rather than "move unions to the left," better, "demolish the labor quislings, take their treasuries, seize their buildings, as we build a mass class conscious movement to transcend the system of capital."

Why does that make better sense? Because unions are no more unions than schooling is education.

- 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 Corporate State.
- Labor Bosses are deeply invested in the Corporate State which is an executive committee and armed weapon of the rich and little else today. Proof? As we saw above, they poured tens of millions of dollars and untold thousands of volunteer

hours into the recent election, luring people into participating in their own oppression. It's a useful diversion as many people still believe in some form of democracy, tantamount to a new faith, and it keeps them from acting out on the job, where the Labor Boss and Big Boss deal is already done, as we shall see.

- 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.
- The remarkable salaries of US Labor Bosses come directly from the fruits of US imperialism and war. They know that. And they have been war hawks for decades, using the unions to promote the Empire's desires.
- The vast majority of unions are corrupt and hierarchical at the core, usually mimicking the structure of the employers. The NEA, to my knowledge, is the least corrupt of US unions. Even so, those seeking to reform those unions are not learning lessons to transcend capitalism, but rather they learn every opportunist and corrupt tactic that has kept US "unionism" afloat when it should have been put to sleep years ago.
- When one gets close to "reforming" most US unions, one will face serious violence. That will come from not only the union bosses, but 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. NEA never used the fist in the past. We shall see how NEA reacts to serious dissent should it arise from the bottom of the expertly stratified hierarchy.
- 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. NEA doesn't allow students, for example, to vote in NEA official meetings. Why? Students do not pay dues—capital's favorite passkey. NEA splits "support personnel" from classroom teachers, teachers from professors, public workers from private workers (who frequently vote down school tax measures, etc). Indeed, unions mirror the divisions of work, cultures, and hierarchies of their industries.
- 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).
- The last thing the Labor Movement and its aristocrats wants 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 to just 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 and the boss too -- with the goal of overturning them 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 Aronowitz and others' "Scholars, Artists and Writers for Social Justice," etc, or simply failed, if somewhat heroically: *Labor Notes*.

The emergence of fascism will not mirror its predecessor movements in precise ways. However, if that was to happen, 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 the 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.

For school workers, let us review what happens when schooling is substituted for education, when school is split from warfare, when capitalist schooling is disguised as public schooling, when the nature of schooling is cut away from the corporate state, when unionism is confused with unity and solidarity, and when hopes for a savior, other than collective action, is substituted for organizing to abolish capitalism, retain what was good about it (science, for example), and create a new society where people can lead reasonably free, caring, cooperative lives: communism.

What happens is this: Schooling becomes a job bank for the middle class, isolated from the people who need them, and whom they need most: poor and working class kids and parents. We see this when NEA and AFT both fight to tax these people, to pay off school workers and the NEA/AFT too.

It is possible, though unlikely, to spend on schooling and sustain warfare. So, is it ok to do schooling while the nation kills millions of people elsewhere? And, over time, how

will that reverberate in the homeland and troops return and find there are no jobs outside education, and no jobs in it? But, as we see with the RA votes, thousands of teacher leaders are willing to make the trade: money for them, for war. That kind of perverse democracy (which ignores millions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and around the world) needs to be attacked, not supported.

When capitalist schooling wears the public schooling mask, people continue to believe, wrongly, in a commonality of interests in schooling that cannot exist in such a segregated, capitalist, setting. More, it pulls them into greater support for the corporate state's form of schooling, and support for that state itself.

When US unions are confused with unionism, as Kim Scipes, Paul Buhle, and many other radicals do, then one must work within the twisted framework of unions, structurally divisive and corrupt, hoping they are something they are not. If you win a union, what do you win? Ask Ron Carey and Labor Notes. You win a reactionary institution and, most likely, you will get heaved out.

It is commonplace to seek someone other than ourselves to solve our problems. That this will simply recreate the initial problem in somewhat new forms seems to go by the wayside: Obama.

