

THE SOCIALIST

MAY DAY 2019



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MAY DAY ISSUE



CONTENTS

pg.3

CIW FAIR FOOD CAMPAIGN AND THE STUDENT FARMWORKER ALLIANCE

by Gold Carson

pg.5

O'MILTON AN EPIC POEM

by Ivan Kireevskii

pg.12

MAY DAY SALUTATIONS

by Eugene V. Debs

pg.13

THE NECESSITY OF A NATIONWIDE TEACHER WALKOUT ON MAY DAY 2020

by Michael Mochaidean

pg.20

MAY DAY POEM

by Kyle Fitzgerald

pg.21

LESSONS FROM THE LA TEACHER STRIKE

An Interview With Jen
McClellan



CIW FAIR FOOD CAMPAIGN AND THE STUDENT FARMWORKER ALLIANCE

By Gold Carlson



On March 2-14, 2019, farmworkers from Immokalee, Florida traveled across the country on the 4 for Fair Food Tour, stopping at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Ohio State University in Columbus, and the University of Florida in Gainesville. At these universities, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) alongside students and community members who urged their institutions to cut contracts with Wendy's until they sign onto the Fair Food Program. Farmworkers, students, and community leaders are calling for a national boycott of Wendy's, demanding human rights instead of cheap 4 for \$4 deals.

The Fair Food Program was developed by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers as an innovative approach to workers' rights because the tomato fields of Immokalee are a unique and particularly brutal workplace where traditional unions and other methods have not been successful. This approach follows the food up the supply chain, holding the people with the most power accountable-- fast-food and supermarket chains, which are the largest buyers of tomatoes. Corporations that sign on are legally bound to only buy their tomatoes from Fair Food farms. The Program implements a wage increase through a "penny more per pound" premium, zero tolerance for forced labor, child labor, and sexual assault, worker-to-worker education sessions, complaint resolution mechanisms, health and safety committees, shade and water in the fields, and ongoing auditing of Fair Food farms. Fourteen of the largest buyers, including Walmart, Taco Bell, and McDonald's, have signed onto the Fair Food Program after pressure from the Coalition and its allies. However, Wendy's has refused.

In 2016, after several years of refusal by the fast-food giant, the CIW officially called for a national boycott of Wendy's. The 4 for Fair Food Tour was this year's continuation of the Boycott Wendy's campaign. The focus shifted toward building solidarity between farmworkers and the corporation's target demographic: students. As part of the CIW ally network, the Student/Farmworker Alliance (SFA) organizes students on campuses across the country to mobilize with farmworkers for justice. Students organize to "Boot the Braids" by kicking Wendy's off campus until they sign onto the Fair Food Program.

I am a high school student from Montclair, New Jersey and I worked with Lexie Fisher, a Hunter College student in New York City to mobilize our communities to Ohio State University in Columbus, urging the institution to Boot the Braids. We organized a bus of students from Montclair High School, Hunter College, Columbia University, Barnard College, and Baruch College, as well as local community members.

On March 8, International Women's Day, we marched in solidarity with over 100 farmworkers and their families, as well as hundreds of other students, both from Ohio and elsewhere such as Washington DC, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and more. The march to the campus Wendy's and then to the office of University President Michael B. Drake was truly a display of people power and solidarity between communities fighting for a common cause of justice. We showed Ohio State and Wendy's that we don't want cheap fast food if it's at the expense of justice and dignity for farmworkers.

As a result of the targeting of the four major state universities, the University of Michigan has Booted the Braids, and the a city resolution in Gainesville, FL has passed to urge the University of Florida to do the same! Campaigns continue at the University of North Carolina and Ohio State University and the momentum has not slowed. Just last week, on the April 18 National Day of Action, students on at least 20 college campuses dropped banners calling for their administrations and Wendy's itself to support justice for farmworkers. This incredible movement is changing the relationships between the workers and the consumers in favor of a future of Fair Food where multinational corporations do not hold power over workers.



O'Milton an epic poem

by Ivan Kireevskii

Milton Friedman, the grand guru of unfettered free-market capitalism, the man credited for writing the book for the new global economy. His views took front and center on the world's stage during the Reagan/Thatcher era and have continued to dominate economic thinking to our day.

In my following epic poem, "o' Milton," I will, in verse ask whether unfettered free markets have brought about better lives or been the cause of much unnecessary pain and suffering for the world's citizens?

