

RADICAL TEACHER

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

News for Educational Workers

By Leonard Vogt



HONDURAS SQUATTER COMMUNITY PHOTO BY NANCY ROMER

Education Reform and Unions

In "When Schools Become Dead Zones of the Imagination: A Critical Pedagogy Manifesto" (www.truthout.org, August 13, 2013), Henry A. Giroux warns that if right wing billionaires hungry for even more corporate power continue to have an influence on education reform, public schools will become "dead zones of imagination" which threaten critical thinking, literacy, and historical memory, as well as deskill teachers and create punishment centers for low-income and poor minority students.

"Reclaim School Reform," an editorial in *The Nation* (December 23/30, 2013), describes a new coalition of teachers and their unions, along with parent, student, community and religious groups, which undertakes to reclaim "the promise of public education as our nation's gateway to democracy and racial and economic justice." Inspired by the Chicago Teachers Union strike of 2012, when parents and teachers fought against school closures, this new coalition is backed by such divergent groups as the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the Philadelphia Student Union, and the Boston Youth Organizing Project.

Aside from group activism encouraging school reform, individual activists are successfully standing up against school closures, defunding, and high-stakes testing. After the Philadelphia School District threatened to cut almost \$300 million from the schools and lay off 19 percent of the school system's workforce, a group of parents and laid-off school workers went on a 15-day fast which ended with a partial victory of the refunding of \$140 million back to the school district. Activism over school reform and defunding has also taken to the streets in such places as Chicago and Seattle with protests against austerity, privatization, and union-busting. The Seattle Education Association, voted the most valuable union in *The Nation's* 2013 Progressive Honor Roll, backed its teachers at Garfield High School who refused to administer the Measures of Academic Progress test. The school superintendent finally announced that schools could opt out of the testing regimen and that test scores would no longer be a requirement for graduation (*The Nation*, August 19/26, 2013 and January 6/13, 2014).

The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), under the direction of President Karen Lewis, has been the country's main inspiration against corporate school reform and the dictatorial austerity plans and school defunding activities of such politicians as Mayor Rahm Emanuel. CTU's Political Action Committee is now planning an electoral strategy for the Democratic primary on April 15, 2014, hoping to radically alter the makeup of the city council (*In These Times*, September 2013).

Educational "reform" is by no means limited to primary and secondary schools, as explained in "Six Ways Neoliberal Education Reform May Be Destroying a College Near You" (www.truthout.org, October 10, 2013). Colleges and universities are also under attack and often for the same reason: to make education profitable.

Adjuncts

Although adjunct, or contingent, faculty make up more than 75% of higher education faculty across the United States, the public at large and even many full-time faculty do not understand or care about adjuncts' living and working conditions. Many adjunct faculty are the migrant workers of academe.

"The Adjunct's Lament" (*In These Times*, January 2014) opens with the very painful story of the death of 83-year-old Margaret Mary Vojtko, an adjunct French teacher for 25 years at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. As an adjunct, she had neither health insurance nor retirement benefits and, when her job was not renewed last spring, had no money for her cancer treatment and could not pay for heat or other bills. After the shame of being referred to Adult Protective Services, she suffered a heart attack and died two weeks later, illustrating that in modern America even the highly educated can end up as destitute as anyone else. For more information, see *Dissent*, October 16, 2013.

Mary-Faith Cerasoli, an adjunct faculty member in Spanish and Italian, tells her story to *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (December 18, 2013). She makes \$22,000 a year before taxes for teaching five courses per semester, approximately \$2000 a course. She is homeless, commutes hundreds of miles a week to travel between her two campuses, and depends on the kindness of friends for a place to sleep.

Campus Equity Week, held in 2013 between October 28 and November 2, was begun in 2001 to draw attention to the lack of equity for non-tenure-track faculty in the higher education workplace. For a report on the recent gathering, see Labor Notes, www.portside.org, November 11, 2013.

More and more adjuncts are seeing unions as their only hope and the Service Employees International Union is offering that hope by adding to its roster adjuncts at private colleges in several urban areas. Last year a survey by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce "found that unionized adjuncts earned 25 percent more per course" than non-unionized adjuncts (*The New York Times*, December 4, 2013).

Protesting David Petraeus

City University of New York (CUNY) students protested in September of 2013 against General and former CIA Director David Petraeus's appointment to teach in the Macaulay Honors Program. The following reasons were included in the demands for his appointment to be rescinded: Petraeus is guilty of war crimes in Iraq, Afghanistan, and as CIA Director; his course at CUNY is propaganda for Big Oil and Wall Street; and CUNY should be spending money for education, not on those who support war.

As the union representing faculty and professional staff at CUNY, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC) passed a resolution on September 19, 2013 in protest of violent

police response to peaceful protest by CUNY students. The resolution states that “CUNY students were punched, slammed against vehicles and against pavement by NYPD officers. Documentary video evidence shows a plainclothes police officer gratuitously kidney-punching a protester who was already held down by other officers and immobilized.” In addition, the PSC resolution stated, “We deplore the use of violence and brutal attacks against CUNY students and faculty who were peacefully protesting outside the college. And we call for a formal investigation of the use of force against the protestors.”

A month later in October of 2013, David Patraeus again confronted protestors at the University of Southern California, where he had been hired as the new veteran affairs advisor (www.answercoalition.org, October 11, 2013).

Education and Poverty

“The Real 21st-Century Problem in Public Education is Poverty” (www.nationofchange.org, November 11, 2013) states that a October 2013 Southern Education Foundation study “indicates that poverty, which has long been the biggest obstacle to educational achievement, is . . . our true 21st century problem.” The study says that unless we face this reality head on, all our other educational remedies will fall short.

