

16 October 2024

# CLASS STRUGGLE EDUCATION WORKERS

## Democrats, Republicans vs. Public Education We Need a Class-Struggle Workers Party

By Class Struggle Education Workers/UFT

For the past year, schools and colleges across the country have been in turmoil as protests mounted against the genocidal U.S./Israel war on Gaza. While ultra-rightist Republicans in Congress summoned administrators to Washington for witch-hunting hearings, Democrats also slandered the protests as supposedly “antisemitic” and brought in police to shut them down. Gaza became a hot issue in K-12 schools as well. In New York City, the Department of Education (D.O.E.) issued a directive threatening disciplinary action against expressions of support for the embattled Palestinian people by students and educators, even on employees’ own time and outside of school.<sup>1</sup> This gag order soon became a dead letter as outrage over the slaughter grew.

Now the final spurt to the November elections is in full swing, and teachers unions are going all out to elect the Democratic Party slate. After President Biden (now widely derided by student protesters as “Genocide Joe”) dropped out, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) quickly jumped to endorse the Democratic ticket headed by Biden’s vice-president Kamala Harris. (The NEA had to curtail its July annual assembly and Biden’s address in Philadelphia due to picketing by striking staff members, to which it responded with a lockout!) So as the slaughter in Gaza continues and spreads to Lebanon, teachers unions are promoting Harris’s campaign theme of “joy” and “freedom.”

Adding to the enthusiasm was her vice-presidential pick, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, a former high school football coach and teacher. Walz’s wife, Gwen Walz, also was a teacher and school administrator for over two decades. NEA president Becky Pringle gushed that educators were “excited to see one of their own on the debate stage.” Within the first 24 hours of Walz’s selection as running mate, the Harris campaign brought in \$36 million from 450,000 donors, with teachers as the top profession. Now NEA and AFT members are phone-banking, door-to-door canvassing and busing to battleground states on weekends to elect Democrats, perhaps with more urgency than usual but basically following the same old playbook.

As the Democrats posture as supposed friends of labor, women and educators to bring home the money and the vote, the Republican candidate Donald Trump, a certified sociopath, is demonizing and threatening to deport “nearly 20 million” immigrants. Now he is regurgitating fascist verbiage, vowing to “root out the communists” and “Marxists” he calls “vermin.”

<sup>1</sup> Class Struggle Education Workers called a protest, “Down with Gag Order Against NYC Teachers!” on the steps of the D.O.E. headquarters on 16 November 2023.

At the same time, Republican governors and state legislators have embarked on a racist crusade to erase black history from public school libraries and classrooms, along with Latino and Native American history, references to Palestine in history books, anything about transgender rights (or even sexuality). Plus, of course, union-busting.<sup>2</sup> This ominous campaign is just a step away from book burning.

Yet over the years, the historic alignment of the teachers unions with the Democratic Party has not put an end to, or even diminished Republican attacks on public schools and teacher-bashing. Far from it, as on issue after issue, Democrats have chimed in on the agenda of charterizing, corporatizing and privatizing public education. The reason is straightforward: the Democratic Party, no less than the Republicans, is a capitalist party, and as the capitalist system decays at an increasing rate, it is seeking to slash expenditures on public schools, hospitals, welfare and social programs. This reached its nadir in the COVID-19 pandemic when millions died as the U.S. public health system all but collapsed.

Teachers unions are in the crosshairs of racist reactionaries and Wall Street money men, Democrats and Republicans alike, because they are an obstacle to the drive to gut public education. Class Struggle Education Workers (CSEW) says that *you can’t defeat Trump with Democrats*. This is doubly true in the public schools, where the bosses (local governments and school administrators) and union leaders are almost universally supporters of the same capitalist party – the Democratic Party. Being in bed with the bosses is *class collaboration*. You won’t defend teachers and students with pillow talk. What we need is a *fighting workers party* prepared to lead hard *class struggle* to defeat the bipartisan capitalist war on public education.

### L.A., Oakland, Chicago: Education Bosses Are All Democrats

Just take a look at the history of teacher strikes in recent years. The 2018 walkouts, from West Virginia to Oklahoma and Arizona, were in Republican-governed states where teachers unions are weak. But the next year saw major strikes by teachers in Los Angeles and Oakland, California and a continuing standoff in Chicago. In L.A., where 35,000 teachers struck in January 2019 for smaller class sizes and against charter schools, United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) union president, Alex Caputo-Pearl steamrolled strikers into voting for a contract that sold out those goals. UTLA had endorsed Democrat Gavin Newsom for governor and Democrat Eric Garcetti for mayor. As the CSEW wrote then:

<sup>2</sup> Florida’s 2023 law, SB256, has already led to decertification of 54 local teachers unions, and now they are going after the largest, United Teachers of Dade (County) in Miami.

