



The Socialist

Magazine of the Socialist Party USA

Volume 33, Number 3 | Fall 2007 | \$1.00



INSIDE: PUBLIC SCHOOLS UNDER ATTACK * QUEER RADICAL'S PERSPECTIVE ON SAME SEX CIVIL MARRIAGE * *GENIUS OF IMPEACHMENT* REVIEW

THE SOCIALIST

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**Printed by Saltus Press, a
unionized printshop
Worcester, Massachusetts**

Subscription Rates

1-year individual • \$10
1-year institution • \$25
Bulk Rate No. 1:
25 copies/issue • \$45
Bulk Rate No. 2:
50 copies/issue • \$80

Layout: Terry Williams

Cover Art: Photo by Jack Gerson: OEA's Crisis in Public Education conference (Dec. 2006) that drew more than 150 people.

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A Socialist Alternative in 2008

Editorial by Eric Chester

For more than four years, the United States has occupied Iraq, with disastrous results. The infrastructure has been shattered, while hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, and more than 3000 U.S. soldiers, have been killed. Sectarian warfare is tearing the country apart, as ancient hostilities deepen in a climate of anger and despair.

Nevertheless, the United States has every intention of maintaining its control over Iraq. Elaborate military bases have been constructed at a cost of billions of dollars. Iraq possesses vast oil reserves, but it also occupies a strategic position within the Middle East.

As U.S. casualties increase, popular support for the occupation has plummeted. Understanding this, U.S. decision makers have formulated a shift in strategy that would quiet popular opposition, while allowing the United States to occupy Iraq for the foreseeable future.

Last December, the Iraq Study Group, a bipartisan commission appointed by President Bush, advanced a plan that has set the guidelines for an alternative policy. U.S. troops would cease to patrol Iraq's cities, and instead would be withdrawn to fortified bases. They would then be limited to acting as a reserve force, training government units and acting as an elite counter-insurgency force. In line with this proposal, tens of thousands of troops would remain in Iraq for many years.

The vast majority of Democrats in Congress have adopted the core of this plan, although

they have amended it to include a firm timetable that would have all combat troops removed by the spring of 2008. Contrary to the phony hype the Democrats propagate, this is not a plan to end the war, but rather one that would maintain the occupation of Iraq for the indefinite future. Unfortunately, mainstream peace organizations are unwilling to challenge the Democratic Party on this critical issue.

In 2008, the Socialist Party will present its own slate of candidates on its own platform. We will demand the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Iraq and we will condemn the complicity of the Democratic Party in the continuation of the war.

U.S. imperialism is a crucial issue in the forthcoming election, but it is not the only one. Socialist Party candidates will also insist on a drastic reduction in the military budget, and the implementation of a steeply graduated income tax that will force the wealthy to pay for such essential services as socialized medicine, quality public schools, low cost housing and mass transit.

As we present our program of immediate demands, Socialist Party candidates will also present a vision of an entirely different society, one based on cooperation not competition, and on equality for all not poverty for many. Global capitalism is hurtling the planet toward environmental destruction. We need to move to a democratic socialist society, and we need to do so as rapidly as possible. **VOTE SOCIALIST IN 2008!**

The Socialist is always looking for interesting, insightful, well-written material. In particular, we are looking for work that highlights the struggles and triumphs of the working class. We will accept news articles and stories about organizing and protests, but we are also looking for short fiction, poetry, and music/arts/theater/film review. Articles should be 950 to 1250 words. Please mark all letters to the editor as such and limit letters to 250 words. Submit as email attachments in text, PDF, or .doc format to SocialistParty@sp-usa.org, or by mail to: The Socialist, 339 Lafayette St. Room 303, New York, NY 10012.

Public Schools Under Attack

By Jack Gerson

Public education is under fierce attack from corporate forces whose aim is to privatize the remaining entitlements of the working class, public education and social security. Nearly everyone on the Left agrees that social security is under attack and must be defended. But, unfortunately, there's less unanimity and less clarity about what's being done to public education. Some folks are convinced that there's a lot (or at least some) good coming out of the latest round of educational reform. After all, public education in the inner city is a shambles and a failure, too many filthy, dangerous, overcrowded, under-funded schools delivering too little in the way of real education to working class and poor kids, and it especially fails students of color.

