

*A Rouge Forum Broadside*

***How Can We Build a Better New World From the Ashes of the Old?***

**Overcoming Capitalist Schooling: Revolutionary Education for Freedom**

(Fourth in a Series)

*“When we try to educate our children we confront a billion dollar industry that is more important than the lives of children. The Civil Rights Movement was a slave rebellion. But we cannot use guns because they have guns and they are waiting for us. Still, before each slave rebellion, there was non-cooperation. We could begin with the schools, and take our children out of the schools. How can you expect racist people who cannot educate their own children to educate anyone else? Our trump is action, non-cooperation, and patience.”(James Baldwin,1979)*

*“We got freedom schools. You form your own schools. Because when you come right down to it, what is it that you learn in their schools? Many Negroes can learn it, but what can they do with it? What they really need to learn is how to be organized to work on the society in order to change it. They can't learn that in schools.” (Robert Moses, leader of the Mississippi Freedom Schools, 1963)*

**Why Have School?**

US schools serve at least these purposes: (1) technical training which reproduces social relations mostly as they are, (2) skill training, like reading and math, (3) ideological training suggesting that the rule of US capital is democratic rule, the best of all possible worlds, (4) centers of hope where people send children believing they will be better off because they will learn to struggle for what is true. Schools are contradictory places. Competing interests always come into conflict, teachers vs textbooks, real estate agents and local employers versus critical thinking. As on any job, employers seek to diminish the work force, to strip them of their minds, to divide them, shatter their dignity, in order to pay them less and to control the work place. School workers invariably resist. Schools, different from places that make widgets, deal with children. Teachers care about kids, often at odds with the boss.

**The Central Role of Schools in the US Today**

The industrial working class civilized the US in the 1930s. Their illegal battles led to laws that won the 40 hour week, rights of assembly, organization, and speech, the social security act, and child labor laws. Today, however, the US industrial working class has nearly disappeared, their jobs easily out-sourced for cheap labor. For now, industrial workers will not take the lead in struggle for justice.

Those workers whose jobs remain in the US are fairly well-off compared to workers in other nations. US industrial unions are organized to divide people along lines of race and occupation. They mimic the undemocratic privileged hierarchies and habits of their employers. US unions, led by the AFL-CIO, have always believed that they will do better if workers in the rest of the world do worse, so they support the cornerstone notion of the fascist corporate state: the unity of business, government, and labor bosses in the national interest. Every major US union, including the school unions, is now supporting Capital's war for oil and cheap labor, masqueraded as a war against terror.

Factories and craft unions were once the centerpieces of the lives of the most progressive people in the US. Now the central organizing point for the lives of most people, and surely those people who are most oppressed and therefore most likely to lead resistance (immigrants, black people, etc) is school. There are more than 3.5 million educators in US public schools, three times the size of any large industry. While industrial production is easily out-sourced, schooling is not.

Other than the military, where youth will learn that to die for Exxon is no honor, that their officers are not their allies, nor allies of the people; the site of impending struggle in the US is school.

Rulers in an inequitable nation who want to invade the world desperately need to control the schools, whose key product is ideas. Ideas about the source of inequality, or the deadly myth of nationalism, must be contained. Domination, social control, is won through fabricated consent, nationalism, racism, sexism, irrationalism, opportunism, and every razor-sharp division that the elite's sham science can manufacture. Teachers, collectively, create terrific value, the minds of the next generation of workers. Educators are the most free of all working people, able to exercise considerable control over their labor. At issue is: Can school workers exert control over the value they create in order to overcome capitalist education, to educate for freedom for the majority—the workers? Is it enough to try to teach well, inside segregated schools, promoting lies?

### **What is the Social Context of Schooling Today?**

There never has been a single public school system, but five or six, each representing the parental income and race of the kids in the school, each reproducing their birth-classes. As the economy rots, schools tamp down the hopes of most kids, who never will do as well as their parents. Most schools now teach lies to children, using methods that make life seem incoherent. Kids learn indifference to learning, despair. Many honest educators swim upstream, seek to struggle for the truth, using methods that demonstrate how that process works. Still, these are the primary tendencies in schools: *\*Booming inequality tied to escalating segregation, racism, sexism, exclusion.*

*\*Irrationalism rising—religious fundamentalism (vouchers) and witless nationalism.*

*\*Regimentation via spectacles, surveillance, and the suspension of common civil liberties.*

*\*Regulation of knowledge via partisan standards and Big Tests.*

*\*Rising authoritarianism as some schools became mirrors of prison life.*

*\*Militarization—an invasion of ROTC and lying military recruiters.*

*\*Technology, mainly used to mesmerize, not liberate or unite.*

*\*A cultural attack, designed to re-heorize the military and to eradicate memories of Vietnam.*

*\*Marketization: children, educators, and schools are commodified, sold to Pepsi.*

*\*Takeovers of entire school systems (Detroit, Chicago), overthrowing local control.*

*\*Talibanization: organized decay of learning at every level of schooling: phonics first.*

After September 11, this became fascist tyranny. Schools teach children in a society promising them perpetual war. Teaching always mattered, but what teachers do now counts more than ever before.

### **Who Will Resist? Resist What? How? For What?**

No reform organization has linked the standards, Big Tests, segregation, economic collapse, war, and capitalism—except the Rouge Forum. School unions support the war, wrote the standards and tests. The unions structurally exclude students, parents and others. Their quisling leaders earn CEO salaries, forming a class that serves elites in controlling school labor. They reroute on-the-job or community action into hopeless electoral campaigns, dead-end legal actions, to divert people from taking effective collective action to control their working lives. Many teachers, middle-class and vacillating for now, support that leadership. But many do not. They fight to defend their own dignity, and their kids'. They matter. They need new organizations.

The main attack on education is the Big Test. Attached to dishonest standards, the tests perform a dual purpose: to destroy wisdom and divide people. Honest educators must not be capital's missionaries. Resist.

Teachers, students, and community people now fight back: the Detroit teachers' wildcat of 1999, the Ontario educators strike in 1998, the Oakland student strike in 2000, test resisters everywhere, community battles in Philadelphia against privatization. There is a long history of struggle for academic freedom, a fair tax system, caps on class size, books and supplies. No one in the US, however, has attempted pedagogy for freedom—to go beyond the system of capital which ensnares everything. Real life is connected, as are the tests and war. To disconnect reform struggles from overcoming capital ensures that reforms will fail—and buttress capital in new ways. Without strategic vision, opportunism and fear will defeat any movement for justice.

Inclusive, anti-racist school workers organized *with* community people and students, can control their working lives by controlling their work places. The way to do that is to prepare for united direct action: boycotts, walkouts, strikes, sit-ins and sit-downs, prepared by one-to-one education, friendship, with the goal of each person fully understanding what is being done, why, and each having a chance to openly reflect on what is being learned. This is reason connected to power, for power only retreats in the face of more power. The test of any worker's power: Who, other than the boss, can open and close the workplace, or nearby streets?

School strikes and boycotts are not new. Freedom Schools of the civil rights movement offered alternative, critical schooling in the midst of civil strife. The interplay of reason and power, which on-the-job action and Freedom Schools represents, serves as a beacon of hope.

Hope for what? For a world where people can be reasonably free and creative, at work and play, connected with others in friendly ways by sharing, all for all, from each according to commitment, to each according to need. How much will be lost before we make the decision to get there?