

RADICAL TEACHER

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

News for Educational Workers

By Leonard Vogt



LONG ISLAND UNIVERSITY/BROOKLYN LOCKOUT (PHOTO BY LEONARD VOGT)

Lockout at Long Island University/Brooklyn

For the first time in U. S. history, a university locked out its faculty. On the first day of the Fall semester 2016, the Long Island University (LIU) Brooklyn campus locked out all 400 members of the faculty union from campus after their contract expired August 31. The proposed contract would slash adjunct salaries and pay faculty lower salaries than their counterparts at the Post campus on Long Island, New York. In addition, the lockout cut off professors' emails and health insurance and threatened that faculty would be replaced. When students went to class they found administrators trying to teach their classes, many of whom simply said they were unqualified to teach the classes and dismissed the students. As anger built around the lack of class room instruction (LIU costs approximately 40 to 50 thousand dollars a year), the students joined the faculty and rallied to have their professors back in class. By the end of the second week of the semester, the lockout was over (democracynow.org, September 13, 2016).

Unions and Strikes

The National Labor Relations Board ruled in August 2016 that graduate students who work as research and teaching assistants at private universities have a federal right to unionize, ending efforts at graduate student unionization going back to 2000. The ruling on the case came from a petition filed by graduate students at Columbia University. One of the organizers said the petition was not particularly about money but rather "a question of power and democracy in a space in the academy that's increasingly corporatized, hierarchical" (*The New York Times*, August 23, 2016). For a fuller history of this struggle for graduate student rights, see www.truthout.org for August 28, 2016 and for a personal narrative by onetime graduate student Joseph Ramsey, who revisits previous attempts to unionize, see www.insidehighereducation.com, September 8, 2016.

The Southern Workers School (SWS) met August 5-7 to continue their study of the political economy of the Southern region of the United States. SWS trains and develops rank-and-file workers to organize the South and in their training sessions discusses such issues as the role of slavery in the capitalistic development of the United States, historical organizing campaigns such as Operation Dixie and the Civil Rights Movement, women's oppression in the workplace, and protections for LGBTQ workers (portside.org, August 19, 2016).

In a strike authorization vote held September 7-9, 2016, over 5,500 faculty members at the 14 Pennsylvania

state universities sent a message to their union leaders to call a strike, if necessary, to ensure that contract negotiations would not include cutting adjuncts' pay by 20 percent. The tally of the three-day strike-authorization voteshowed that 93 percent of the 82 percent of the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculty members who cast ballots voted in favor of a strike.

On April 27, for just a single day, full and part-time faculty from Teachers (AFT) Local 2121 at the City College of San Francisco went on strike—and it worked! By July, to head off another strike, the college agreed to a union contract with substantial raises (*Labor Notes*, portsidelabor.org, September 7, 2016).

K-12

Education Secretary John King's proposed regulations for national implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) indicates a renewed emphasis on high stakes tests, and possible financial punishment for the growing movement of "opt out" and test boycotting (truthout.org, June 16, 2016).

Even though corporal punishment in U. S. schools has declined rapidly in the last 20 years, it is still legal in 19 states and, according to Education Week Research Center, it is actually used in 21 states. "More than 109,000 students endured beating or other forms of physical punishment during the 2013 to 2014 school year at over 4,000 schools" and

this corporal punishment was used across all grade levels from kindergarten to high school (www.truthout.org, September 4, 2016).

"Teachers Take on Student Discipline" (*Labor Notes*, June 14, 2016) discusses how the activist group Teachers Unite are using and promoting "restorative practices" to deal with student discipline. Teachers and students meet to discuss inappropriate student behavior and the root problems such as stress, anxiety, and problems at home that might make students demonstrate behavior problems. Teachers Unite are devoted to the idea of not turning over these practices to outside specialist trainers who would not have the relationships with students necessary to make such practices successful.