Unfortunately, the new wave of reforms makes education in the inner city worse still. Indeed, they make life overall worse in the inner city by reconstituting and closing down massive numbers of schools in most of this country's urban centers, they qualitatively increase instability in areas that can ill afford more. And, at the heart of the matter, beneath the language of educational reform is a gross transfer of wealth to the private sector: education is now a \$1 trillion a year market. There's a feeding frenzy at the trough. And it's all been made possible by the state. Indeed, privatization is actually encouraged, even mandated, by the federal No Child Left Behind legislation (NCLB) enacted in 2002 with bipartisan support (its

Democratic sponsors were the very liberal California Democratic Congressman George Miller in the House, and his very liberal Massachusetts Democratic colleague Ted Kennedy in the Senate).

NCLB makes federal funding for public education contingent on the states holding teachers and schools accountable for "achievement" as measured by student performance on standardized math and reading tests, with the supposed intention of narrowing and eventually eliminating the "achievement gap" between students in affluent suburban schools and students in inner-city schools. The law stipulates punitive measures for schools that don't measure up. These schools, invariably already

cash and resource starved, must use some of their federal Title I funding to pay for private after-school tutoring programs (usually a waste of students' time, but a big profit source for giant tutoring mills like Sylvan and Kaplan's), while teachers at the school must put in extra time to take mandated in-service classes (usually a waste of teachers' time, but a big profit source for educational consulting firms). Schools that fail to measure up for five years can be closed down, put under direct state control, converted to privately-run charter schools, or converted to traditional private schools or, as is happening ever more frequently, converted to the privately-run, lightly regulated and generally non-union charter

Beneath the language of educational reform is a gross transfer of wealth to the private sector: Education is now a \$1 trillion a year market.

THE SOCIALIST PARTY strives to establish a radical democracy that places people's lives under their own control - a non-racist, classless, feminist socialist society...where working people own and control the means of production and distribution through democratically-controlled public agencies; where full employment is realized for everyone who wants to work; where workers have the right to form unions freely, and to strike and engage in other forms of job actions; and where the production of society is used for the benefit of all humanity, not for the private profit of a few. We believe socialism and democracy are one and indivisible. The working class is in a key and central position to fight back against the ruling capitalist class and its power. The working class is the major force worldwide that can lead the way to a socialist future - to a real radical democracy from below. The Socialist Party fights for progressive changes compatible with a socialist future. We support militant working class struggles and electoral action, independent of the capitalist controlled two-party system, to present socialist alternatives. We strive for democratic revolutions - radical and fundamental changes in the structure and quality of economic, political, and personal relations - to abolish the power now exercised by the few who control great wealth and the government. The Socialist Party is a democratic, multi-tendency organization, with structure and practices visible and accessible to all members. Join us today.

schools that are being promoted by corporate privatizers like Bill Gates, Eli Broad and their respective foundations.

So NCLB has encouraged profit-making activities in education and greatly accelerated a transfer of wealth and control from the public to the private sector, to the textbook companies that moonlight by manufacturing standardized tests while still selling (often worthless) textbooks; to the test preparation and tutoring mills; to the giant software vendors and consulting firms for software to track and report teacher and student “performance” data; to the “management consulting” companies; to the “educational consulting” companies; to the “Educational Management Organizations” and “Charter Management Organizations” that model themselves on health care HMOs (!) and lobby for the shutdown of public schools... the list is endless.

But rather than helping kids in inner-city schools, NCLB is doing them grave harm. NCLB’s failing schools and school districts are overwhelmingly located in the inner city and disproportionately serve poor African-American, Latino and other working class families.

NCLB’s punitive measures are directed at these schools, and therefore are directed at those most in need. Instead, NCLB punishes them. NCLB:

- Transfers funds from cash-strapped schools and districts to for-profit companies (as already discussed)

- Forces schools to focus narrowly on two subjects, remedial math and remedial reading. Consequently, inner city schools around the country are eliminating electives, closing libraries, abandoning enrichment programs. For example: my school, an inner city high school in Oakland,

California, closed its library and “consolidated” our librarian, eliminated French, art, music). (It’s a violation of California’s Education Code for a secondary school to not have a library and a credentialed librarian, but the state put Oakland’s schools under trusteeship four years ago, and Democratic State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O’Connell, a huge advocate of NCLB and high stakes testing, clearly thinks standardized tests are better educators than libraries and electives)

- Forces teachers to narrow their teaching to squeeze in the boatload of subject matter “standards” tested by their subject’s standardized test.