Economic inequality within the educational structure also contributes to the problem of poverty within education. For example, the top 16 New York City charter school executives earn more than the NYC School Chancellor, in some cases twice as much (*The Daily News*, November 11, 2013). In terms of higher education, a recent report by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (www.portside.org, December 26, 2013) found that 42 private college presidents made over \$1 million a year, up from the previous year’s 36 millionaire college presidents.

International Education

Camila Vallejo, who helped spearhead Chile’s student uprising in 2011, was elected to the Chilean Congress, along with three other former university leaders (www.portside.org, November 19, 2013). Also in Chile, the National Education Council recommended that schools use the term “dictatorship” rather than “military regime” to describe the 1973-1990 Pinochet rule that left more than 3,200 people dead and 38,000 arrested (www.aljazeera.com, October 6, 2013).

On November 13, 2013, The Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies at New York University held a panel on “Transforming Education in El Salvador” which discussed the changes in education during the last five years of El Salvador’s first leftist government.

In October of 2013, tens of thousands joined a demonstration in support of teachers in Rio de Janeiro who had been on strike for 46 days and feel that the system is mired in corruption and excessive bureaucracy and

threatened by privatization (www.portside.org, October 11, 2013).

Mexican education reform has stirred some of the largest teacher protests in Mexican history. In early September of 2013, Mexico’s Senate passed a series of education reforms that introduced standardized testing for hiring and firing teachers and undermined the strength of teachers’ unions. For details on these events, see www.portside.org, September 9 and 11, and October 11 and 13, 2013

American Studies Association and the Academic Boycott of Israel

The American Studies Association (ASA) has endorsed an academic boycott of Israel, saying Israeli academic institutions are “complicit in oppression that denies Palestinians rights.” ASA is the largest group of U. S. academics to join the global campaign to boycott and divest from Israel over its treatment of Palestinians. While reaction against ASA’s boycott against Israel has been strong (*The New York Times*, “Backlash Against Israel Boycott Throws Academic Association of Defensive” January 7, 2014), support for the boycott has also surfaced (“The New McCarthyites: BDS, Its Critics, and Academic Freedom” (www.coreyrobin.com, January 9, 2014).

International press coverage of the Modern Language Association (MLA) meetings (Jan. 9-12)— where a session on academic boycotts was scheduled, and a resolution urging the U.S. State Department to contest Israel’s denials of entry by U.S. citizens to the occupied territories was to be considered—was intense. Organizations such as Hillel International and the Israel on Campus Coalition, that had helped stir up the hostile reaction to the ASA boycott resolution, stirred up their supporters to protest the Israel-related events at MLA, in advance. The MLA resolution narrowly passed, after an intemperate debate.

Resources

“Claiming and Teaching the 1963 March on Washington,” presented by the Zinn Education Project’s *If We Knew Our History* series, counteracts sanitized textbooks and demythologizes not only the march itself but the entire Civil Rights Movement. For information, see <http://zinnedproject.org>.

Project Look Sharp has updated its curriculum kit, *Media Construction of the Middle East*. The free online kit teaches about the history of the Middle East and current issues through critical thinking about media constructions. New documents have been added such as a lesson on the U.S. War in Iraq which now includes various newspaper front pages about the final withdrawal of U. S. combat troops. The lesson on the history of Iran was updated to include an analysis of the *Time* magazine covers about the 2009 Green Revolution and the controversy over Iran’s nuclear program. The update also includes student readings and assessments on the history of the

Arab/Israeli conflict. For information, go to www.ithaca.edu/looksharp

Education Opportunity Network, which provides news and views for progressive change in education, is a project of the Institute for America's Future, in partnership with the Opportunity to Learn Campaign. The September 2013 issue included topics like school budget cuts, hungry school children, income inequality, "same" versus "equal," and the problem with common core tests. See

www.educationopportunitynetwork.org

Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor (<http://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/workplace>) announces its new online issue "The New Academic Labor Market and Graduate Students," which provides a scope and depth of scholarship relevant for both graduate students and new and senior scholars as well.

Volume Four of the *Journal of Academic Freedom* (www.aaup.org) mainly consists of a roundtable discussing the issue of academic boycotts in general and the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel in particular.

The Teachers College Press catalogue (Fall/Winter 2013-14) highlights new resources on urban teaching, multicultural education, teaching for social justice, literacy, and inclusive education. www.tcpress.com.

The Syracuse Cultural Workers catalogue (Fall/Winter 2013-14) offers political art celebrating peace, equality, feminism, and justice. The current catalogue offers peace calendars, indigenous art, a tribute to Trayvon Martin, and a commemoration of the Civil Rights Movement at 50. See www.SyracuseCulturalWorkers.com.

Bullfrog Films presents *La Camioneta*, the story of U.S. decommissioned school buses that are sent to Guatemala where they are repaired, repainted, and resurrected as the brightly-colored *camionetas* which carry the majority of Guatemalans to work each day. Since 2006, however, nearly a thousand drivers and fare-collectors of these renovated buses have been murdered for refusing to or being unable to pay the extortion money demanded by local gangs. www.bullfrogfilms.com.

Gender Work (Palgrave Press) by Robin Truth Goodman shows the intersection of feminist theory and the conditions of contemporary global society under neoliberalism. One reviewer calls the book "an urgent, timely, and truly global feminist theory of how women's work changes the world."

Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities (Bloomsbury Press) by Craig Steven Wilder explains the role U. S. Ivy League universities played not only in the development of racism and slavery but also in the economic profits made from them.

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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