

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

News for Educational Workers

by Leonard Vogt



TWITTER LSE STUDENTS' UNION

Student Protest

Students joined teachers, parents, and workers on December 2, 2014 in a nationwide walkout honoring Michael Brown, shot down by officer Darren Wilson on August 9 in Ferguson, Missouri. The walkout occurred in over 80 cities, in 30 states, and on 40 college campuses at 12:01 P. M., the exact time of the shooting. The walkout also occurred exactly one week after a Ferguson grand jury announced its decision not to indict officer Wilson for the death of Michael Brown (portside.org, December 5, 2014).

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar writes (www.jacobinmag.com, November 12, 2014) about his college athletic career forty years ago when bringing fame and money to UCLA left him "too broke to do much but study, practice, and play." Any extra money he could make had to come from spring break and summer low level jobs. He writes that little has changed in 40 years, except that the NCAA, television broadcasters, and colleges and universities are making more money than ever before. For examples, the NCAA makes \$1 billion annually from their March contracts with CBS and Turner; the NCAA president makes \$1.7 million a year; and the ten highest paid coaches make between \$2 million and \$9 million a year. At the same time, college athletes on scholarships, unlike students on academic scholarships, are not allowed to earn money beyond their scholarships; athletic scholarships often fall about \$3,200 short of the financial needs of the students; and athletic scholarships can be taken away if the players are injured and can no longer contribute to the team. With this in mind, it is entirely possible that a student on athletic scholarship might end up without an education at all.

On November 19, 2014, students in the United Kingdom marched in the thousands for "Free Education" as a direct challenge to austerity cuts to higher education imposed by the conservative government led by David Cameron. A coalition of student-led groups published a letter in *The Guardian* explaining their demands: "Today we are stepping up our campaign against tuition fees and education cuts with the biggest student national demonstration for years. As student debt soars and staff working conditions deteriorate, it is clear that the marketization of education is failing students and workers alike." Using Germany's elimination of tuition fees a months earlier as an example of the possibility of "free education", the UK students suggested "increased tax on the rich [and] scrapped Trident or reduced military spending" would free up billions of pounds to fund education and other public services (portside.org, November 24, 2014).

In Jefferson County, Colorado, a newly conservative school board instituted a review to ensure that the Advanced Placement History curriculum "promote citizenship, patriotism, essentials and benefits of the free-market system." Students and their teachers would have nothing to do with it. Organizing on Facebook, students walked out of schools in suburban Denver by the hundreds. One of the conservative members of the school board, who admitted she did not know much about U. S. history, confirmed it when she publicly declared that the United

States freely gave up slavery (*Denver Post*, September 24, 2014 and portside.org, October 11, 2014).

When the Philadelphia School Reform Commission canceled the teachers' contract and announced changes including teachers having to pay part of their health insurance premiums, hundreds of students from the Philadelphia area went on strike to support their teachers (*Philadelphia Enquirer*, October 8, 2014).

Unions

Members of Madison Teachers, Inc. voted by a majority of 88 percent to recertify their collective bargaining units, according to the Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission. Annual recertification of public workers' unions is required by Act 10, Governor Scott Walker's legislation curbing the collective bargaining rights of public workers (portside.org, November 28, 2014).

Teachers in the sprawling Los Angeles Unified school system are asking for a one-year, permanent 10% raise but also looking beyond money to issues like staffing levels, classroom conditions, and policies aimed at improving academic results. The union wants computers integrated into classroom instruction, student participation in teacher unions, a full time nurse at every school five days a week, increased counseling staff, significant reduction in class size, and more oversight over independently managed charter schools (*Los Angeles Times*, November 21, 2014).

Los Angeles teachers and their new unions are trying to end what is called "teacher jail," a system whereby teachers accused, but not proven guilty, of immorality or misconduct are on paid leave and not allowed to enter the classroom. Hundreds of L.A. teachers are in this situation and most of them have no idea what they are accused of. No one from the United Teachers Los Angeles disputes that allegations from students should not be taken seriously, or that real misconduct should not be cause for dismissal, but many of the teachers in "teacher jail" have had no charges brought against them (Labor Notes, November 24, 2014).