In "A Turning Point for the Charter School Movement" ([Truthout](http://truthout.org), August 30, 2016), a battle over charter schools in Massachusetts is seen as a microcosm of the charter school debate across the country. Massachusetts Democrats passed a resolution opposing charter school expansion and said the pro-charter school campaign is "funded and governed by hidden money provided by Wall Street executives and hedge fund managers." Across the country, public sentiment against charter schools has appeared in the form of the NAACP and The Movement for



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PHOTO BY LEONARD VOGT

Black Lives calling for a moratorium on charters and a series of highly negative reports by *The New York Times* on the controversial New York City charter chain Success Academy. Charter school criticism even reached HBO when, on August 21, 2016, John Oliver's "Last Week Tonight" show in an almost 20 minute segment exposed the charter school industry's fraud, waste and abuse. To see Oliver's dissection of charters, go to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_htSPGAY7I.

The Department of Defense gave its three-hour enlistment exam (the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery known as ASVAP) to 700,000 in 12,000 high schools during the 2013-2014 school year. If that's not bad enough, 81 percent of the students taking this exam during that school year had their results sent to military recruiters without the parents' consent ("High School Students' Test Results Are Being Sent to Military Recruiters Without Consent," *World Beyond War*, August 10, 2016).

In May 2016, the school board in Portland, Oregon, adopted the most far-reaching policy on teaching climate justice in U. S. schools. For full details, read Bill Bigelow's article at www.commondreams.org.

In response to a decade-long lawsuit arguing that Connecticut has failed to provide adequate funding for its poorest school districts, a Connecticut judge has ordered the state to fundamentally overhaul its public education system, saying the state is "defaulting on its constitutional duty" and has "left rich school districts to flourish and poor school districts to flounder" (DemocracyNow, September 8, 2016).

Education in Mexico

Ten Years ago the "Oaxaca Commune" movement, as named by its supporters, was born when riot police beat, arrested and pushed out of the Oaxaca town center striking teachers. (See *Radical Teacher* 81 and its lead article on the use of alternative media to help organize the teachers' strike). And the battle continues. Two years ago 43 future teachers from the Ayotzinapa Normal School disappeared with yet no one held responsible. These attacks against striking teachers are an effort by the Mexican government to impose neoliberal education reforms in the southern state of Oaxaca and eventually privatize education. For more current government attacks on teachers, see portside.org (June 22, 23, 26, and 30), democracynow.org (June 20, 21, and 23), and *In These Times* (September, 2016).

Racism in Education

Black Lives Matter activists, after successfully pushing some colleges to address racism on campus and make curriculum more inclusive, are now reaching into K-12 education, where there is much work to be done against corporate education reform. In July of 2016, the NAACP voted to call for a moratorium on charter schools, saying charters "do not represent the public yet make decisions about how public funds are spent" and contribute "to the increased segregation rather than diverse integration of

our public school system" (truthout.org, September 8, 2016 and *Common Dreams*, July 30, 2016).

The Department of Education recently released a report showing that every state in the United States spends less on pre-k-12 education than on correction facilities. Over the past 20 years, the report continues, while spending on public education remained stagnant, spending on the prison system rose by approximately 90 percent (portside.org, July 24, 2016).

"New Report Underscores Serious 'Equity Gap' in Public Education" (*Washington Post*, June 7, 2016) says that "black children were nearly four times as likely to be suspended as white students, and nearly twice as likely to be expelled. The same pattern showed up in pre-school. Black children represented 19 percent of all preschoolers but accounted for 47 percent of those who received suspensions."

The New McCarthyism in Education

The University of California, Berkeley, offered a course examining Palestine "through the lens of settler colonialism," sparking off a controversy which suspended the course because a coalition of Jewish organizations called the course "anti-Semitic" and "anti-Israel." After a week of protest criticizing the course suspension as a threat to academic freedom, it was reinstated (*The Guardian*, September 19, 2016), but not without comparisons of the ban to a new McCarthyism in education (see Ellen Schrecker's June 30th article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*).

Governor Andrew Cuomo of New York signed an executive order creating a blacklist of organizations that boycott or divest from Israel or encourage others to do so, a list that could include schools or colleges, from potentially receiving taxpayer funding (*The New York Times*, June 12, 2016).