Please join me as I begin this journey.



canto i

o' milton

junta leaders
and a cynical plan
the chicago boys
stand before you... dazzling and groomed

an extortion of colors
and scheme-laden shocks
as a dagger through the heart
they will exploit you as mere pawns in their game

in these dark barren worlds
i awoke to savaging waves
fictitious capital
and a clanking of chains

the empires groan
with contempt and scorn
a sorcerer out of control
impoverished slums and the unemployed

i woke to a wilderness
mad eyes staring back
free marketeers and crooked math
they've filled their pockets and flew back home

a void suspended by inward fires
cheating waves of charter'd streams
rugged wintry rocks on paper thin ice
bellowing winds and imagined dreams

scattered shots beneath an oil-crowned moon
whispers in the distance
amidst a black liquid tide
the chicago boys... and a nobel prize

from crisis to crisis
expertly exploiting the desperate ones
o' professor friedman... what have you done?

canto ii

o' milton

grand guru of the free market myth
unfettered capital and its desirable end
first the textiles and on to the steel
the debt-ridden farmers, the mines and the factories

catalyzed transformation, shocks and change
from nicaragua to chile and greece
collapse a country, change a regime
where the ends will always justify the means
suave smiling assassins
buying countries, people and seas
planting tyrants, businessmen and kings
perverting understanding... where blood cannot be
washed clean

the oligarchs, the princelings, the piranhas
entwined with this crusade
their hazy and ever-shifting lines
creating miracles born of panic and shock

taxes are cuts, all trade will be free
all that is public... will be auctioned away
a rapid-fire plan and your healthcare's denied
a magic cure... a scheme of premeditated terror

sever the rope and let them fall
it's the algebra of infinite greed
a leap of imagination and insensitive schemes
the beast of the markets is awakened and unleashed

from crisis to crisis
expertly exploiting the desperate ones
o' professor friedman... what have you done?

canto iii

o' milton...

for a drop of oil
allende is blown away
the gift from fidel in his grip
and you were there... side-by-side with pinochet

a weapon of moist flint
the initials of the earth
written with blood
and the thunder of the damned

you taught them to buy their silk
their nylon and cigars
and move in and out
through chaos and revolving doors

free market dogma and
terror in the streets...
a miracle torn in the jungle
let the shots ring out

leaving nothing to hide
your eyes are closed
the keys are lost...
a fistful of empty clay

taken the chain from their ankles
and moved to their necks
clad in stillness
the clouds echo the names of the dead

o' milton... what have you done?



canto iv

o' milton...

clocks are unwound
the stars are halted in their course
obscure with gruesome acts
thailand, malaysia and the philippines

turned the working class
into a people of debt
now sit... and watch them fall
broken trees and torn down walls

moving deftly... expertly exploiting
the desperate laid bare
as wall street scavenges
even rummy and cheney were there

asia's up for sale
trickled down... but not into their hand
genius abandoning nations
lives forsaken, broken and left behind

economic meltdown
the i.m.f. decrees
a billion people fall before you
on bended knee

the disinherited
ones whom neither past
nor future belongs
victims of the friedman chicago class

the hat you're here to wear
where captives thicken to gaze...
if blood be the price of wealth
good god... they have surely paid

broken and terrified
the torture goes on
o' milton... what have you done?

canto v

o' milton

i traveled to sri lanka
to the land of the fishers
to the free markets
and the power of shock

to the tsunami
and a quarter-million dead
to moments of collective trauma
economic theory and a cardboard friend

an enraged sea
in the ocean rain
the wings of the albatross rose up
a mockery of motion and the monsters of men

before their eyes the water dried
i heard the footsteps
i heard the sounds of many
and i saw bones in the wake

hark... neptune's empire stands
walled off by the surge
they came to break them
their pebbles worn by tabulation

a pretext for rebirth
a glimmer of ancient arms
to pen and protect...
but you left them broken and deformed...

and a billion in slums
o' milton, what have you done

canto vi

o' milton...

for 12 years you've been gone
but your chicago boys
staked their claim and've carried on

a fabricated crisis
and cold war schemes
an endless roar
and a medieval siege

atrocities smile
through their coups and sanctions
unanswerable riddles
and a man named juan

elected by no one
words are gathered and bound
volumes of myth... indexed and shelved
as the chimes dilute all that's been done

this criminal assault
beneath your depths
their hollywood show
squeezed, shattered and torn

coordinated sabotage
and the theft of oil
trembling phrases fade to a pause
as they bow before the river-god of blood

for twelve years you've been gone
o' milton, what have you done?



canto vii

nelson mandela...

were you duped
caught in the web
of arcane rules and hurried backroom deals

you stepped out
you carried david's sling
erect and summoned as if a newborn king

you were betrayed
a restless future laid bare
fallen mountains beyond repair

where prowling bestial shapes
lead you down to dust and reeds
to dark ravines, where only horror lay

the chicago boys descended...
their ill-gotten gains
and their market beast

to the last,
all's been emptied...
a nation fleeced

turning day to night
sun to blood
no jobs, no homes... and a bill for the loans

their trickle-down scandal...
broken images, bribes and lies
crumbling before you... into a handful of dust

dried-up riverbeds of sharpened stones
in a tangled-up land
withered stumps of time and dead men's bones

o' milton what have you done

canto viii

the wall collapsed
and the promises made
roared from a black flue
like an emphatic fire... the lies were spewed

as yeltsin eclipsed gorbachev
the victor stepped forward
a new pinochet
a killer's model... done the friedman way

and your most precious assets
the mines, shipyards and factories
even the 'commanding heights'
sold... with chicago school brutality

stripped of all value
pillaged in unburied darkness
a tale the color of blood
drowned in cruelty... shattered in mercilessness

the profits flowed westward...
and their cleverly packaged tricks
harnessed chaos among the desperate
above the tyrants and the capitalists
even the sky was wounded...