The recent success of the British Columbia's teachers' strike is attributed to three things: 1. union solidarity made the difference; 2. people will back unions and parties that stand up for progressive programs; and 3. strike first since offense is often the best form of defense (portside.org, September 19, 2014).



WINNOVATING.COM

Karen Lewis, the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) President, will not run for mayor of Chicago because of the

diagnosis of a cancerous brain tumor. For a review of her wonderful work with CTU since she became president in 2010, see *In These Times*, December 2014.

Charter Schools

The Education Opportunity Network's Jeff Bryant was awarded one of the "top 25 most censored or underreported news stories of 2014" by Project Censored, "a media research, literacy, and education organization established in 1976." Bryant's award was based upon his article questioning the charter school hype (educationopportunitynetwork.org, December 5, 2014).

K-12

Teachers fought back against Wal-Mart's September 2014 back-to-school marketing efforts which included a series of teacher appreciation videos, ads, hashtags, and discounts. Even though teachers often dig into their wallets to pay for supplies for their students, these Wal-Mart discounts were offensive since they come from a company that since 2000 has given more than \$1 billion to destabilize public education. One teacher launched a petition calling on his fellow teachers not to shop at Wal-Mart and over 5,000 teachers signed the pledge (*Huffington Post*, September 3, 2014).

At a Teach for America (TFA) open meeting in Manhattan on November 13, 2014, United Students Against Sweatshops activists condemned TFA for bringing inadequately trained students, mostly from elite universities, into some of the country's poorest school districts to teach for short periods of time and for promoting a for-profit, anti-union education reform agenda (*In These Times*, November 14, 2014).

Texas wants to rewrite school text books to incorporate passages denying the existence of climate change and reflecting the views of the ultra-conservative think tank, the Heartland Institute, funded by the Koch oil billionaires (*The Guardian*, September 16, 2014).

The Huntsville, Alabama, school district paid an ex-FBI agent \$157,000 to monitor the social media activity of its 24,000 students. The most alarming part of this violation of students' rights is that at the end of the year, of the 14 students expelled, 12 were African American, even though only 40 percent of the district's students are from that group (portside.org, November 4, 2014).

A Catholic school student who goes by the name "Nekochan" started an official library of her school's banned books (including *The Canterbury Tales*, *Paradise Lost*, *Animal Farm*, and *Catcher in the Rye*) that she runs out of her school locker. The student now has 62 books in her locker for loan and says, "Almost no kid at school but myself took an active interest in reading! Now not only are all the kids reading the banned books, but go out of their way to read anything they can get their hands on" (<http://www.care2.com>, August 28, 2014).

The Nation's October 13, 2014 issue highlights "Saving Public Schools: A Growing Movement Confronts the Failure of 'Reform'" with articles by such notable educators as Diane Ravitch, Pedro Noguera, and Michelle Fine.