The core issue of our time is the potential of a mass, class conscious, activist, social movement aiming at real control over work places, like schools, and communities, and upending the military, met by the very real promise of perpetual war and the fact of booming inequality.

### ***Postpartum RA Depression and a Resurrection***

To reiterate for emphasis: Schools are the centripetal organizing point of de-industrialized North American life. If there is hope for resistance, it is to turn schooling into education via a mass movement for equality and justice.

I was, admittedly, discomfited by being part of the summer's NEA rep assembly where I saw the vast majority of the school workers' representatives voting not to discuss the connections of imperialist war, class war, and school—not to discuss that, but discussing at considerable length the definitions of medical terms like “staph.” That is troubling.

American unionism is not going to answer the myriad of crises US capitalism has fashioned for us. Indeed, the unions held, on October 2, fake rallies under “One Nation” banners that Mussolini could have raised. Then, the AFL-CIO and both political parties began a “Blame China” campaign complete with the shopworn “Buy American” slogans that rightfully would have vanished with industrial out-sourcing and the internationalization of the financial markets. Should there be a call for brown-shirts, the union offices will probably be a place to pick them up.

With unions this bad, that is, unions that openly reject the reason for unions, that being the contradictory interests of employers and employees, what should be a line of defense, unionism, is largely another layer of enemies. School workers almost instinctively know that and it makes them more fearful. Much of the fear is groundless, some of it real. Ferocious defense of reasoned resistance can be built inside and outside the unions as we see, only in nascent form now, in Core and the Chicago Teachers' Union and the October 14<sup>th</sup> rejection of the concessions-riddled Baltimore AFT contract.

That said, discomfort is part of learning. I am uncomfortable too.

But this is a fight, the fight is on, and if we who are somewhat aware of the details of that battle do not take it on in the best ways we can, then we will be rolled over. Real barbarism rises in tandem with the emergence of fascism.

The Detroit city bosses, auto bosses, and DFT union bosses crushed the lives of the Detroit school worker force and the kids as well (remember, \$500 cut from each monthly paycheck as of 6 months ago, plus a 3% cut in September 2010 to set off pension costs, plus the loss of tenure, plus merit pay, plus more cuts in health benefits, and more--some "priority schools" cleaned, staffed and supplied, neighborhood schools in shambles and special ed kids' busses not picking them up, etc). Those who are born with the least inheritance, a color-coded factor, are hit first and worst.

Suburban teachers in the MEA (not AFT) allowed this to happen to Detroit and said nothing as they could skate on the birth-right test scores, etc. Now, the MEA is rolling over just as the AFT did. This happened all over the USA.

What changes people's minds, or gets them to act? That remains unsolved, for our side, as far as I know.

Evidence: the easy upending of socialism (really capitalism with a party promising benevolence at its top) in Russia and China after millions of people died to abolish the system of capital. Or, the US today, losing two wars over a decade, political leadership devoid of ethical balance or integrity, cities in ruins, massive joblessness, lost wars and returning troops unemployed, PTSD'ed, and suicidal--and a nearly fully pacified population. People in pacified areas become agents of their own oppression.

There is a treasure trove of literature about how the few rule the many; interesting stuff, probably going back to the first thoughts of the first woman who got exploited by a man. I make no claim to know why it is that some people are so easily placated, while others resist. I've been working on that for a long time, in practice and theory.

One method of pacification is to convince the oppressed that they are free and their interests are the same as the tyrants--fake democracy and nationalism personified by Diane Ravitch, the vacillating reactionary lauded by union hacks and politicians who most people recognize as Quislings, but Ravitch gets hugged by those muddled about

nationalism and democracy in the US. Her project, patriotic and religious, never changed. Her tactics did.

The nature of the government, the state, which in our case is capitalist democracy, also leads to a lot of contradictory thought. For example, are kids the property of the capitalist democracy's schools, or are they the property of their parents? Of course, as long as they are property, it's a false second-tier contradiction, but the argument that they are property of parents was one case that segregationists made not long ago.

Let's look at American tyranny from four angles: inside out, outside in, top down, and down up.