the sun is just a myth
the crimes have been committed...
and the outside world no longer exists

a soundless landscape
under the clouded night
of an unfocused gaze...
spiraling destruction, mutiny and economic genocide

the hidden rooms, the chill in the air
in the distance the beating drum

o' milton, what have you done

canto ix

o' milton

did you conspire with katrina
to confiscate the land
as the funds were stolen
and subsidies moved to corporate hands

did you not hear the cry of gulls
and the deep-sea swell
when you calculated
your profit and what to sell

did you
auction off the schools
forgetting that the working poor...
paid your bills

while at glacial pace
the levees were repaired
and from their shackled noose
the children wept and stared

vivid, ferocious flood
which has formed me
and chased me down
it spread inside... so violently

don't be fooled new orleans
you will not be rebuilt
just erased...
will we ever know the number killed

get on board
can you climb the wall
there are poolside drinks...
ignore the disaster... the glasses are tall

there is you and there is them
the protected and the damned
the fooled and the one's that rule
in this, your smothered land

power breaks beyond the waves
vague abstractions
sentences scream in bursts
o' milton, what have you done

facts evaporate
are scattered and blown away
memories like snapshots
and no one's troubled by the aftertaste

walls of water
fell from the sky
a terrifying theater
of empty stones and faceless lies

like vital tears
dredging the riverbeds
where investors as serpents
erased all that was left

the drops of blood
beneath the sand
snuffed out the nest
traversing the harshness of man

fate, which is silent...
corridors, stairways and thrones
here, a haunted space formed
endless shields of misery, nothing sheltering the storm

shattered bones along the way
'we have fed our sea for a thousand years
and yet she still calls...' as if unfed
you stood betrayed by their lies, their swords and their
spears

abhorring nature... upsetting its plans
cry if you must... you stand unseen
in the storm upon your onrushing world
in iraq, sri lanka and new orleans

an ever-widening chasm
of the dazzling rich
and the disposable poor...
the distant gods of indifference

atrocities have crossed the land
you still yearn
as steps take you among the lowest dead
beyond strange roads, in widowed skin

power beyond the waves
vague abstractions
where sentences scream in bursts
o' milton, what have you done

canto x

squeezed empty
broken and shattered...
and the angry shall become rubble
the conquered and the seized

depatterned societies
rage simmering at the roots
the destruction roars on...
fafnir's gone off... carrying the loot

believing he can patent the sun
and victimize the victims
exploit the exploited...
while building walls, that have caged you in

they... who sacrifice affections
in madness they will trample
chasing riches and stealing your oil
leaving arrows of famine beyond the darkened moon of battle
as zarathustra's dragon
guards the cave
where fragments of chaos
are shored against the ruins

and woton robs the poor
as he defaces the earth
miseried villages... and ghettos
in africa, russia and new orleans

the gold has been stolen
brynhild's mountain top is spinning
as the norms sit...
their threads of destiny... slowly unraveling

a praxis of indifference
shattered and cursed
in glacial tears
measured and dispersed

profiteers drinking blood
sweetened with shit
the wood is gone...
the fire is unlit

cruelty exposed
the misery and shame
untested theories and bloody days
the shock of the coup and those frightful flames

ascending rungs of air
to the void of sunken time...
and at the bottom... all i saw were scars and tears
the slaves have been buried and left behind

from crisis to crisis
expertly exploiting the desperate ones
o' professor friedman... what have you done?
-ik

The complete epic will be included in my upcoming book; *Sculptum Est Prosa* (Vol 3) – The Voices of the Un-People.



1922 MAY DAY SALUTATIONS

"THROUGHOUT THE WORLD THE PROLETARIAN MOVEMENT IS TODAY READJUSTING ITSELF TO THE CHAOTIC CONDITIONS CREATED BY THE WORLD UPHEAVAL. CAPITALISM IS BANKRUPT AND IN RUINS AND SOCIALISM IS MOUNTING TO POWER TO REBUILD THE SHATTERED SOCIAL FABRIC AND SAVE CIVILIZATION."

-Eugene V. Debs



The Necessity of a Nationwide Teacher Walkout on May Day 2020

Michael Mochaidean organizer with the IWW, WVEA, and a member of the West Virginia United caucus

Have strikes become fundamentally reactive in nature, or can they be done proactively in the service of something more?

