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The Education Agenda is a War Agenda: Connecting Reason to Power and Power to Resistance

Rich Gibson & E. Wayne Ross

The sky is, of course, falling. We are lambs among wolves. The core issue of our time is the relationship of rising color-coded social and economic inequality challenged by the potential of mass class-conscious resistance. This can now be summed up as life and death, an issue that most North Americans avoided during nearly eight years of war because, while the US supports one of the largest militaries in the world, its personnel amount to less than 1% of the population. The very real conflict also sets up a challenge often ignored: how can people become whole, that is, live reasonably meaningful intelligible lives in connection with others in the midst of a social collapse that can quickly become barbarizing?

If we are to face the crises of our day we must do what *Nemesis* author Chalmers Johnson claims most Americans cannot do: connect cause and effect, the whole with the parts, past-present-future—as Johnson rightly believes history is eradicated in America.

The task means connecting war with imperialism, economic collapse with capitalism, and the imperial project to designs on schools, what people know and how they come to know it. It also means connecting the solutions, that is, recognizing that fights in health care are necessarily fights in education, that the battles about immigration are also battles about wages, hours, and benefits. It means recognizing what is really afoot: class war, an international war of the rich on the poor: the social relations of capitalism. The economic restructuring through massive job losses in almost every sector (2.6 million in the last 4 months¹) going on now will result in either a horrific defeat for the North American and world working class, or these months will mark as an awakening moment when the people recognized the many boots on their throats. Last, making connections means transformation, overcoming the system of capital as, without that North Star, any social movement is directionless, just recreating injustice in slightly new ways.

Making Connections: The Election of 2008

Let us step back briefly and examine the last election. The recent election should not only be studied as how voters chose who would most charmingly oppress the majority of the

people from the executive committee of the rich, the government. It should be studied, more importantly, as how an element of capitalist democracy², the spectacle of the election, has speeded the emergence of fascism as a mass popular force; that is:

- the corporate state, the rule of the rich, near complete merger of corporations and government;
- the continuation of the suspension of civil liberties (as with renditions);
- the attacks on whatever free press there is;
- the rise of racism and segregation (in every way, but especially the immigration policies);
- the promotion of the fear of sexuality as a question of pleasure (key to creating the inner slave), and the sharpened commodification of women (Sarah Palin to pole dancers);
- the governmental/corporate attacks on working peoples' wages and benefits (bailouts to merit pay to wage and benefit concessions);
- intensification of imperialist war (sharpening the war in Afghanistan sharpens war on Pakistan which provokes war on Russia, etc, and the US is NOT going to leave Iraq's oil);
- the promotion of nationalism (all class unity) by, among others, the union bosses,
- teaching people the lie that someone else should interpret reality and act for us, when no one is going to save us but us;
- trivializing what is supposed to be the popular will to vile gossip, thus building cynicism—especially the idea that we cannot grasp and change the world, but also debasing whatever may have been left of a national moral sense;
- increased mysticism (is it better to vote for a real religious fanatic or people who fake being religious fanatics?); and
- incessant attacks on radicals (Bill Ayers is not a radical; he is a foundation-seeking liberal now, once he was a liberal with a bomb, but people see him as the epitome of a radical and he IS connected to Obama).

That is a litany of the acceleration of fascism.

Al Szymanski outlined the basic functions of the capitalist state's democracy three decades ago.³ This is a reminder:

1. To guarantee the accumulation of capital and profit maximization and make it legitimate.
2. Preserve, form, and temper, capitalist class rule.
3. Raise money to fund the state.
4. Guarantee and regulate the labor force.
5. Facilitate commerce.
6. Ensure buying power in the economy.
7. Directly and indirectly subsidize private corporations.
8. State sanction of self-regulation of corporations.
9. Advance the overseas interests of corporations.

Democracy does not dominate capital. Democracy submits, atomizes voters to individuals huddled in ballot booths asking capital's favorite question: What about Me?

Let us continue to make connections, this time foreign and domestic policy.

Making Connections: US Foreign Policy and the Collapsed Economy

What is US foreign policy? It is largely unchanged post-Bush. It is war for empire, regional control, and, in particular, oil. That is why the US is in Afghanistan (it is not Al-Qaeda which is more out of business than not, and it is not the Taliban whose potential pipelines were hugged by the US years ago—though worries about nuclear Pakistan destabilized by a Taliban-ruled Afghanistan are real enough). Empire is why the US is in Iraq, and is not going to leave, not in 2010, not in 2011. The permanent bases, six by our count, say otherwise, and so does every military expert working in the Obama administration. The wars' cost, depending on your analyst, about \$2 trillion, though we must acknowledge the military budget is bathed by secrecy.

Failed wars have a lot to do, but not entirely to do, with the economic collapse that continues to spiral while Obama, like the sorcerer's apprentice, tries to contain it. The containment, so far, adds up to about \$9.7 trillion, though that too is a secret, as are the recipients, in the midst of proclamations about transparency. Bloomberg is one of the few news groups willing to sue for the information—now in court.

The TARPs etc. are sheer robbery achieved by the use of power that goes to the very nature of US society itself. When we hear “the economy,” and “our government,” we should think, “Their economy, their government.”

