

# RADICAL TEACHER

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

News for Educational Workers



PHOTO BY FRINDE MAHER

## The Chicago Teachers' Strike

Even though the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) strike lasted only seven days in September of 2012, what it accomplished and what was written about it will last much longer. Enrolling about 400,000 students, with about 22,000 school workers, Chicago is the third largest district in the country. For a history of what led up to the strike, see *Labornotes*, September 10, 2012.

The press and the public took somewhat different sides on the strike. The national media was "worried that children's education was being imperiled by the entitled members of a public employee union" (*In These Times*, November 2012). The majority of Chicago parents, however, supported the strike and approved of the fair contract fight. In a poll released by an Illinois political report, 66 percent of parents with children in public schools, and 55.5 percent of Chicagoans overall, approved the strike (*American Prospect*, September 14, 2012 and *Labornotes*, November 12, 2012). Even *al Jazeera* (September 1, 2002) wrote that "Chicago public school teachers managed to score a major victory over Rahm Emanuel, Chicago's business-oriented mayor."

With Department of Education's Arne Duncan coming from Chicago and Mayor Rahm Emanuel going to Chicago, the teachers' strike is seen as central to the challenge against national educational reform (Reuters, September 10, 2012). After ten years of top-down "reform" the Chicago teachers showed the power of collective action by school workers and their supporters. The successes of the strike were seen as a feather in the cap of participatory democracy and a sting to a 1% mayor ([www.nationofchange.org](http://www.nationofchange.org), September 25, 2012 and [www.alternet.org](http://www.alternet.org), September 17, 2012).

The hero of the strike was CTU President Karen Lewis, who "held her ground against op-eds by billionaires, liberal media scrutiny and education 'reform' establishment" and even had the nerve to call Rahm Emanuel a "bully" and a "liar" (*In These Times*, November 2012). In the end, the new CTU contract includes: a 3% pay increase the first year, with a 2% increase each following year; phasing out "merit pay"; hiring 600 teachers in the areas of art, music, languages; having only 30% of student test scores factored into teacher evaluations; having laid-off teachers receive hiring priority for new teacher openings.

## International Education Struggles

Sri Lanka shut down 13 of its 15 state-funded universities during the summer of 2012 after the faculty and students went on strike in early July. The strikers want additional funding for education, higher salaries for faculty, and decreased political interference in campus life from the government (TruthDive, August 23, 2012 and BBC News, August 22, 2012).

"Teachers—probably because a majority of them are women—are despised in this country" begins "Schooling in

a Spot of Bother" (*In These Times*, September 2012), describing the state of London comprehensive schools. Just when the number of uneducated, unemployed, and untrained young people has increased by 8 percent in a year, the Secretary of State for Education is planning on introducing still harder examinations with failure rates that would increase an already serious educational divide.

Two Chilean student movement leaders, Camila Vallejo and Noam Titelman, were awarded the Letelier-Moffitt Human Rights Award for their leadership in Chile's massive citizen democracy movement of 2011-2012, the largest protests in Chile since the Pinochet opposition a generation earlier. For over a year, the student movement rallied hundreds of thousands to demand affordable university education and deeper structural changes in Chile, which has the highest per capita income in the region but also the most unequal distributions of wealth (Democracy Now, October 16, 2012).

During a wave of student mobilization in Quebec, Canada, through the spring and summer of 2012, the students won a major victory against the Parti Quebecois government. The tuition hike was cancelled and the anti-protest law that curbed basic freedoms of expression and assembly was repealed. For celebratory articles on this significant victory, see *The Toronto Star*, September 24, 2012; Socialist Project, September 24, 2012; and *Truthout*, September 28, 2012.

The Center for Constitutional Rights and other civil rights groups submitted a letter to the University of California (UC) President advising him of the need to protect pro-Palestinian speech on campus. This lengthy and scholarly letter (35 footnotes) presses the UC President "to consider the chilling effect of efforts to target Arab, Muslim and other students advocating for Palestinian rights on UC campuses." To read this letter, go to *Jadaliyya Reports* of December 4, 2012.

## Student Debt

The editors of the *Wall Street Journal* (a Rupert Murdoch-owned paper) railed against the ongoing expansion of Pell Grants, even with more than \$1 trillion of U.S. student debt, nine out of ten college graduates with student debt, and over one quarter of the repayments on these loans past due. *DOLLARS & SENSE* (September/October, 2012) explains why federal Pell Grants should be expanded to help solve the student debt crisis.

"Escalating Delinquency Rates Make Student Loans Look Like the New Subprime" ([www.truth-out.org](http://www.truth-out.org), December 5, 2012) emphasizes that the amount of student debt is undermining college graduates' abilities to consume and contribute to the economy.

94% of recent graduates borrow to help pay for their educations, and the average debt level is \$23,000 per graduate, contributing to the decline in such things as home ownership because student debtors cannot afford mortgage loans.