This question poses a challenge to the mass of education workers who have since, or are preparing to, go on strike. Since the historic victory in West Virginia last year, the country has witnessed mass strikes by education workers in otherwise calm or less strike-prone regions of the U.S. In each of the areas where a strike has taken place, however, the organizing efforts there have been fundamentally reactive in nature. As a brief run-down:

- West Virginia (2018): Nine-day walkout to secure an increase in pay and block cuts to the state's insurance agency (PEIA).
- Kentucky (2018): Periodic and intermittent walkouts to protest Governor Bevin's attempts to privatize the state's pension plan.
- Oklahoma (2018): Eight-day walkout to redirect state funding towards underfunded schools for new infrastructure investment and wage increases.
- Arizona (2018): Five-day walkout to significantly increase wages for education workers over a two-year period.
 - Los Angeles (2019): Six-day walkout to increase salaries for education workers, reduce class sizes, cap charter school growth, and increase amount of support staff.
 - Denver (2019): Three-day walkout to increase pay for teachers based on the city's increasing cost of living.
- Oakland (2019): Seven-day walkout that secured an eleven percent pay raise over four years and an agreement to hire more school counselors, psychologists, and special education teachers.
- West Virginia (2019): Two-day walkout to protest an omnibus education bill that would have introduced charter schools and educational savings accounts in the state.
- Kentucky (2019): Intermittent walkouts to protest alterations to the state's pension board.

In states where a walkout took place to secure better wages or investments in schools (Oklahoma and Arizona), strikes were a necessary tool used to return to pre-recession levels of state funding. The walkouts there were reactive in nature in as much as the others (West Virginia, Kentucky, Los Angeles, Denver, Oakland) because of the need to fight back against a hostile legislature and/or board of education that had, over the course of more than a decade, reduced state investment in public education. The technocratic approaches that we saw take place across the country during the height of the recession sought to decrease the tax burden on corporate interests so as to stave off unemployment numbers.

According to a report from the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities at the time, between October 2008 and September 2009, states collected \$87 billion less in tax revenue due to alterations in state tax brackets that provided for new exemptions for larger corporations. The flipside of this has been that, with a decrease in tax revenue, public services declined over that period as well. According to Dr. Sylvia Allegretto, an economist for the Institute for Research on Labor and Employment at the University of California, Berkeley, “In real terms... the average U.S. teacher today makes \$30 less a week than they used to” from 2000 to 2017. This is actually worse than what private sector workers have witnessed over the past forty years, where real wages have remained stagnant overall.



As state investment declined, public schools began to falter as well. In 2015, over half of all states were still spending less for total school funding per student than they were pre-recession, in 2008. States where charter schools began expanding in that same time period – Kansas, Arizona, Mississippi, and Oklahoma – also saw income tax rate cuts that cost the states millions in potential education funding. Naomi Klein describes this process in her book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007). Disaster capitalism is an effort by neoliberal free market policy makers to 1) create a crisis, 2) push for private investment to resolve this crisis, 3) profit considerably from this privatization of public services, and 4) institute the “shock doctrine” whereby this small group can reinvest their capital into this repeat process and slowly starve the public from their much-needed social services.

Such is the case currently with charter schools and vouchers. In New Orleans, for example, Hurricane Katrina decimated the infrastructure of the otherwise underfunded, predominately Black and Brown city back in 2005. Public schools in the city had a graduation rate eighteen points below the national average, while sixty-eight percent of seventh graders were testing below basic proficiency in English, and seventy percent were testing below in Math. Schools had never been fully funded, and the result was a lagging education system teetering on the brink of collapse. When Hurricane Katrina hit in August 2005, the Orleans Parish School Board laid off 4,000 teachers and 3,000 staff. The city’s tax base had been disrupted, its schools damaged beyond repair, and the city’s infrastructure was decimated. Corporate educators had been consulted to provide for what has been described as “the most expansive overhaul ever seen in the history of public education” (<http://inthesetimes.com/article/18352/10-years-after-katrina-new-orleans-all-charter-district-has-proven-a-failur>).

Public schools in New Orleans were sold off to the highest bidder. 107 of New Orleans' 128 public schools were handed over to the Recovery School District charter program, which currently manages over half of all New Orleans' schools. Each school became its own district, with separate hiring practices, dress codes, and the like. Management of these schools could be for-profit or non-profit, and even with non-profit status, there were plenty of ways for school board members to get fat off this new tax base. New Orleans became the canary in the mines for public education in an era of rampant neoliberalism. The expansion of charter schools over the past decade has taken an otherwise manageable economic crisis and ballooned it, disrupting entire communities through consolidations, shutdowns, and layoffs.