Where the bailout money has gone is a secret.⁴ Where it is going to go is a secret. Which banks the FDIC is visiting is even a secret. The bailout is not trickling down. Why, after all, should banks lend to people who are already in debt at a rate more than their annual incomes—about 50% of Americans? The total debt of the US government, including unfunded entitlement obligations such as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, etc. adds up as a debt of more than \$175,000 per citizen, more than \$53 trillion and that is before the bailouts began.⁵ To nearly all economists, before the bust, that was a secret. Societies whose veins run with secrecy, which run on rumors and fanciful hopes, verge on tyranny. But it is no secret that the stimulus is already stimulating sharp battles between state, county, and city governments over who gets what, and who holds the reins—must assuredly not those who do the work.

The stimulus package that just passed congress may be full of pork, true, but one key aspect that is being missed. It represents a real conflict inside the US ruling classes, who use the government as their executive committee and armed weapon, now with Obama as the Chair. This battle can be oversimplified as a struggle between old-line capital, as with the Rockefeller backed Council on Foreign Relations, and newer capital, like the Bush/Cheney crowd, as well as a struggle between finance capital, investment banks, and more immediately productive capital, like the “Big 3” automakers (we can already see the

financier winners and auto losers in that). Nevertheless, it is a fight with each player acting, not out of high aims for the patriotic good, but the narrowest forms of opportunism, what Lady Astor called, “running off higgledy-piggledy,” after the nearest dollar.

The many heads of finance never really separated from the many bodies of productive capital, but the heads of finance who served as generals of the moneyed class believed they did, until the bodies of overproduction, corruption, and waste pulled them back.

The US is in a desperate situation. The military was fought to a standstill in Iraq by an enemy unfit to call Enemy. The best the US can hope for is a draw in Afghanistan. Stephen Biddle of the Council on Foreign Relations (whose members are sprinkled all over the Obama regime) testified to that before Congress on February 12 of this year.⁶ It’s interesting to see how closely the Obama line tracks behind Biddle’s writing. But Biddle is quite clear: The US is going to be in Iraq a long time, and probably longer in Afghanistan, at a cost of perhaps 50 to 100 dead troops a month.

The US is a declining world power ideologically, morally, politically, economically, and militarily. The government stands exposed as opposing the common good—as with the massive opposition to the first bailout before the Obama/McCain election—and it cannot meet the elementary needs of the people, from housing to jobs to health care to old age assistance.

US elites are well aware of their own weaknesses and so are their potential enemies. We recently saw Russia attack Georgia, a US ally, and the US did nothing. Russia challenged Europe and shut down pipelines. Both the US and Europe only whined.

In Europe, national political and economic rulers retreat to the comfort and protection of their home militaries as the notion of a united continent evaporates in a wash of economic realities and old hatreds. But, the contradictory nature of capital popped up when General Motors demanded a bailout from Europe, after decades of “Buy Americanism” from both GM management and the United Auto Workers.

The collapsed economy and failing wars surely turn up in domestic policy where, we can note with humor, Obama has participated in, and now led, perhaps the most massive transfer of wealth in history, gone on a breathtaking spending spree, yet he promises to balance the budget.

Making Connections: The Economic Meltdown Sparks Global Unrest; Prompts Plans to use Military Power to Curb Civil Unrest

As global capitalism implodes there is has been a marked up tick in social upheaval worldwide and now establishment analysts are expressing their concerns about "class conflict" and "civil war" in the USA.

The financial crisis has sparked unrest globally and particularly across Europe, with demonstrations, strikes, and protests in 16 European countries.⁷ Here are a just a few examples:

- Tens of thousands of workers marched in Lisbon, Portugal on March 13 against the policies of the Socialist government, which unions say are increasing unemployment and favoring the rich at a time of crisis;
- Hundreds of workers at Bulgaria's Kremikovtzi steel mill protested on March 9 over planned lay-offs and unpaid salaries, demanding the Socialist-led government find a buyer for the insolvent plant; thousands of police officers marched in Sofia on Sunday to demand a 50 percent wage rise and better working conditions;
- In Greece, the fatal police shooting of a 15-year old in December sparked the country's worst riots in decades, fueled by anger at economic hardships and youth unemployment. Anarchists and left wing guerrilla groups have followed up with a wave of attacks against banks and police; Greek unions, representing about 2.5 million workers, have also staged repeated protests against the government saying its measures to tackle the global crisis only burden the poor;
- Last month over 100,000 people marched against cutbacks in Ireland.⁸

High unemployment rates have led to protests in Latvia, Chile, Greece, Bulgaria and Iceland and contributed to strikes in Britain and France.⁹

Last month, a half-million Mexican truckers shut down the countries highways to protest high fuel prices.¹⁰

In December, Russian riot police busted up protests in Vladivostok against new taxes intended to "help prop up Russia's domestic car industry and prevent people buying cheaper, imported products." BBC reports that the protests were fuelled by the severe impact of the global economic crisis on Russia. According to *Newsweek*, "the Russian Interior Ministry set up a special command center in Moscow, packed with surveillance equipment designed to deal with street unrest. The Duma, on Kremlin instructions, added seven new articles to the criminal code including a law that makes "participating in mass disorders" such as the one in Vladivostok a 'crime against the state.'"¹¹ 800,000 Russians lost their jobs in December and January, making the total number of unemployed more than 6 million or 8.1 percent. Gennady Gudkov, former KGB colonel and current chair of the Duma's security committee, said, "We are expecting mass unemployment and mass riots. There will be not enough police to stop people's protests by force."¹²