Inside out: is what is going on in US schools, where fear rules, a form of tyranny? Add in the regimentation of curricula, high-stakes anti-working class exams, militarization, etc, and I say yes. Since schools are extraordinarily important in the de-industrialized USA, I think that is a key indicator. But liberals seek to defend the myth of Public Education and thus, trap themselves in debates with reactionaries who insist the schools are terrible, and, at the same time, fashion faith in what really is the corporate state, easing its arrival, stripping people of their potential to comprehend and act on the world's class-based realities.

Outside in: If, say, we look back into the US from its many semi-colonies, do we see tyranny? I don't think the burden is on me to prove that. Consider the massive US bases around the world, about 800. They are not there to protect civil liberties and human rights.

Top down: do the massive bank bailouts (\$12.9 trillion according to Bloomberg), the bailout and takeover of the auto industry (both opposed by most Americans—and remember who gained, the financiers and auto bosses while those who retained auto jobs did so at ½ pay), and the real promise of perpetual war for regional control, cheap labor, raw material, and markets (perhaps supported by most Americans) indicate that this is a form of tyranny? I say yes. It is more true in the US now than ever--the government is an executive committee and armed weapon of the rich. Capitalism ran over democracy, completely.

Bottom up: with around 2 million people in prison, 1.5 million in the military (most economically drafted), massive and rising unemployment, bad jobs or meaningless jobs offered to most youth, most people routinely rejecting the vote because their choices amount to who will tyrannize them best, political debate so debased that the option of pole dancer vs. demagogue becomes laughable, nightmarish schools especially in poor and working class areas, a demolished social safety net (chopped down piece by piece by a united class of Democrats and Republicans, starting with those with least power, mental patients, then welfare recipients, then workers, then pensions, etc); does that add up to internal, structural tyranny? I say yes. If we add in the fact that nobody seems to notice, there is no democracy on the job, the most important location for most people's lives, I say it's a finalized form of tyranny.

Again, how rulers rule is not too hard to unravel.

Carrot and stick. "I am going to war. You go shopping."

Relentless surveillance: FBI raids, immigration raids, etc. According to staff in career services on my campus, the CIA and FBI are the top recruiters and they practice on students as an educational project.

Spectacles: If we say at least 50,000 people will attend every pro football game on Sunday; how many is that? Or, my hometown baseball Padres (sic) play in camouflage outfits and the military frequently does flyovers at games. Perhaps more pointedly telling: 750,000 people, by official estimates, attended the San Diego Air Show on the weekend of October 2, 2010. They were treated to three days of flyovers by the Blue Angels, Harrier Jump Jets, F22s, F18s, Apache helicopters and, best, a "Wall of Flame" made of napalm lighting the night sky in red, yellow and orange, easily seen from my home 9 miles to the south. One mother, a former student, took her two kids, one in middle school, the other in elementary, emailed me from just as the flames died down: "It's been amazing to see the helicopters do loop-de-loops, the Blue Angels in formation, the planes that can take off straight up, but the announcer was a little overboard when he was praising the way napalm sticks to human skin."

Religion--believe that and you'll believe anything, but to detail: it commonly is one of the first forms of alienation, paying someone else to interpret the world and suggest how to act on it. Criticism of religion is a fountain-head of criticism.

Divide and rule: racism, sexism, nationalism, and, importantly, hierarchy. Etienne de la Boetie, in a terrific little book, *The Politics of Obedience, the Discourse of Voluntary Servitude* (just 86 pages and cheap!) suggests that tyranny arrives through either deception or conquest; then becomes habit. As long as people consent, the stronger the tyranny becomes.

Then, hierarchies grow. One rules ten, they rule a thousand, a thousand rule a million (union hierarchies for example), all believing they share in the common weal while those at the top filch nearly everything of value, but many believe they have a stake in despotism.

Laws, nothing but a reflection of economic and political reality, become respectable and honored, as if they apply evenly.

How do a few Masters control so many, metaphorical, slaves?  
(<http://richgibson.com/masterslave.htm>).