Chronicle / Mark Costantini

Teachers universally complain that there’s no time provided for developing concepts and authentic learning, and instead just cram in mountains of disconnected facts and skills

- Encourages “teaching to the test” strategies for guessing the right multiple choice answer, rather than encouraging true thinking and learning

- Destabilizes already battered inner city areas by closing down schools and reopening new schools, only to have the new schools also be punished and then closed by NCLB. This merry-go-round leads nowhere but down.

Who’s behind all of this? It’s no secret. High stakes testing, scripted learning and narrow “standards-based” education is a major priority of the Business Roundtable, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the

American Enterprise Institute. It is heavily promoted by billionaires Bill Gates and Eli Broad, who advocate the “business model for education”: everything driven by the bottom line, outsource and privatize as much as possible, smash teacher unions, end teacher pensions and eliminate union seniority. This isn’t just a pet project of the Republican right: Eli Broad is a major Democratic Party campaign contributor and kingmaker, and he’s supported by most Congressional Democrats (including two co-sponsors of Bush’s 2002 NCLB legislation: House Labor and Education chairperson George Miller and Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy).

There’s no doubt that inner city public schools need to do a much better job. But that’s not the fault of the kids and it’s not the fault of their teachers, and it won’t be helped by punishing kids, teachers and schools via the NCLB accountability and privatization

Frankenstein. This country needs to invest in minority and other working class kids. Schools should be the hubs of their communities, with on-site health clinics, childcare, early childhood and adult education, and well-stocked libraries at every site. Class size should be cut in half, studies consistently show that students learn best when there are no more than 15 students per teacher. Teachers need adequate time to prepare their lessons. Decrepit school buildings need to be thoroughly renovated or replaced. Communities, especially parents and students, need to be involved, together with teachers, in formulating socially and culturally relevant curricula and in establishing educational goals.

These measures can help. They can’t solve the problem as long as U.S. capitalism produces and repro-

duces the gross disparities inherent in its profit-driven system. It is the height of hypocrisy for Bush, Gates, Broad, Kennedy, Miller et al. to chatter about the need to close the “achievement gap” when they actively drive a society which is raising inequality between corporate

executives and workers, between the wealthy and the downtrodden. This, of course, is the true source of the “achievement gap”. It will not be eliminated until capitalism is. You can help get rid of NCLB. Sign the Education Roundtable petition call-

ing for eliminating NCLB at <http://www.educatorroundtable.org>
Jack Gerson teaches math at an inner city public high school in Oakland, California. He was recently re-elected to the Executive Board of the Oakland Education Association. •

A Queer Radical's Perspective on Same-Sex Civil Marriage

By Tina Philips

The Human Rights section of the Socialist Party USA platform demands the legalization of same-sex civil marriage. However, we must ask ourselves is that the stance we really want to take as radicals to support an institution that is, for the most part, regressive?

In 1996, president Bill Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) into law. This act allowed one state the right to refuse to recognize a marriage initiated in another state. Under this law, the federal government refused to recognize same-sex civil marriages, thus refusing same-sex married couples the 1,138 rights that a married heterosexual couple have under federal law.

Same-sex civil marriage is legal in The Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, South Africa, Spain, and the U.S. State of Massachusetts. Starting from 2000, eight other U.S. states offer civil unions, domestic partnerships, or similar status and rights.

The lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights movement has shifted focus in recent years from AIDS activism and direct action techniques that were seen in the Stonewall riots, to more mainstream hetero-friendly tactics. Many LGBT activists pour money and votes into the Democratic Party. The LGBT community has more recently become a marketable demographic. We are being sucked into a capitalist lifestyle as any other American is.

Many LGBT people feel that we deserve all that heterosexuals have

been offered all these years. That includes obtaining exactly what all heterosexuals have, and many believe that is the very definition of equality. Other LGBT people feel that buying into heteronormativity, where social institutions reinforce certain beliefs, is the wrong thing to do. Many believe that by selling out to the marriage cult, we give up our uniqueness as queers and lose our own community. There are several different perspectives on this issue. Some feel that marriage is a civil

gain domestic partnership rights for their state. Civil unions give one the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of marriage, without the title of marriage. Domestic partnerships are very similar to civil unions, but in many cases give fewer rights. In California, our domestic partnership law is equivalent to same-sex marriage in all ways, except in name.

But oh what a name marriage is! Marriage is seen as such an important institution in our society. It comes with privilege and prestige.

Sociologically speaking, marriage is a powerful concept. To many people, marriage is the ultimate form and act of love. It is believed that marriage demonstrates that people are serious about starting a family and making a life-long commitment to one other person; to “settle down.”