There a have been massive general strikes in the French territories of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Réunion.¹³ The general strike in Guadeloupe prompted the French government to fly in riot police (Guadeloupe is a French "overseas department" in the Caribbean). And while the general strike lasted 6 weeks—it ended on March 4 with an agreement among the strike collective, the employers federation and local and French governments, which granted 20 of the strikers primary demands and set out negotiations

on a long list of remaining issues—strikes and protests continue, involving tens of thousands of workers.¹⁴

The agreement to end the Gaudeloupe strike, called the “Jacques Bino Accord”, identifies the underlying cause of discord as “the present economic and social situation existing in Guadeloupe [that] results from the perpetuation of the model of the plantation economy”. An economy “based on monopoly privileges and abuses of dominant positions that generate injustices.” The accord calls for an end to these obstacles “by establishing a new economic order enhancing the status of everyone and promoting new social relationships”.

Just as the general strike ended in Guadeloupe,¹⁵ social unrest over economic conditions spread to Réunion (a French "overseas department" in the Indian Ocean).¹⁶

There is a definite pattern developing worldwide. And now, US elites are starting to worry about what might happen if the American workers take action as a result of their frustrations with massive economic inequalities.

United States Prepares for Class War

In his latest monthly commentary, sociologist and world-systems analyst Immanuel Wallerstein discusses the breakdown of taboos as the world's economy continues to disintegrate.¹⁷

He notes, for example, that "nationalization" of banks and industry is now being seriously discussed by establishment intellectuals and analysts such as Alan Greenspan, Senator Lindsay Graham, and economist Alan Blinder.

But Wallerstein's most dramatic example of the breakdown of taboos is the open discussion of the possibility of class war breaking out in the USA. Wallerstein says, "after hearing nationalization proposals by arch-conservative notables, we are now hearing serious discussions about the possibilities of civil war in the United States. Zbigniew Brzezinski, apostle of anti-Communist ideology and President Carter's National Security Advisor, appeared on a morning television talk show on February 17, and was asked to discuss his previous mention of the possibility of class conflict in the United States in the wake of the worldwide economic collapse."

In Brzezinski's interview with Joe Scarborough on MSNBC about his recently published book—*America and the World: Conversations on the Future of American Foreign Policy*,¹⁸ co-authored with another former National Security Advisor (to Gerald Ford and George H. W. Bush) Brent Scowcroft—Brzezinski was straightforward about the belief that class war in America is real possibility:

JOE SCARBOROUGH: You also talked about the possibility of class conflict.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: I was worrying about it because we're going to have millions and millions of unemployed, people really facing dire straits. And we're going to be having that for some period of time before things hopefully improve. And at the same time there is public awareness of this extraordinary wealth that was transferred to a few individuals at levels without historical precedent in America...And you sort of say to yourself: what's going to happen in this society when these people are without jobs, when their families hurt, when they lose their homes, and so forth?

We have the government trying to repair: repair the banking system, to bail the housing out. But what about the rich guys? Where is it? [What are they] doing?

Brzezinski went on to compare the current economic meltdown to the "Panic of 1907":

It sort of struck me, that in 1907, when we had a massive banking crisis, when banks were beginning to collapse, there were going to be riots in the streets. Some financiers, led by J.P. Morgan, got together. He locked them in his library at one point. He wouldn't let them out until 4:45 AM, until they all kicked in and gave some money to stabilize the banks: there was no Federal Reserve at the time.

Where is the moneyed class today? Why aren't they doing something: the people who made billions, millions. I'm sort of thinking of Paulson, of Rubin [former treasury secretaries]. Why don't they get together, and why don't they organize a National Solidarity Fund in which they call on all of those who made these extraordinary amounts of money to kick some back in to [a] National Solidarity Fund?

Brzezinski continued saying,

"And if we don't get some sort of voluntary National Solidarity Fund, at some point there'll be such political pressure that Congress will start getting in the act, there's going to be growing conflict between the classes and if people are unemployed and really hurting, hell, there could be even riots!"¹⁹

Wallerstein points out that "almost simultaneously" LEAP/Europe a European agency that issues monthly confidential bulletins for its clients—politicians, public servants, businessmen, and investors—devoted its February issue to global geopolitical dislocation, discussing the possibility of civil war in Europe, in the United States, and Japan; and foreseeing a "generalized stampede" that will lead to clashes, semi-civil wars.²⁰

Wallerstein quotes the Global Europe Anticipation Bulletin as saying:

"If your country or region is a zone in which there is a massive availability of guns, the best thing you can do...is to leave the region, if that's possible."²¹

And Wallerstein also points out that, “the only one of these countries which meets the description of massively available guns is the United States. The head of LEAP/Europe, Franck Biancheri, noted that ‘there are 200 million guns in circulation in the United States, and social violence is already manifest via gangs.’ The experts who wrote the report asserted that there is already an ongoing emigration of Americans to Europe, because that is ‘where physical danger will remain marginal.’”²²

Wallerstein emphasizes that “these analyses are not coming from left intellectuals or radical social movements.... Verbal taboos are broken only when such people are truly fearful. The point of breaking the taboos is to try to bring about major rapid action - the equivalent of J.P. Morgan locking the financiers in his home in 1907.”²³