All this tracks along, or beneath, Marx's theory of alienation within capitalism. People are alienated from one another, structurally, because the few own (a reality won by force and deception) the land and means of production. The many must engage in a war of all on all in order to gain work. They don't control the processes (Taylorism), or products of their

work. The more they do this, the more they enrich the owners, and divide themselves (high stakes exams), and the less human everyone becomes as all life is, in any system, social, mores- now than ever, a world united by exchange, technology, communication, etc, yet driven apart by war and greed. The few, rooted in national militaries and police, war on one another using the children of the poor to fight and die.

For those seeking an excellent work on revolution, by someone trying to stop it (just read it upside down), see the CIA asset, Chalmers Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*. Johnson, writing recently, says "Americans have no grasp of history so they cannot connect cause and effect." Schools play a major role in that. He's also said, repeatedly for the last three years, that the US is a fascist nation. His solution? Leave. Flee. Or, dismantle the empire, as did the British—not noting that the US does not have the US to hide behind now. And not acceptable, but not stupid.

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.

People will resist, as they must in order to live. The problem remains: class consciousness. What establishes that? We do have a fairly good idea about how domination is achieved, but class conscious resistance is another thing.

Lenin, of course, addressed that throughout his adult life. Despite his terrible errors in, especially, the question of nationalism and the theory of productive forces, his best works, as in the "Hegel Notebooks" and *State and Revolution*, go right at that point.

Rosa Luxemburg criticized Lenin's grasp of imperialism, rightly so I believe. Her contribution to class consciousness is, therefore, somewhat deeper.

George Lukacs picked up from there in *History and Class Consciousness*, indicating the necessity of organization to address and transform the problem into revolutionary action that could be preserved over time.

There is a field of marxism which suggests (grossly oversimplifying) that because people will always have to fight back in some way, they will come to understand they need to fight back as a class over time. Marty Glaberman, for me, represents some of the best of this (<http://richgibson.com/glaberman.html>) I am saddened to suspect that this avenue has not produced class consciousness.

Fredy Perlman argued that the customs and demands of daily life within capitalism both obscure and reinforce it (see: <http://richgibson.com/repro-daily-life.html>)

Wilhelm Reich took this up as he witnessed the rise of European Nazis in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*.

School worker Paulo Freire shifted the stage from class consciousness to critical consciousness, declared himself a devout Catholic, Marxist, and post-modernist (angry religious glossolalia). A revolutionary wherever he was not, and a liberal reformer

wherever he was, borrowing very heavily from Hegel and Dom Halder Camera, Freire is a cul-de-sac but heartily defended by a small publishing industry that tries hard to make him something he was not—a revolutionary.

Bertell Ollman briefly picked up where Reich left off in a very short and readable article, here:

<http://www.pipeline.com/~rougeforum/towardclassconsciousness.htm>

Just as there is an entire field on Tyranny, so is there an entire field on Psychoanalytical Marxism. See for example, Wolfenstein, in a book by that title. For me, this field has, so far, ended in a cul-de-sac but it may open some doors for others. It is, never the less, clear to me that reason alone does not change people's minds. The turn to psychology makes sense, especially if one is dedicated, as I am, to people being able to unravel and act on their own, far beyond, “tell me what to do to achieve this and I will do it” (see: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/>)

So far, we encountered the usual check list of education, agitation, and action.

What, in this little intrusion, is left is communication, organization, and, most importantly, close personal ties with people.

Every break we can make through the capitalist press is worth it. Stephen Krashen's tireless exemplary work on this by his relentless letter writing opens eyes and curiosity (dangerous).

Still, we need our own communication systems that we, mostly, control.

We have our own hard-copy and online presses. If communication and intellectual work is a form of resistance, we need these presses to grow.

- Substance News (hard copy and online): <http://www.substancenews.net/index.php> (send money!!! It's a form of resistance);
- Rouge Forum News (online and hard copy backlist):  
<http://rougeforum.org/newspaper/RougeForumNews-Issue16.pdf>

Organization and personal ties are related. If I've fairly described our broad social context, then this is a life-long struggle that will ebb and flow. Organization is not only important because we have enemies who have command structures and weapons, but because to sustain ourselves over time, we need friends, people who will stick with us through errors, ups and downs, and some disasters. Organization can help set aside the real isolation that honest resisters in the US reasonably feel.