If education is the frontline of this battle between neo-liberal capitalism and a revived, militant working class, then it stands to reason that education workers must seize this opportunity to push for greater concessions from their governments and boards of education. A nationwide May Day strike could accomplish this goal of further delineating lines between the working class and the employing class, expanding the reach of this movement to other industries, and redirect this energy towards building dual power at a time when the national election will be most heated. It is of primary importance that education workers across the country begin the process of planning for this action for the following reasons.

1 – A Rise in Class Consciousness

Lenin describes the process of mass action in his *Left Wing Communism* pamphlet as such:

If you want to help the "masses" and win the sympathy and support of the "masses," you should not fear difficulties, or pinpricks, chicanery, insults and persecution from the "leaders"... but must absolutely work wherever the masses are to be found. You must be capable of any sacrifice, of overcoming the greatest obstacles, in order to carry on agitation and propaganda systematically, perseveringly, persistently and patiently in those institutions, societies, and associations... in which proletarian or semi-proletarian masses to be found.

With regards to the proletarian desire to engage in parliamentarism, Lenin likewise argues that:

You must not sink to the level of the masses, to the level of the backward strata of the class. That is incontestable. You must tell them the bitter truth. You are in duty bound to call their bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary prejudices what they are – prejudices. But at the same time you must soberly follow the actual state of the class-consciousness and preparedness of the entire class, and of all the working people.



In the midterm elections of 2018, an ominous hype lingered around many education organizers that the new awakening of education workers would usher in a sweep at the state level and a blue wave would rid them of their reactionary, Republican politicians. This did not materialize. In the four main states that held statewide walkouts lasting longer than two days – West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Arizona – Republicans maintained control of the state legislature. One Congressional candidate who had ingratiated himself to the teacher and service personnel movement – Richard Ojeda – was seen as a powerful contender for West Virginia's 3rd Congressional district. Ojeda, a state senator at the time, had given fiery speeches before, during, and after the nine-day walkout. He appeared in Michael Moore's documentary *Fahrenheit 11/9*, was a frequent guest on *The Young Turks*, and outlined his policies on *The Van Jones' Show*. Ojeda's rise was marked by stigma when he stated that he had voted for Trump in the 2016 election, but had regretted that decision later. Nevertheless, Ojeda's campaign was to the national media a silver bullet for Democrats in conservative-leaning districts; run as a blue dog Democrat, gain the support of unions, and position your campaign as a shot across the bow to harken back to the days of "working class" Democratic politicians.

Ojeda would go on to lose his campaign to a fairly obscure state legislator, Carol Miller, by a margin of 56.4 to 43.6%, similar to other House races in the state.

I distinctly recall the many sullen faces of my fellow workers on November 9th. The time and energy they had put towards campaigning for Democrats, fighting to unseat hostile Republicans, only to lose races or make minor gains that had no bearing on future legislative outcomes. Months of knocking on doors, rallies, speeches, and phone banking had done little to stem the tide of reactionary Republican takeovers. It was almost like reliving 2016 all over again for many of the same cadre of workers who felt, in those moments, powerless to the forces of the far-right.

The election had another damning effect beyond lowering morale – it divided the workers along party or ideological lines. On the secret Facebook pages where our organizing work has been most present, we witnessed countless attacks on individuals based on their party affiliation or ideology. Posters would state that they could "not vote for a Democrat under any circumstances" because of Obama's presidency, abortion, or some other stated reason. Those who were most likely to remain committed militants swore off the pages all together, leaving them entirely or blocking their page from seeing future posts to avoid this hassle. Whether or not the conservative-leaning posters were trolls or legitimate accounts, the desired outcome was the same – a reduction in posts that could unite workers towards a common end beyond the electoral sphere.

It was only through the mass statewide walkouts that education workers began to realize that their economic anxieties, the stress of their jobs, and the lack of connections to their communities were indeed tied to the same overarching system. Though most did not qualify this system as the result of capitalism, workers could nevertheless pin the blame on those operating the system, the politicians, whom they ruthlessly mocked and ridiculed for their obstinacy. This was the first step in building a measure of class consciousness. Drawing a line in the sand, workers could unequivocally state that those on one side – the workers – were those who did the majority of the labor, while those on the other side – the politicians – managed the crisis as bourgeois onlookers. The politicians could be pegged as outsiders to the labor system, hell-bent on winning re-election or securing donor funds rather than assist in creating truly well-funded public schools. It was a crucial awakening that the system is fundamentally flawed, but the antidote to this was, as always, electoral in nature.

In West Virginia this year, the anger that had built up from the election towards one another dissipated when we were called to go on strike yet again, the second strike in two years. Our fight this time was against the introduction of charter schools and educational savings accounts (vouchers). Animosity between “those teachers who vote against their own best interests” went out the door when we learned another statewide strike had been approved. Building up something after a strike is always harder than building up to a strike; it is easier to divide the workers by telling them to return to their old habits than continue to push against the systemically corrupt nature of our bourgeois electoral system.