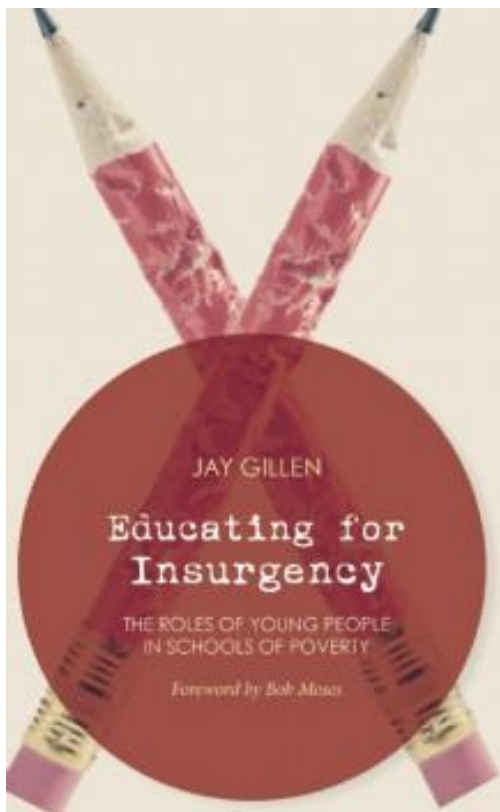
Education in Mexico

On September 26, 2014, over 40 students were kidnapped from the teachers' college of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, Mexico. These rural students are mainly from poor families and were being trained to teach other poor and indigenous students. For decades, their school has been subjected to political attack by the state and powerful business interests (Campaign for Peace and Democracy, November 13, 2014). For a more thorough understanding of these student abductions, and the struggle of teachers and their unions against the Peña Nieto administration's growing authoritarianism, see "The Struggle to Democratize Education in Mexico" (NACLA—Report on the Americas, Fall, 2014).

The Educational Caste System

"Schools, Parents Sue Pennsylvania Over 'Educational Caste System'" (*Common Dreams*, November 11, 2014) describes how six school districts, seven parents, and two statewide educational associations sued Pennsylvania for failing "to meet state-imposed academic standards" and "participate meaningfully in the economic, civic, and social life of their communities." For additional information on America's inequitable educational class structure, from colonial times to the present, see portside.org, December 17, 2014.

In "Higher Education and the New Brutalism" (Truthout, October 28, 2014), Henry Giroux places higher education within the broader historical context of attacks on democratic institutions and dissident voices in general. Attacks on academics like Ward Churchill and Steven Salaita are matched by even more vicious attacks on whistleblowers like Chelsea Manning, Edward Snowden, and James Risen. "Viewed as a private investment rather



than a public good, universities are now construed as spaces where students are valued as human capital, courses are determined by consumer demand and governance is based on the Walmart model of labor relations.”

“Making Top Colleges Less Aristocratic and More Meritocratic” (*The New York Times*, September 12, 2014) might help even out the U. S. educational caste system, but that may not be so simple since “at the nation’s most selective 193 colleges and universities, affluent students . . . outnumber economically disadvantaged students . . . by 14 to 1.”

Resources

Books

Jay Gillen’s *Educating for Insurgency: The Roles of Young People in Schools of Poverty*, with a forward by Bob Moses, describes the daily lives of poor students trapped in institutions that dismiss and degrade them. Gillen explains what sort of insurgency is needed and how to create it. AK Press, \$15.95, 192 pages, <http://www.akpress.org>.

The voices in *More Than a Score: The New Uprising Against High-Stakes Testing* (Haymarket Books) present an action plan to combat the increase in high-stakes standardized testing currently pervading K-12 education.

Journals

Socialism and Democracy published a special issue focusing on the 150th Anniversary of the First Workers International and explores this legacy in terms of working-class struggles today. The introduction to the volume can be read at <http://sdonline.org/65/introduction-24/>.

Socialism and Democracy’s more recent issue is “The Roots of Mass Incarceration in the US: Locking Up Black Dissidents, and Punishing the Poor.” This issue is co-edited by Mumia Abu Jamal, has contributions by Angela Davis, and a critical reflection on reading and teaching Assata Shakur’s biography *Assata* by Joseph Ramsey.

The new issue of the arts and politics magazine *Red Wedge* is up and online at <http://redwedgemagazine.com>.



Film

Bullfrog Films has three new documentary releases.

The Allergy Fix explores the science behind the tripling in childhood food allergies over the last twenty years.



THE ALLERGY FIX

A Fragile Trust: Plagiarism, Power, and Jayson Blair at the New York Times tells the story of Jayson Blair, the most infamous serial plagiarist of our time, and how he unleashed the massive scandal that rocked the entire world of journalism.



A FRAGILE TRUST

Groundswell Rising: Protecting Our Children’s Air and Water shows how fracking has contaminated drinking water and jeopardized health and quality of life.