To my knowledge, the Rouge Forum is the only education-based organization in the US that, broadly, sees class struggle as key to grasping why things are as they are, and what to do about it. The RF has been around for more than a decade. Our email list has about 4600 people on it. We cannot tell any of them to do anything. There is no "line" but a wide, wide range of views--liberals, soldiers and officers, Trotskyists, reds of many kinds

but as far as I know, no Stalinists, school workers of all sorts, unionists, animal righters, environmentalists, anarchists, anarcho-communists, community organizers, parents, students, etc. We have a pretty big group of people in the UK, South Africa, India, and the Caribbean too.

Rouge Forum members work in the professional organizations, publish books and articles. Write for the capitalist press. Teach. Struggle in the unions. Study. And raise hell. Our members have led massive test boycotts, strikes, sit-ins, occupations, guerrilla theater disrupting daily life, teachins and outs, held yearly conferences taking up the theory and practice of change and enjoying each other—fun.

You're welcome to join us, and if not, no hard feelings. Rougeforum@pipeline.com  
<http://www.rougeforum.org/>

Dennis Van Roekel's wedding with the White House will not be interrupted but by mass, class-conscious, direct action.

At issue is connecting reason to power.

So far, the education agenda is a war agenda (see Gibson & Ross, 2009, Workplace #16, <http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca/journal/index.php/workplace/article/view/47/gibsonross161>)

### ***Addendum and Disclosure***

*Future NEA RAs:*

- 2011 Chicago
- 2012 Washington DC
- 2013 Atlanta
- 2014 Denver
- 2015 Miami Beach
- 2016 Washington DC

### ***Resources:***

On Imperialism:

- Marx, Chapter 8 of *Capital*
- Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*
- Rosa Luxemburg, Imperialism in the *Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, esp. pp. 17-19 + 294.
- Al Szymanski, *Imperialism*

On the specifics of US labor and imperialism:

- Jack Scott, *Yankee Unions Go Home*

- C. W. Mills, *the New Men Of Power*
- Paul Buhle, Kim Scipes online.

On Spectacles:

- *Society of the Spectacle* by Guy Debord.

On Surveillance

- Foucault, all of it.

The best introduction to Marx, I know of

- Fischer, *How to Read Karl Marx*.

On Marx and alienation

- Bertell Ollman, *Alienation*.

On Freire:

- Gibson in *Neo-Liberalism and Education Reform*, Ross and Gibson, editors (Hampton Press, 2007). Also on-line here:  
<http://www.pipeline.com/~rougeforum/freirecriticaledu.htm>

On the nature of school/education fetishism and union fetishism:

- Gibson forthcoming from in *Cultural Logic* online now at  
<http://www.richgibson.com/EducationFetish.pdf>

### **About the Author:**

I am an emeritus professor of education at San Diego State University, spent most of my adult life in the labor unions, most of that in Detroit. I worked as a National Education Association organizing and bargaining specialist for nearly a decade. At the RA, I faced an ethical problem: How to be a dissident delegate, a writer, and researcher, and a friend to those many NEA members who I like and respect, yet who sometimes make such bad choices. As a delegate, I felt I had to be at least as persevering, diligent, as most others. I believe I was, arriving on time and leaving at the close each day, but departing 2 hours early on the last day to catch a plane—staying connected via phone to delegates in the hall. I decided not to quote anyone who sat near me, or even hint at their actions, in any way. I know NEA leaders understand reward and punish practices. While that is less common in NEA than in most unions, it persists. I have quoted other people who asked me to not use their names but offered to speak. I did quote people who published material online, in public. NEA paid part of my expenses as a delegate, maybe three-fourths of them. I paid the rest. Good luck to us, every one. [Rgibson@pipeline.com](mailto:Rgibson@pipeline.com)