And enter the debt collection industry. With about 5.9 million student debtors behind in their payments, the Department of Education last year paid more than \$1.4 trillion to collection agencies to hunt down defaulters ([www.truth-out.org](http://www.truth-out.org), September 10, 2012).

## Charter Schools

Once again, studies show that charter schools do not outperform unionized schools (Chicago Reader, October 3, 2012). Actually, high performing charter schools may simply lie about their scores. As Campaign for America's Future (August 30, 2012) says, "One problem with radical test score gains, as many researchers have noted, is that miraculous improvements in test scores over short periods of time are more often the result of cheating, student skimming, or other test manipulation."

## For-Profit Education

A two-year investigation into for-profit colleges confirmed that the rapidly growing industry is focused more on profits than on its students. For-profits take in about 10 to 12 percent of higher education students who, however, have about a 50 percent failure rate. Last year, for-profits took in \$32 billion in taxpayers' money in the form of federal grants to students. At the same time, for-profit college CEO's are known to take home as much as \$40 million dollars a year (*The Nation*, September 24, 2012). One way to make such profit is online education which, like for-profit colleges in general, have abysmal failure rates. For more, see the weekly newsletter Too Much (September 17, 2012).

## Unions and Education

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) has begun a campaign to organize the adjunct faculty at Georgetown University after successfully organizing several other adjunct faculties in the Washington DC area. The goal is to organize so many colleges in and around the nation's capital that "all colleges in the region will feel a need to improve the pay, benefits, and job security of adjunct instructors" (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 2, 2012).

Campus workers also are in need of unionization. Security guards, cleaning crews, gardeners, janitors, food-service personnel—over 700,000 of them at American colleges do not earn a living wage to provide a minimally decent standard of living for their families (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 10, 2012).

Director General Guy Ryder of The International Labor Organization (ILO) is calling for urgent action to make teaching an attractive career. Ryder wants "to promote sound social dialogue, improve the status of teachers and come up with policies and strategies that attract and motivate people to become teachers." To read a transcript of his statement, go to [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org).

## Race

Today our schools remain perhaps even more segregated than they were before *Brown v. Board of Education*. A Federal loophole involving teacher salaries accounts for lower spending on students of color, thus shortchanging them compared to their white peers (Center for American Progress, August 22, 2012).

For a history of the battle for Black Studies, and a review of Martha Biondi's book on this history, *The Black Revolution on Campus*, see *In These Times*, October, 2012).

## CUNY Pathways

The City University of New York (CUNY) is fighting back against the CUNY Pathways program which is an austerity measure which both cheats the students and violates faculty governance rights. "Scheduled to begin with students entering CUNY in the fall of 2013, Pathways is a university-wide revamp of CUNY's general education curriculum—a policy governing the number and types of classes all students must complete. It was enacted by the CUNY Board of Trustees with the supposed purpose of smoothing transfer between CUNY colleges. The real agenda behind Pathways is about spending less per student and graduating more students in a shorter time at lower cost. Thousands of CUNY faculty oppose Pathways because it diminishes the quality of a CUNY education and underestimates CUNY students. Instead of addressing faculty concerns about Pathways, the administration is barreling ahead, threatening departments that do not comply with reprisals, and doing CUNY students a great disservice" (Taken from the Professional Staff Congress union website, [www.psc-cuny.org](http://www.psc-cuny.org)).

## Resources

For a film project featuring NYC schools pursuing alternatives to the school-prison pipeline, go to <http://www.indiegogo.com/GrowingFairness>.

*Out at Work*, the award-winning documentary about LGBT workplace discrimination, remains the only existing documentary about this critical topic. For purchasing and streaming possibilities, contact [kanderso@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:kanderso@hunter.cuny.edu).

Another classic LGBT documentary, *JUGGLING GENDER: Politics, Sex and Identity*, including the new video *STILL JUGGLING*, is now available on DVD. The two videos, a portrait of Jennifer Miller, a lesbian performer who lives her life with a full beard, explore the fluidity of gender and raise important questions about the construction of sexual and gender identity. For purchase and cost information, contact [tamigold@mindspring.com](mailto:tamigold@mindspring.com).

On the website [www.sharemylesson.com](http://www.sharemylesson.com), teachers put lesson plans and other resources (more than 200,000 of them to date).

Bullfrog Films has produced yet another of its excellent videos for classroom use. *You've Been Trumped* (director Anthony Baxter, 95 minutes) captures the cultural chasm

between Donald Trump as he buys up for golf courses hundreds of acres of wilderness on the northeast coast of Scotland and the local Scots who fight against the purchase of the unique landscape that has been the backdrop of their lives. For purchase or rental information, see [www.bullfrogfilms.com](http://www.bullfrogfilms.com).

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](mailto:lvogt@nyc.rr.com).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](http://www.library.pitt.edu) of the [University of Pittsburgh](http://www.pitt.edu) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](http://www.dscribe.com), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](http://www.pitt.edu).