And US elites are obviously fearful enough to start planning for military responses to potential social upheaval as a result of the collapsing economy. Last November, the US War College's Strategic Studies Institute posited a number of “strategic surprises” that the country should be prepared for, including potential for disruption and violence caused by the economy's failure. The report “Known Unknowns: Unconventional 'Strategic Shocks' in Defense Strategy Development,” says “widespread civil violence inside the US would force the defense establishment to reorient priorities in extremis to defend basic domestic order and human security.”²⁴

And now, for the first time ever, US military units are staged and are training inside the country to address civil unrest rising from inequality. The *Army Times* has reported on the US Northern Command's (NORTHCOM) deployment of the 3rd Infantry Division's 1st Combat Brigade Team (BCT) on U.S. soil for "civil unrest" and "crowd control" duties. The 5,000-member force was one of first units deployed in Baghdad.²⁵

Canadian economist Michel Chossudovsky has recently described the “Orwellian Solution” to curb civil unrest in the US via reinforcement of the Homeland Security apparatus and the militarization of civilian state institutions. According to Chossudovsky, various pieces of “anti-terrorist” legislation (e.g., USA Patriot Act) and presidential directives have been put in place since 2001, largely using the pretext of the “global war on terrorism.” And now there is planning for a cohesive system of detention camps to be run by the Department of Homeland Security and the Pentagon. The National Emergency Centers Establishment Act (HR 645)²⁶ was introduced in the US Congress in January and “calls for the establishment of six national emergency centers in major regions in the US to be located on existing military installations.”²⁷

The stated purpose of the “national emergency centers” is to provide “temporary housing, medical, and humanitarian assistance to individuals and families dislocated due to an emergency or major disaster.” In actuality, what we are dealing with are FEMA internment camps. HR 645 states that the camps can be used to “meet other appropriate needs, as determined by the Secretary of Homeland Security.”²⁸

There has been virtually no coverage of HR 645 in the mainstream media and as

Chossudovsky points out the proposed “civilian facilities” are amount to the militarization of FEMA internment camps, modeled on Guantanamo.

The Education Agenda as a War Agenda

These factors will all appear in schools where money plays a very significant, but not the primary, role. The primary role of capitalist schooling is social control, winning the children of the poor and working classes to be loyal, obedient, dutiful, and useful, to the ruling classes under a variety of lies: We are all in this together; this is a multicultural society, democracy trumps inequality, we all can be President, etc. Kids learn the ethics of slaves, perhaps an important reason why there is so little outcry from the rank and file of the military, engaged in war crimes world wide, but quite well educated.

We said, months before the election, that Obama will continue the Reagan-Bush-Clinton-Bush education agenda that came into being after the ruling classes nearly lost control of the schools and universities during and after they lost the Vietnam war—ran away. That agenda can be summarized by:

- The regimentation of curricula (phonics, abstract math, the eradication of history and academic freedom);
- Racist and anti-working class high stakes examination;
- The deepening militarization of schooling (JROTC, ROTC, CIA, NSA, ICE, HS, etc. all over campuses).

We added that, in some instances, Obama's cadre would turn to privatization and in others they will not, depending mostly on the interaction of profitability and social control. One remarkable example of the merger of the corporate and the government is Bob Bobb's arrival in Detroit, to oversee the Detroit Public School's finances (while a dysfunctional school board is allowed to pretend it controls whatever is left). Mr Bobb is on the DPS payroll at about \$250,000. His salary is to be supplemented by the right-wing Broad Foundation, where he was trained, at nearly \$100,000.

Arne Duncan, Obama's Education Secretary, is following precisely that path, rushing along with plans for merit pay rooted in test results, the abolition of some teacher job protection, a nationally regulated curriculum, privatized charters like those favored by the Broad Foundation and the takeover of some urban school system, like Detroit, by Broad-trained and funded Mr. Bobb. Leaders of both teacher unions, the National Education Association (largest union in the USA by far) and the American Federation of Teachers assist the Obama project at every turn; AFT President Randi Weingarten said the union would “embrace the goals and aspirations outlined” by Obama in his recent speech to the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.”²⁹

Obama's education plan is based on the same rhetoric (fear mongering) and reasoning that produced the educationally disastrous NCLB. Indeed, Diane Ravitch, right-wing education policy analyst at New York University and Assistant Secretary of Education in the Reagan Administration recently opined,

“that Obama has given President George W. Bush a third term in education policy and that Arne Duncan is the male version of Margaret Spellings [Education Secretary in Bush’s second term]. Maybe he really is Margaret Spellings without the glasses and wearing very high heels. We all know that Secretary Spellings greeted Duncan's appointment with glee. She wrote him an open letter in which she praised him as "a fellow reformer" who supports NCLB and anticipated that he would continue the work of the Bush administration.”³⁰

Like his predecessors, Obama misrepresents public education performance as a scare tactic and to open the door for the privatization. Gerald Bracey, a fellow at the Education Policy Studies Laboratory at Arizona State University, has cataloged recent errors in Obama’s claims about public schools.³¹ Here are a few examples:

- Obama claims that graduation rates have fallen from 77% to 67%, but the U. S. Department of Education says the best method for estimating it puts it at 74.5% nationally.
- Obama said dropout rates have tripled over the past 30 years. But how does a 10% decline in graduation rate equal a 300% increase in dropout rate?
- Obama claims “Just a third of our 13- and 14-year-olds can read as well as they should.” Bracey calls this claim “outright garbage.”³²
- Obama “raved about South Korean schools but neglected to say that thousands of South Korean families sell their children--yes, sell--to American families so their kids can a) learn English and b) avoid the horrible rigidity of Korean schools. And while the US trails Korea on average test scores, it has a higher proportion of students scoring at the highest level on the Program of International Student Achievement (PISA). Moreover, it has the highest number of high scorers (67,000) of any country. No one else even comes close.”
- Obama “praises charters for creativity and innovation. But study after study of charters has come away saying they were surprised at how much the charter schools look like regular public schools. And charter schools don't score as well on tests as regular public schools. You can't bash the public schools on test scores then praise the charters which have lower scores.”³³

Obama’s education stimulus package continues the regimentation of curriculum and test-driven approach to education by bribing states and school districts to apply for \$5 billion in grants largely aimed at boosting student test scores. These grants, administered by the U.S. Department of Education, are known as the “Race to the Top Fund.”

Obama, Duncan, and the rest do this because that is what they must do in the social context they are in, and because they have chosen sides in what is the class war, the international war of the rich on the poor, which the rich recognize and the poor, at least in

the US, do not—yet.

Again, this is the core issue of our time: the interaction of rising inequality and mass, class-conscious, resistance. That is why the education budget is a war budget.

Those who reject this fact not only mislead others—as did hundreds of liberal pundits who fashioned the hysteria that continues around Obama—but they also set up poor and working people for the emergence of fascism, the corporate state that emerges around us now. Example: demands to nationalize banks; the corporate state fully come forth.

This includes, for example, columnist Robert Scheer who recently called the Obama near-bank nationalization, “fascist,” then turned about and concluded that Obama is just okay.³⁴ Or education big-wig Linda Darling Hammond who waived pom-poms for Obama, then wandered off from the Obama education department, disillusioned, but never issued a self-criticism about what she did, or a warning about what scared her off.³⁵

Those who feel betrayed by Obama, like Scheer and Darling-Hammond, actually betrayed thousands of people themselves by marching them into the teeth of his charming grin. And those who knew their operation was a scam, like the education union bureaucrats, willfully set up their members for defeat. These mis-leaders should recognize the severe limitations of their analytical abilities and issue a public self-critique, rather than continue to add to the delirium and intellectual rot that typified the national election.

In many nations, schools are the centripetal organizing point of life. The contradiction of inequality and resistance already appears in education worldwide. In Greece and France school workers and students recently initiated what became general strikes. Those who are hit first and worst, that is those who were born with the least inheritance or who have lesser powers, are likely to fight back first—though not necessarily with strategic or even tactical wisdom: New York University building takeovers, graduate assistant resistance, Detroit school job actions, and so on.

But there is little organized class-conscious resistance. The anti-war movement wasted the potential demonstrated when millions of people hit the streets against the Iraq invasion. Most anti-war activity in the past two years was aimed at electing a demagogue, Obama, who was more open and honest than many of his liberal and left backers in proclaiming he had every intention of sustaining and expanding the empire’s wars. As of this writing, opinion polls show two-thirds of the US public supports the Obama plan to intensify the invasion of Afghanistan and his extension of the war in Iraq—probably *ad infinitum*.

The anti-war movement has failed not only to mobilize action but, more importantly, it failed to take up the pedagogical and practical tasks at hand: *teaching people how to develop strategy and tactics inside specific communities rooted in rational answers about why things are as they are, and then, just what it is that needs to be done.*

In education, pivotal to social mastery, the leaders of the two unions, the NEA and the AFT, with a combined membership of nearly 4,500,000, poured millions of dollars and thousand of volunteer hours into the Obama election, diverting member attention from their real source of power: their ability to control or at least influence their work places, the curriculum, the assessments, the military invasion, privatization, and the very reality of whether school should be opened or closed.

Then the education union leaders worked behind the scenes to snare workers in a union of the wreckage of the AFL-CIO and the Change To Win Coalition, the splinter group led by Andy Stern who firmly believes in corporate state unionism—the unity of business, labor and government in the national interest—and who runs his Service Employees International Union on a model written by General Motors. Leaders of both teachers' unions are already engaged in offering extensive concessions, allowing layoffs, encouraging school workers to hit out at other working people as with the California Teachers Association demands that the state raise the regressive sales tax.

Given the child abuse that is the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), closed schools buttressed by freedom schooling in the midst of social strife are superior to most everyday schooling.³⁶ To reach that point, education organizers will have to fight their way through a phalanx of union bosses, as did members of the United Auto Workers, for decades.

Professional organizations in the field of education have been no better. The National Council for Social Studies, claiming to be the core group concerned with teaching for democratic citizenship in the US, has had rare presentations from Rouge Forum members, only, opposing the wars and predicting financial calamity. Absent that, NCSS has said nothing at all but to support imperialist war that sends the children of the poor, on all sides, to fight and kill the children of the poor from other nations, all acting on behalf of the rich in their homelands, that is, capitalist democracy.