GROUNDSWELL RISING

For details on these three films, trailers, and pricing for educational institutions, go to <http://www.bullfrogfilms.com/catalog/gsr.html>.

Sir, No Sir (2005) is a 49 minute documentary of GI resistance during the Vietnam War, available free at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nPJgeg6hpA>.

Tami Gold has produced two new films for GLBT, Feminist and Gender Studies classrooms. *Passionate Politics* explores Charlotte Bunch’s life from young civil rights organizer, to lesbian activist, to international leader of a campaign to put women’s rights on the global human rights agenda. *Puzzles* explores the roots of hate crimes and the intersections between joblessness, homophobia, intolerance, alienation, and violence. For more information

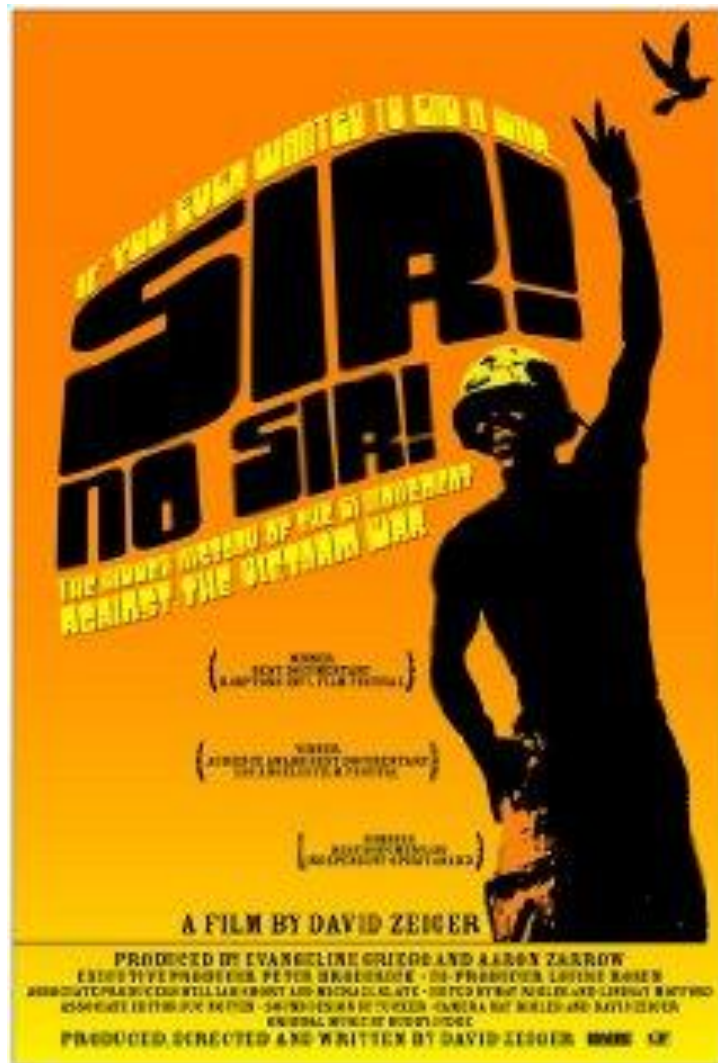
on either of these films, go to <http://andersongoldfilms.com/films/documentaries,puzzles.htm>.

Curriculum

The Labor and Working-Class History Association launches a teachers/public sector toolkit, a set of resources to help foster dialog on teacher and public sector unionism consisting of a short history of teacher organizing and unionism and sources for teaching and learning more about the subject.

Is there a news item, call for papers, upcoming conference, resource, teaching tool, or other information related to progressive education that you would like to

share with other Radical Teacher readers? Conference announcements and calls for papers should be at least six months ahead of date. Items, which will be used as found appropriate by Radical Teacher, cannot be returned. Send hard copy to Leonard Vogt, Department of English, LaGuardia Community College (CUNY), 31-10 Thomson Avenue, Long Island City, New York 11101—or email items to lvogt@nyc.rr.com.



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