A May Day strike would help reunify and mend old wounds that had been torn anew in the midterm elections. It would identify the enemy yet again in a more systematic way and prevent the tribal nature of bourgeois political parties from calcifying an otherwise organic movement.

2 – Expand the Strike to Other Industries

A recent report from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics found that in 2018, 485,000 employees went on strike. This was the largest number of workers engaged in a strike since 1986. Teachers and service personnel accounted for over half of all workers engaged in a strike action in 2018 alone, signifying a powerful trend that had ripple effects across the nation.

The movement of education workers strikes emboldened other industries to do likewise. In West Virginia alone, at least two major strikes occurred during or immediately following the nine-day walkout here in 2018. Communication Workers of America (CWA) went on strike against telecommunication giant Frontier Communications in protest of new classifications and a reduction in employer-funded health insurance. The strike had been some months in the making, but when talking with CWA workers personally at the time, the response had been the same: “We support the teachers and we hope they support us,” a strike leader told me. “We’re all in this fight together.” Likewise, at the Technicap factory in Glen Dale, workers with the International Association of Mechanics and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW) went on a 130-day strike in protest of similar grievances. At a rally in May, speakers there spoke boldly of the inspiration teachers had given them to fight for what is theirs. Food drives and solidarity funds were established between teachers unions and the IAMAW to help defer costs the striking workers accrued over their months-long strike.

Worker empowerment through a strike can rise to meteoric levels as a tidal wave brings innumerable irate workers together in a fight for common concerns, banding together across whole industries. The fear of utilizing a strike has decreased and workers in right-to-work states have now felt emboldened to seek greater demands against an otherwise monolithic giant (capital). What is needed now more than ever is to tie these strikes together into a larger, general strike that can do the task of clearly identifying capitalism as the root of this crisis. We have already seen that strikes can embolden other industries to act likewise; therefore, a nationwide strike of education workers could gain sympathy strikes from other workers in their industries, shutting down cities and states until larger concessions are granted by the employing classes.



3 – Build Dual Power, Not Politicians' Campaigns

At the moment, socialists have one of two options ahead of them – endorse Bernie Sanders' campaign, or work outside the system. Unlike his long shot campaign in 2016, Sanders has real potential to win the Democratic primary this election cycle. Sanders consistently polls near the top nationally, behind only Joe Biden, and even then only by a few percentage points. The recent decision by the National Political Committee of the DSA to endorse the Sanders' campaign has all but ensured that this campaign for the heart and soul of socialism is a foregone conclusion for the center-left and entryists. Whatever the flaws of Sanders himself, his supporters have now taken up the charge to use his newest campaign to bring in a new wave of socialist-inspired members, activists, and organizers.

The challenges that this campaign presents are too numerous to list here, and any historical analysis of these factors would become overly cumbersome. Suffice it to say that propelling Sanders simultaneous to, or in lieu of, supporting mass education worker strikes is a poor decision to be made. As mentioned above, the divisiveness sown by right-wing media against parties and individuals is a challenging feat to overcome. Affiliating an amorphous, class-building movement to one individual, or one party, will ultimately doom it to a quick death. We have already seen such movements become co-opted by the Democratic Party. Neutered shells of their former self, these movements eventually divulge into some non-profit or another, acting as a formalized channel through which justifiable anger can be redirected towards less radical means.

The #Red4Ed movement and its ancillary "United" groups should never give up their independence to become an advocating force to any political party or candidate. Doing so would reduce their impact as a powerful unifying coalition of rank-and-file workers, transforming them into, in essence, the cheerleaders of progressive Democratic politicians. The allure of this new power is great. In West Virginia, until relatively recently, the United Mine Workers Association (UMWA) held this power, too. An endorsement from the UMWA carried with it the weight of generations of dues-paying family members. The union's cozy relationship with the Democratic Party ensured a Democratic majority in West Virginia's legislature throughout the past several decades. Still a force of relevance and a powerful lobbying group in the state, the UMWA's power to command has been reduced to one that is more culturally relevant than practically relevant to the state's majority working class.

The UMWA's greatest strength had been their optics and their history as one of the more militant unions in American history. Scores of camouflaged-wearing miners rallying together as they listen to one impassioned speech after another could rekindle any fledgling spirit. But in their absence, the void was filled by the other militant majority, a new group of rank-and-file education workers. The natural economic decline of coal meant that fewer dues-paying members could affiliate with the UMWA. Instead of transforming into a union that could advocate for the abolition of capitalism, as this system has been the reason for coal miner deaths and a plague of black lung diseases, the UMWA soon advocated for tax policies that benefited private coal companies. Their union's longevity depended upon the fewer and fewer workers who still labored in mines, and so the UMWA saw that they would need to protect these jobs by any means necessary.