During his campaign, Obama supported linking teacher pay based upon their students' test scores and he recently served noticed that he intends to make good on his promise.³⁷ But teacher pay for student test scores is already an established practice in US schools. Arne Duncan, Obama's Secretary of Education, used test-based performance pay for teachers while he was C.E.O. of Chicago Public Schools, New York City Schools embarked on a project to evaluate teachers based on student test scores last year, and Washington DC schools chief, Michelle Rhee, announced this week that DC teacher evaluations will be tied to students' scores on standardized tests.

Paying teachers for student performance is not a new idea. History shows that most of the gains from such programs are destructive illusions that narrow the curriculum offered to students and encourage teachers and administrators to cheat—as we have seen with the so-called “Texas Miracle” under the duo of Governor George W. Bush and his first Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, who presided over Houston schools when test scores there were enormously inflated.³⁸

Welford Wilms and Richard Chapleau of UCLA have examined pay for results schemes implemented in England, Canada, and the U.S. in the last two centuries and conclude: “Few results that are forced on the schools (especially destructive ones like pay-for-results) will ever penetrate the classroom and positively change the teaching and learning processes. Teachers are every bit as adept at deflecting or sabotaging reforms of this kind today as they were at deceiving English school inspectors in the 1800s. Politically driven reforms like pay-for-performance are nothing more than reflections of public frustrations. And rather than helping to solve the root causes of failure, they paralyze us and deflect public attention from reforming the educational systems at their core.”³⁹ Yet, the Obama stimulus plan includes a continuing bribe to school workers, a payoff to soldier through the drill and kill essence of the NCLB. And, the US Department of Education’s Teacher Incentive Fund is providing \$200 million for teacher and principal compensation linked to student test scores.

How long will educators, kindergarten through universities, continue to exchange reasonably good pay, benefits, and some security for staying mum about the nature of imperialist warfare, for implementing racist high stakes exams that not only intimidate and make dishonest everyone in a class room, but that also segregate children wrongly by class and race—under a fictitious veneer of science, hiding privilege behind a veneer of accomplishment? The tests, in turn, are being used to segregate teachers as merit pay, linked to test scores, expands under the Obama administration—proving out the many steps of alienation: no control of the process and product of work, becoming less human to self and others, becoming an instrument of your own servitude; losing.

The stimulus package provides an immediate \$44 billion in temporary money for schools and comes with instructions from Duncan that schools should “spend funds quickly” in ways that increase test scores and keep the receipts. While there is still a veil of secrecy around even the real education money, it appears that much of it is dedicated to school buildings, technology, etc. That will mean much of the money will go to developers; unionist construction workers will battle with their non-union counterparts for what is left—another neat example of the ability of capital’s relations to sort, divide and rule.

Moreover, state financial crises are as real as the federal crisis. It is unclear as to whether the stimulus will be sufficient to offset cuts to programs and personnel in recent years, much less cuts to state education budgets in the coming year. For those who continue to have jobs, it is likely that state, city and federal taxes will wipe out any income boost now promised. California’s sun shines on the best example; even with the bailout, the state will remain two billion dollars in the red.

Ruling classes have plenty of experience with suppressing rebellion. They know uprisings are often initiated by disgruntled, angry, educated, members of the middle or upper middle classes, who are cut off from opportunities during hard times. Keeping those people inside the evanescence of very limited privilege is important. It’s not possible to out-bribe the bribers with material rewards. It is an ethic that pops the bubble, says, “No;” and leads to action.

The ethics that drove the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement were wiped away by decades of mendacious pluralist postmodernism (religion with an angry cloak, which discarded the labor theory of value, the key role of exploited labor and made peace with the capitalist state), years of consumerism (70 percent of the US economy until the bottom fell out), by the absence of example from turncoat leaders in the trade unions and professional ranks; by the elimination of history in classrooms as Johnson forewarned; the upshot being that inside a nation teetering on the brink of the collapse of its ruling classes, the resistance must resurrect its memory of what it is to be in a truly moral fight—right against wrong, equality against inequality, justice against tyranny.

Here are four resistance ethics worth restoring to life:

- We are responsible for our own histories, if not our birthrights.
- Solidarity and equality; an injury to one only goes before an injury to all.
- It is wrong to exploit other people.
- Justice demands organization and action where it counts. It's right to rebel.

Connecting Reason To Passion, Passion To Ethics, Ethics To Organization, And Organization To Action

One year ago we wrote in *Counterpunch*, “We do not need to be lambs among wolves. There is a real fight ahead.”⁴⁰ We suggested a financial collapse could speed the rise of fascism, arriving in respectable garb. We make no Cassandra claims about our ability to predict the future—nor anyone’s desire to believe us. We came to the conclusion that economic collapse and imperialist war was inevitable years ago. In the nineties, meeting with middle school teachers, we said, “You are looking at the troops in the next oil war.” We foresaw the wars, but not September 11, 2001 (Chalmers Johnson came close in *Blowback*). We did that by using dialectical and historical materialism, Marxist political economy, as an investigatory tool.