There is an argument that marriage helps protect each partner and also their children and families. The respect one receives with the title of marriage versus any other title is real and cannot be denied. This is why many LGBT activists are not satisfied with civil

unions or domestic partnerships. With marriage comes social status and benefits. Many gays and lesbians want more than a slice of the American pie; they want the whole pie.

Still others are in the middle on the issue. They think that marriage has its fair share of problems, but attaining short term marriage rights for gays and lesbians is progress. For many of these people marriage



right and cannot be voted on regardless of people's beliefs. When leaving issues like this in people's hands via referendum, often the result shows the socio-cultural bias that people have. That is why many people feel that the issue of same-sex marriage should not be put to a popular vote. Many people feel that the issue should be decided in the courts where other important civil rights issues have been determined. Others work to make civil unions legal or

is seen as a step in the right direction. They believe that the top priority is to get marriage parity and we can worry about reforming it later. Others feel that civil unions are best because marriage is an institution they do not want to associate with for several reasons. One is that marriage is largely seen as religious. Another is that marriage is a heterosexual institution. Furthermore, some view marriage as a patriarchal institution that is more about property than love. They believe that marriage is a social contract that allows power, money, and privilege to be moved from one person to another. Marriage is seen as patriarchal and based on one person dominating the other (generally the man over the woman, or husband over wife), and trading the commodity of women. According to the radical organization Gay Shame:

“Marriage does this through concentrating wealth and power through family lines and inheritance (both in terms of money and power). Because of marriage’s ability to discipline class structures it is now, and always has been a primary structure of a capitalist economy.”

Furthermore, monogamy is unobtainable for most people and staying with one person for one’s whole life is too. In addition, many feel marriage is unfair because those who choose to get married get benefits and those who choose not to marry do not.

Thusly, single people get cheated. Some even go as far as to argue that marriage, in its current form, should be abolished completely. However, those in power are content with marriage staying around for a long time to come. In fact, they believe that marriage should be “saved” for heterosexuals only.

The Bush Administration supports an amendment to the constitution that bans same-sex marriages because allowing it somehow diminishes the institution of marriage. If passed, this would take away the right of any state to decide on the issue. So far the proposal to amend the constitution to ban same-sex marriage has been seen as largely symbolic since it is extremely difficult to amend the constitution. It is also used as a wedge issue to split apart groups that might otherwise agree on issues. In fact, the Democratic presidential front runners, Clinton, Obama, and Edwards, are all opposed to same-sex marriage. This is likely due to recent polls on the issue, and because they are unwilling to place principle over popularity. The LGBT community continues to overwhelmingly support Democrats, while legislation Democrats support (from the Defense of Marriage Act to the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell Policy) hurts our community. Why does our community continue to vote for people who don’t represent our interests? We need to vote based on what we

really want, instead of compromising so much of who we are. No matter where one stands on the issue of same-sex marriage, the bottom line is expanding our liberties not taking them away.

In the end, who are we to tell other people how to live? It is just like the issue of a woman’s right to choose. It is the woman’s choice and hers alone. Shouldn’t marriage be the couple’s choice and theirs alone?

Why do we as a society get a say on whether two people get married or not? We should focus on how to stop imposing our morality on others. When we set social policy we have a responsibility to leave choice and liberty in the hands of the people to decide their own fate. That is why the Socialist Party believes that legalizing same-sex marriage is important, but being critical of the institution of marriage at the same time is also necessary.

The Socialist Party should support the autonomy of individuals and give them the agency and self-determination they deserve. We should support expanding people’s choices not limiting them. Let us stay critical of the institution of marriage and challenge it. However, let us also support the choice of same-sex couples to decide for themselves what they want. As socialists we will continue to actively seek justice for all, regardless of sexual orientation or the gender of the partner someone loves. •

The Genius of Impeachment—The Founders’ Cure for Royalism, by John Nichols

Reviewed by Mary-Alice Herbert

John Nichols’ book, *The Genius of Impeachment—The Founders’ Cure for Royalism* is a fascinating history of impeachment and also a handbook for how to make it happen. The appendices include websites and information about impeachment movements around the country. In Brattleboro, VT last fall, Nichols said that George Bush and Richard

Cheney must be impeached to restore the balance of powers. Barring this, whoever replaces them will assume the same expanded executive powers and continue to ignore

the constitution. He had high hopes that the recently elected Democrats would find impeachment inevitable once they began to investigate the lies leading to the Iraq War; the illegal wiretapping of US citizens; the torture of prisoners of war; and other impeachable offenses.