This is the danger presented to education workers who have, for the time being, been handed over the keys of a mass movement. Being the charges of this political movement in such a critical stage of revolution could lead to victory or disaster, and we must be careful not to become so easily lead astray by this power into becoming simply another non-profit, advocating for meager reforms under capitalism. Remaining outside the electoral sphere, building up workers for their own ends to manage their workplaces and advancing their own agendas in spite of the desires of bourgeois political parties will ensure the long-term stability of this militant movement.

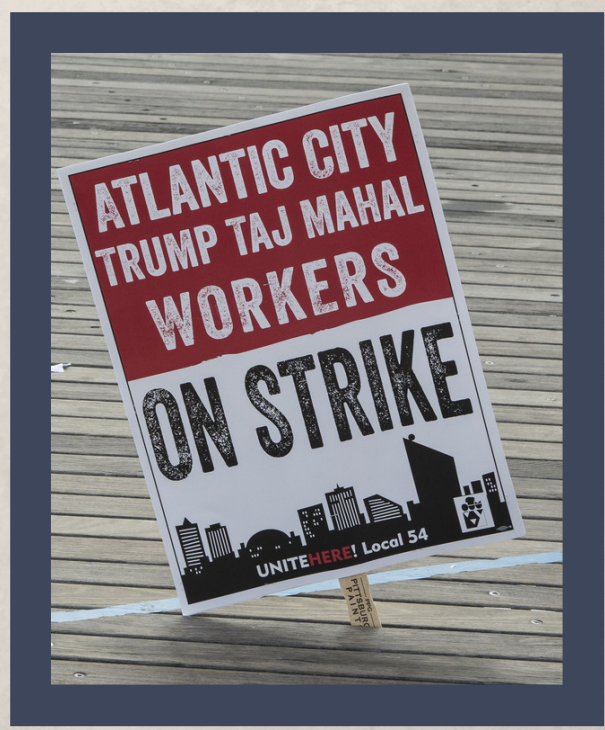
Furthermore, it will prevent fracturing along ideological or party lines before such transformation in revolutionary class-consciousness can take place. We must recognize that the workers who joined us on our picket lines have vastly different ideological beliefs than we, engaging in a strike against Republican legislators one day and voting for them the next. This strategy does not practice a non-ideological intervention; far from it! Instead, such a strategy would substitute the building of class-consciousness through the ballot box, which we understand is a false consciousness, with the building of class-consciousness external to the functioning of the state. y divulge into some non-profit or another, acting as a formalized channel through which justifiable anger can be redirected towards less radical means.

What is to be done?

It must be our goal with this movement to unearth the contradictions inherent in capitalism for the masses of education workers. Direct action has the capability of doing this on a small scale and in periodic steps. For this to be truly effective in the long-term, however, the #Red4Ed movement must fundamentally reshape the labor movement yet again with a proactive strike on labor's truest of holidays, May Day.

The goals of this movement have yet to be written, and it would be of the utmost importance that all education workers have a say in determining what this strike would look like on the ground, in real time, making demands of a system already hostile to even the mention of social democracy.

What I have laid out above is more so the case for why a nationwide May Day strike is imperative, given the power generated by education workers. It is not up to one individual to determine its magnitude or immediate asks, yet the overarching theme of this walkout can and must be the eventual dismantling of neo-liberal capitalism and the building up of a wholly new, wholly independent economic and political system. Our future is not predetermined. Our system cannot last. It is time that education workers begin to work towards a May Day strike now, in this very moment, to hasten the rise of the working class in opposition to capital. To quote the labor leader Mary Harris 'Mother' Jones, "Some day the workers will take possession of your city hall, and when we do, no child will be sacrificed on the altar of profits."



May Day Poem

By Kyle Fitzgerald

Not the color of the skin
Not the gender or identification
Not the difference in tongue
Or the region of birth
Can darken the transparency
Of the socialist party
For it is that
If the socialist loses
Humanity loses
If we win
Healing can begin
Solidarity



Lessons From The LA Teacher Strike

An interview with Jen McClellan by Joshua B.

“It's really a fucking shame, man. It's been made clear to me already why teachers burn out so quickly” stated Jen McClellan on the teaching conditions in Los Angeles public schools. She continued “Pinned between the demands of the repressive state apparatus, the expectations of local administrators and parents, and the dying dreams of young people being exposed to the truths of global warming, capitalism, and mass extinction, it's a goddamn wonder when you come across someone in their fifties who has been able to maintain energy and hope.” Jen McClellan is currently a student teacher and is working on her last semester at CSU Northridge's credential program. Although Jen is not yet an official member of the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) she has been active in organizing for and participating in the more radical left tendencies of the UTLA since 2013. Recently Jen took an active role in organizing for and supporting the 2018 LA teachers' strike.

I asked Jen to explain the reasons why the second largest school district in the U.S. decided to go on strike. What are currently the conditions of classrooms in the LA school district? What was the final straw for UTLA teachers that led them to finally declare a long waited strike?