Today, we especially appreciated work by John Bellamy Foster, writing mostly in *Monthly Review*, whose incisive work outlined the looming disaster. Foster recently summed up his view in response to a question that may make it easy to grasp:

“No I am not equating stagnation, stagflation, and overproduction. though they overlap. Stagnation, i.e. slow growth, rising unemployment/underemployment, high excess capacity, etc. reemerged in the 1970s. Initially, there was a period of stagflation (stagnation plus inflation). The inflationary part was brought under control but not the underlying stagnation, which continued. Under monopoly capital (or monopoly-finance capital) actual overproduction is not the dominant tendency since the demand shortfalls show up in overcapacity rather than overproduction. Corporations cut back on output pretty quickly and lower their capacity utilization (fully competitive capitalism didn't work this way). You could say, though, that it is a case of implicit overproduction, so there is no real contradiction. Of course a build up of productive capacity, which is increasingly underutilized, fits just as well with Marx's statement, ‘the real barrier of capitalist

production is capital itself,' which you quote.”

Foster’s repeated insistence that there are really no sustainable solutions within the capitalist system that will really serve what is the common good is courageous and on the mark.

Robert P. Brenner, interviewed in the *Asia Pacific Journal*, said,

“What mainly accounts for it is a deep, and lasting, decline of the rate of return on capital investment since the end of the 1960s. The failure of the rate of profit to recover is all the more remarkable, in view of the huge drop-off in the growth of real wages over the period. The main cause, though not the only cause, of the decline in the rate of profit has been a persistent tendency to overcapacity in global manufacturing industries. What happened was that, one-after-another, new manufacturing power entered the world market—Germany and Japan, the Northeast Asian NICs (Newly Industrializing Countries), the Southeast Asian Tigers, and, finally, the Chinese Leviathan. These later-developing economies produced the same goods that were already being produced by the earlier developers, only cheaper. The result was too much supply compared to demand in one industry after another, and this forced down prices and, in that way, profits. The corporations that experienced the squeeze on their profits did not, moreover, meekly leave their industries. They tried to hold their place by falling back on their capacity for innovation, speeding up investment in new technologies. But, of course, this only made overcapacity worse. Due to the fall in their rate of return, capitalists were getting smaller surpluses from their investments. They, therefore, had no choice but to slow down the growth of plants and equipment and employment. At the same time, in order to restore profitability, they held down employees’ compensation, while governments reduced the growth of social expenditures. But the consequence of all these cutbacks in spending has been a long-term problem of aggregate demand. The persistent weakness of aggregate demand has been the immediate source of the economy’s long-term weakness.⁴¹

Brenner concluded,

“The bottom line is that, like Roosevelt, Obama can be expected to take decisive action in defense of working people only if he is pushed by way of organized direct action from below. The Roosevelt administration passed the main progressive legislation of the New Deal, including the Wagner Act and Social Security, only after it was pressured to do so by a great wave of mass strikes. We can expect the same from Obama...where they should be active is in trying to revive the organizations of working people. Without the re-creation of working class power, little progress will be possible, and the only way to recreate that power is by way of mobilization for direct action. Only through working people taking action, collectively and en masse, will they be able to create the organization and amass the power necessary to provide the social basis, so to speak, for a transformation of their own consciousness, for political

radicalization.”⁴²

Marx went to the heart of the issue: shortage of effective demand. For Marx, there was never any doubt about the root cause of capitalist economic crises. “The ultimate reason for all real crises always remains the poverty and restricted consumption of the masses as opposed to the drive of capitalist production to develop the productive forces as though only the absolute consuming power of society constituted their limit.”⁴³

However, Professor Foster’s profound analysis of the source of crisis offers no radical project on how to get from here, capital in ruins, to there, the transcendence of capital, no strategy and tactics, about how people might take on the system of capital, even as a beginning, and transform it.

Brenner believes the world’s ruling classes hope to use the US military might as an international police officer, preventing wider wars. We differ.

We believe inter-imperialist rivalry will sharpen, especially over oil, but over regional control, water, markets, cheap labor, the usual suspects of imperialism. US social, military, and moral weaknesses only exacerbate the tensions and make conflict more likely.

Given the mantra, true as it is, that WWII alone solved the depression, armed conflict could be tempting to some who have never witnessed it. War means work and profits, setting up popular national unity, even if fleeting.

At the same time, we are troubled by wild-card players who could set off unpredictable warfare: Al-Qaeda, Israel, Pakistan, etc. Our estimate is wider war over time. It is with this as a foundation that we offer an expansion on the foundation that Foster, Brenner, and others are fashioning.

We return to Marx’s combat with political economists of old who treated the system of capital as a collection of gods with minds and lives of their own. Today, we see mainstream economists, really apologists, suggesting The Market does this, The Market does that, when it is people at work, and other people dominating work. And some Marxist economists (Foster and Brenner exempted) focus in much the same way, tracing the movement of finance capital—its volatile expansions and busts—in great detail, without examining what is key about capital: social relations; people in their struggle with nature to produce and reproduce life and its means, to seek rational knowledge in order to survive, and for freedom.

Simultaneously, we see much of what most people think of as the left dodging the failure of socialism—capitalism with a party claiming benevolence in the lead—the betrayals of the world’s “communist” parties and trade unions, the real dilemma of the imperial payout to the empire’s working classes and especially their mis-leaders; meaning that without a sharp historical critique of the past any future struggle is undermined. We are also struck by this paradox: much of the left shies away from the use of the term

Capitalism. We see two mistaken motives. Some of the left seems to believe that people can only learn in baby-step fashion and cannot be told of the frights of the world economic system—when the term is now in daily use on TV talk shows. Others on the left, whose tactics we surely understand, operate in what they seem to think are secret wings of parties; the upshot being that the ruling classes and their police are fully aware of how these groups do analysis, while the people they hope to influence do not.