It’s discouraging that, as this is being written in late July when calls for impeachment are coming from all over the country, the Democrats are still refusing to do the one thing that could end the war and raise their low poll ratings. An electorate

that now rarely shows up at election time would be galvanized and reengaged by impeachment proceedings.

Impeachment was devised by the founding fathers not just as a means for removing treacherous executives, but for restoring and maintaining the checks and balances between the three branches of the government they had just established. It was meant to be “the tool of constitutional renewal and the rejuvenation of the American experiment.”

Because they realized that executive power is immensely expanded in times of war, while the rights of citizens are always curtailed, Madison and Jefferson wanted to make sure that presidents could not start wars. The power of declaring war and of paying for it should belong to congress. "To chain the dogs of war," Madison observed, "the

Constitution has accordingly with studied care vested the question of war to the Legislature."

Congress has consistently failed to reign in the many presidents who have sent troops abroad without permission because both parties are funded by the corporations who benefit from the arms sales and military contracts that ensue. The Republicans' silly impeachment campaign against Bill Clinton ended in strengthening a popular president's already extensive executive power. If they had impeached him for deploying U.S. bombers and an Army battalion in the Kosovo War without congressional approval; for the "Chinagate" controversy in which foreign money flowed into his political accounts in return for eased restrictions on military sales to China; and for being granted most-favored-nation trading status—the result might have restored congressional powers.

Only Republican Bob Barr, following the example of Republican Robert Taft, from Ohio (who brought impeachment proceedings against Harry Truman in 1951 for sending troops to Korea without consulting congress), tried to insist on tying this impeachment to intervention in Kosovo. Taft, in the minority even in his own party, warned that allowing the president a free hand would make the commander in chief "a complete dictator over the lives and property of all our citizens" Republicans in congress joined the motion to impeach Richard Nixon in 1974 for his unauthorized bombings

of Cambodia during the Vietnam War, but the break-in of Democratic Party Headquarters became the reason for an impeachment proceeding which caused Nixon to resign from office. (Those Republicans who broke with their party and voted to impeach Nixon, even those in predominately Democratic districts, all won overwhelmingly in the next election. This should be a lesson for the timid Democrats who refuse to impeach Bush!) The post-Watergate era, Nichols tells us, has been one of partisan realpolitik. Most senators and representatives no longer see themselves as defenders of the powers and prerogatives of congress. They no longer act as guardians of



the separation between the legislative and executive branches. They've become, as Cheney was during the Reagan and elder Bush presidencies, extensions of the executive branch. They slavishly do the bidding of the president when their party is in the White House and attack the president when it isn't.

Constitutional scholars like Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia are increasingly rare. In 2003 he said, "For decades Presidential Administrations have sought to wrap their fingers around the purse strings, push away the congress, and ignore the constitution. It does not matter which Administration. It does not matter the political party of

the President. What matters is nothing more than raw power. Congress has it. The Executive Branch wants it—and will use any excuse to get it."

Nichols pays homage to Henry B Gonzales, of Texas, the son of Mexican immigrants, who served in the U.S. House for 37 years and proposed and supported more impeachments against more presidents than any other member of that body in its history. Gonzales did this because he took his oath to defend the constitution as seriously as his duty to his constituents. I'll close my review with the articles of impeachment Gonzales brought in 1991.

Impeached: George Herbert Walker Bush, President of the United States, for high crimes and misdemeanors, including: (1) violating the equal protection clause of the Constitution by putting U. S. soldiers in the Middle East who are overwhelmingly poor white, black, and Mexican-American, as well as basing their military service on the coercion of a system that denies viable economic opportunities to these classes of citizens; (2) bribing, intimidating, and threatening others, including the members of the United Nations Security Council, to support belligerent acts against Iraq; (3) preparing, planning, and conspiring to engage in a massive war against Iraq employing methods of mass destruction that would result in the killing of tens of thousands of civilians, many of whom would be children; (4) committing the United States to acts of war without congressional consent and contrary to the United Nations Charter and international law; and (5) preparing, planning, and conspiring to commit crimes against the peace by leading the United States into aggressive war against Iraq in violation of the U. S. Constitution and certain international instruments and treaties. •

the separation between the legislative and executive branches. They've become, as Cheney was during the Reagan and elder Bush presidencies, extensions of the executive branch. They slavishly do the bidding of the president when their party is in the White House and attack the president when it isn't.

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