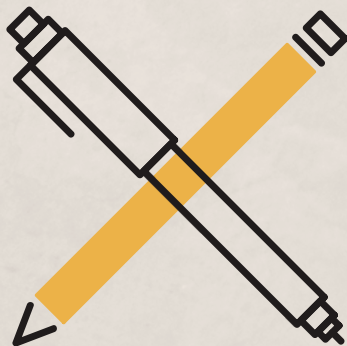
“Specifically, right now I am student teaching a class, for example, that has 38 students to 1 English Language Arts teacher” Jen continued to explain the technology in her classroom is somewhat up to date, but the Wi-Fi is very unreliable. The classrooms are often uninviting and counter productive to inducing an atmosphere that should foster curiosity and knowledge. Jen described the desks in her classroom as being “old as fuck, super uncomfortable, hard and heavy with book basket foot rests and cold metal frames.” She continued to describe the unsanitary conditions in her classroom as “being always filthy (layers of dirt and dust on the floors mark up our shoes and pants) because, of course, the janitorial staff is underpaid and overworked.” Jen remarked that she has yet to see anyone mop let alone wax the floors.

As if overcrowded and dirty classrooms were not bad enough, students are treated as if they are criminals. Jen noted that students “cannot come into or go from a classroom, hallway, front or side gate without specific permission and an approved reason - so, they are literally watched by guards who aggressively make it known that they are being watched, cannot loiter anywhere, and will be questioned at random as they move from place to place, while being locked in by fences, walls and gates.” During our conversation I was struck by the abysmal and oppressive conditions in which students are expected to learn and spend the majority of their young lives!

The vivid descriptions Jen provided conjure up images of a prison rather than a classroom. Overcrowded and underfunded classrooms alongside underpaid staff are an all too common criticism voiced by the UTLA strikers. However, I wanted to know her opinion on what sparked the LA teachers strike.

Jen cut right to the point with her reply “Don't ask me. I don't know shit. Ask everybody you possibly can and don't stop there. You would have to listen to interviews and watch documentaries about strikes prior to this one. And ask what people envision comes next, especially young people because they don't know what they're up against yet.” Jen clarified that the youth far from being naïve, actually have the power of “optimism, imagination, and unimpeded believe in the possibility of everything is rare, fleeting, and viciously coveted.”

Jen raised some interesting sentiments regarding the youth. Far too often older activists, organizers and leftists can get worn down and lose their spark. As Jen mentioned in our interview, some of the veteran educators she works with frequently mentally check out from their work and feel overwhelmed. Hitting the brick wall can be easily caused by the strenuous work grind of trying to put food on the table combined with the daily horrors of Imperialism and Capitalism. All of us should gather strength and inspiration from wherever we can find it. For Jen that inspiration comes from her young students.



Towards the end of our discussion Jen proposed an extremely interesting question. Why did the strike end so quickly? The LA teachers strike made headlines across the country. Thousands of workers, teachers, students and parents attended the rallies to demand justice. However, as quickly as the strike happened it disappeared.

Commenting on the longevity of the strike Jen commented “How many days did we go? Six? They had those Grand Park rallies planned too. Not to sustain momentum, but to bring all the energy to a high point, so that it could dissipate thereafter. Okay, thanks for coming to the show! You can go back to work now...This brought to you by Netflix. Amazon. WalMart.”

The strike certainly created a grand spectacle, thousands of working class people marching together, waving flags, chanting slogans and demanding change. A mighty wave of proletarian power crashing upon the high rises of downtown LA.

However, that mighty wave crashed and quickly receded back into the sea. Jen's comments reminded me the occupy movement. I became politically conscious during occupy, I marched, carried banners and chanted slogans. It was a truly powerful feeling and an incredible moment. But I also witnessed how quickly the energy of Occupy dissipated and spread out in a thousand different directions. Which raised important questions for me. How can a strike or political march transcend the brief public spectacle and evolve into genuine movement with revolutionary potential. Jen offered her advice on how to reach that goal.

“We need more strategic planners, more local, long term, dedicated to the death organizers. because even if we don't have the funding right now, we got the numbers. We got the will and the people power and we need just a bit higher frequency of mass strike moments, worldwide, international, in time, then the grandkids will have some real good stories to tell about how they were supposed to be one of the last generations of the human species, but how they managed to turn that shit around. They're gonna be redefining education, man--I hope I get to see some more manifestations of this.”

The labor movement and radical leftist politics have been for the most part, absolutely crushed in the United States. Today, we are facing a historic struggle and a daunting task alongside the rise of labor and socialism. Capitalism has outlived its usefulness and now threatens all life on earth, as we know it. Capitalism keeps our children in poverty, denies students quality education and works our educators to the bone. The question of how we on the left can fulfill our revolutionary potential is a subject for another time. However, in the simplest terms we have to turn this shit around. The future is either socialism or barbarism. The stakes could not be higher.



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