We are aware of the dangers of the emergence of fascism, the remaining Patriot Act, etc., and we are not so foolish to write what would be necessary should fascism arrive full blown, but in this period we urge openness and the related risks.

If it is true that the crux of the matter is inequality at hyper-speed contradicted by the chance of mass, organized, class conscious resistance, and if it is equally true that the ruling classes have little left but their mostly conspicuous lies and sheer force, then it follows that while those who stand for equality and freedom have a formidable, ruthless, enemy; we also have a chance, yet again, to supercede capital—for freedom and equality—if we do more than construct reason, but connect reason to passion, passion to ethics, ethics to organization, and organization to action.

As above, it is quite possible that struggle will emanate from schools where, presumably, ideas still have a role. We wrote in *Counterpunch* last year that schools are the integrative organizing points of North American life—centers of power struggles for knowledge, capital, labor, and freedom.⁴⁴ That is our strategic view.

Tactically, there are key choke points in schools, opposition to imperialist regulated curricula, rejecting high stakes exams with boycotts, and fighting the campus military invasion, as the military and the struggle for what is true are incompatible. We have already witnessed one of the larger school worker locals in the US, the United Teachers of Los Angeles, pick up the test boycott tactic, in admittedly limited ways, but a boycott nonetheless. In San Diego, a coalition of parents, students, and teachers has had remarkable success in limiting enrollment in high school ROTC programs, through, above all else, sheer perseverance, leafletting regularly at the schools.

Since 2008, we participated in some of the largest teach-ins in the US last year—the Rouge Forum Conference in Louisville and the San Diego San Diego Coalition for Peace and Justice teach-in. Combined those totaled less than five hundred participants; good in substance, far short in form.

While around the world, students and school workers in Greece and France started what became general strikes. In the US, the education work force has been more malleable. Indeed, the key terms that might describe the majority of the professorate and k-12 US educators would be: racism, ignorance, cowardice, and opportunism. The schools, which were always capital's schools, became, more than ever, missions for capitalism and educators its missionaries. What changes that?

Social conditions may change it somewhat. Layoffs, wage cuts, pension elimination,

escalating class size; all may add up. We worry they will add up piece-meal, leading to what we have already seen: education workers continuing with the bad habits of everyday schooling and, at the same time, pointing at others (the media specialist, the counselors, support staff like bus drivers or food workers, etc.) to be cut loose first.

We expect the union leaders, who reject the very reason most people believe they join unions, that is contradictory interests of workers and employers, to lead a series of concessions—in the national interest (meaning their own opportunist interest). Concessions will be sold as “the best that can be done in hard times.” For example, the NEA is now partnering with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers to implement reforms outlined a “Tough Choices for Tough Times,” a report of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce.⁴⁵ Tough-Tough was authored by such educational experts as the director of the militarized Lockheed-Martin, and university presidents whose incomes are frequently dependant on grants from the military, earmarked for “research.” Tough-Tough calls for national curriculum standards as a means of recapturing the witless patriotism necessary to get people to work, and eagerly fight and die, for what is abundantly easy to see are the interests of their own rulers.

Concession bargaining is already in full swing. The union leadership, and the very structure of unions—dividing people as much or more than uniting them—will mainly serve as yet another layer of enemies to be combated. The union bosses amount to a benign loyal opposition who seek to save the rules of the system, for their own narrow desires. They reify the division of labor at the heart of capitalist society.

No concessions. None. Not one step back in health care. Indeed, free care for everyone. Tax the rich. Tax inherited, landed, and corporate wealth. A thirty-hour week with no cut in pay. No foreclosures. Bailout back mortgages with payments right to the buyers. Free k-university education. Or else.

One strike after the next. Promoting mutinies in the military.

We believe people will fight back because they will have to fight back in order to live. At issue is whether sense will be made of the resistance. Will protestors demand a shorter work week with no cut in pay, the end of foreclosures and evictions, free health care for all, an end to education for domination, or will people, in the midst of a confusing social collapse, demand more troops on the streets as we see in the border cities of Mexico, strangling in the grips of drug gangs?

First resistance may come from students who have had contact with a few thinking teachers. As hope (a vital function of school, real or false) evaporates, students may rise. They will need considerable support, and the notion that their struggle is a workers’ struggle as well. France 1968 is evidence enough.

If the happier possibility of a mass resistance is to break out, we hope it combines the true passion of the ethics and call for equality and freedom we outlined with the analytical

tools of political economy and the study of things and people as they change: dialectical materialism. People can become whole, joyous, and free within a resistance movement that is making sense of the crux of current conditions and that seeks to change the world.

Everything is at hand for a full rearrangement of the social relations of daily life. Let us get to the real task connecting Reason to Power, to Ethics, to Passion, to Organization and Action.

Rich Gibson is a professor emeritus at San Diego State University (richgibson.com). **E. Wayne Ross** is professor at University of British Columbia (ewayneross.net). They are co-editors of *Neoliberalism and Education Reform* (Hampton Press).

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