A website and social media initiative called Canary Mission posts information designed to slander student, faculty and community activists for Palestinian rights as anti-Semitic, extremist, and sympathetic to terrorism, and uses this information to contact universities and encourage them not to accept these students. However, graduate admissions faculty have signed a statement saying, "We unequivocally assert that the Canary Mission website should not be trusted as a resource to evaluate students' qualifications for admission. We condemn Canary Mission as an effort to intimidate and blacklist students and faculty who stand for justice for Palestinians."

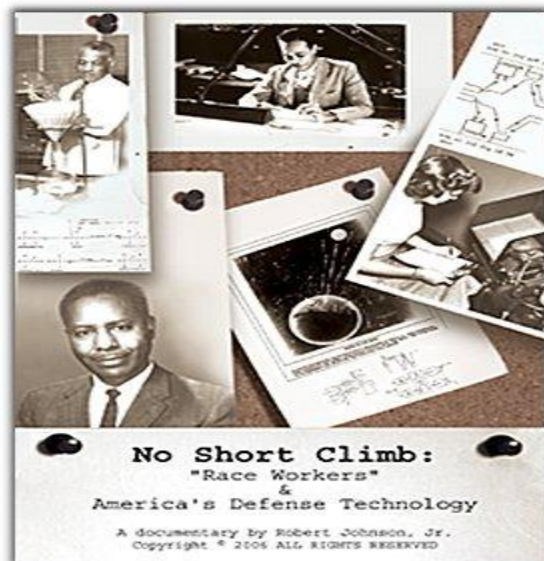
Education and Poverty

A partnered report on student debt from *Consumer Reports* (August 2016 issue) and *Reveal* from The Center for Investigative Reporting ([RevealNews.org/student debt](http://RevealNews.org/student%20debt)) shows that 42 million Americans owe over \$1.3 trillion. The report explores how the crisis began and what parents and students can do about it.

Trump University has brought national attention to the exploitation of for-profit education (one of Trump's victims even appeared on the stage of the Democratic Convention) but his is only one of many. Diane Ravitch's blog of June 24, 2016 cites "Squalor in Higher Education: Who Protects Predatory For-Profit Colleges?" which gives names and institutions that become immensely wealthy as students become even poorer. The report ends by saying, "A key reason why such predatory for-profit colleges have been able to continue receiving billions annually in taxpayer dollars while ruining the financial futures of students . . . is that national power players, politicians, lawyers, academic leaders [and] celebrities have been willing to vouch for these companies, serving as their paid lobbyists, board members, investors, and endorsers."

Student poverty is reaching new levels, with 58,000 students homeless (truthout.org, May 29, 2016) and many more students buying less and even going hungry (portside.org, July 18, 2016).

According to *The Atlantic's* "There is No Excuse for How Universities Treat Adjuncts," thirty-one percent of adjunct faculty across the country are living near or below the federal poverty level.



about nonviolence in labor, civil rights, immigrant rights, and community organizing over the last 50 years.

Jumbo Wild is a documentary highlighting the tension between the protection of wilderness and the ever increasing growth of development.

Our Mockingbird uses Harper Lee's 1960 novel as a lens to view race, class, gender, and justice then and now.



Resources

Starving the Beast: The Battle to Disrupt and Reform America's Public Universities is a new documentary that taps into national current concerns like inflated tuition, student debt and the intersection of politics and education, exposing the coordinated assault on U.S. public higher education.

No Short Climb: "Race Workers" and America's Defense Technology is a documentary showing the major contributions made by African American scientists and technicians to defense weaponry. Just before WWII, African-Americans were unable to find jobs because of their race. As the country geared up for war, the government began recruiting Blacks for military and civilian service jobs. *No Short Climb* presents the previously unknown story of the contributions made by Black scientists and technicians during WWII.

The current *African Studies Quarterly* (Vol. 16, Issue 2) has articles like "Commodifying Water in Coastal Tanzania," "Water Vendors in Niamey," and "University-Based Music Training and Current South African Musical Praxis."

Bullfrog Films (www.bullfrogfilms.com) has three new documentaries appropriate for school and college students.

Love & Solidarity: James Lawson & Nonviolence in the Search for Workers' Rights is a 38-minute documentary



LOVE & SOLIDARITY



OUR MOCKINGBIRD



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