“The governor, state superintendent of education [Austin Beutner], Los Angeles mayor and almost all members of the L.A. school board are Democrats, who also hold huge supermajorities (over 70%) in both houses of the state legislature, which they have controlled almost continually since 1970. They are the ones directly responsible for the perilous state of public education in California today. Yet both the UTLA and the LAUSD are looking to the Democrats to resolve the issue in the strike.”

—CSEW, “To Win the Teachers Strike We Must Shut Down L.A.” (21 January 2019)

The following month, 3,000 educators of the Oakland Education Association (OEA) went on strike against the school district for pay raises, smaller class sizes and more school funding. Again, the prime enemies of the teachers were Democrats, including top-level capitalists pushing education “reform”: Michael Bloomberg, Bill Gates and Eli Broad. Bloomberg, the billionaire NYC ex-mayor who switched from Democrat to Republican and then back to the Democrats, “dropped more than \$5 million on California elections to elect charter school supporters,” including \$300,000 to a slate in Oakland seeking to turn half of local schools into charters (CSEW, “Mobilize Bay Area Workers to Win Oakland Teachers Strike,” 21 February 2019).

Both the UTLA and OEA’s rotten deals in cities governed by Democrats amounted to pay cuts (when adjusted for inflation), achieved essentially nothing on class size, and did not stop the charter school invasion and the resulting cut in funding to the public schools. Still, “California teachers unions [had] spent more than \$1.3 million supporting Newsom” in the elections, who only called to make charter schools “more transparent” (“Here’s who invested in Gavin Newsom – and what they want him to do,” *The Bee*, 11 February 2019).

In the Windy City, Democratic mayor Rahm Emmanuel declared war on the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) even before taking office in 2011, essentially forcing a strike the next year.<sup>3</sup> He was replaced in 2019 by Democrat Lori Lightfoot, who continued trying to strongarm the teachers through mayoral dictatorship over the schools. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when the CTU put forward specific demands for safely reopening the schools, she locked 150 teachers out of Google Classroom in a blatant union-busting move. As we noted then, “one of the main forces behind Mayor Lightfoot’s diktat ordering teachers back to school no matter what, was the sinister outfit Democrats for Education Reform (DFER), which has long attacked the CTU, and teachers unions in general.”<sup>4</sup> The DFER was bankrolled by Bloomberg.

So while Republicans demonize teachers unions and want to destroy them, it is most often Democrats who deliver the blows, and the union tops trail along behind like good boys and girls. Union misleaders like AFT president Randi Weingarten, a longtime member of the Democratic Party National Committee, argue that aligning with the Democrats gives teachers more clout and leverage in backroom negotiations. The UFT

has poured millions into its lobbying operations in Albany and Washington. But none of this has protected teachers, students and schools from charters, standardized common core curricula, high stakes national testing and the like. And in many cases such schemes were originated by the Democrats and pushed by Democratic party elected officials.

### Clinton, Obama and Eva Moskowitz

Take the case of Hillary Clinton. Back in the 1980s, when husband Bill was governor of Arkansas, she chaired a state Education Standards Commission, denouncing the head of the NEA affiliate as the “leading villain” for opposing Clinton’s introduction of “teacher competency” tests. She was put on the board of directors of virulently anti-union Arkansas-based Wal-Mart. Hillary also raked in \$100,000 for leading a Commission on Workforce Skills of the National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE). And when in November 1992 Bill was elected president, NCEE CEO Marc Tucker wrote her outlining a plan to separate off college-track students at age 16, while others would be channeled into programs focused on “work-related skills.”

The Clintons enacted much of this plan in the 1994 “Goals 2000: Educate America Act” and “School-to-Work Opportunities Act.” Later, a 2006 NCEE report, *Tough Choices or Tough Times*, financed by the Gates Foundation, called to end secondary education for many poor and minority students after the 10th grade; to “change the shape of teacher compensation,” raising wages by gutting pension plans; to end seniority for teachers and introduce “merit pay” based on student performance; and to sideline local school boards so “schools would be operated by independent contractors, many of them limited-liability corporations” (from the November 2008 *Internationalist* supplement, “No to Teacher-Basher McCain and Education-for-War Obama”).

In Hillary Clinton’s 2000 Senate bid, she remarked in a campaign debate, “I think we ought to streamline the due-process standards so that teachers that don’t measure up would no longer be in the classroom.”<sup>5</sup> With her trademark calls for “public-private partnerships,” for decades she has backed charter schools, many of them financed by her friends in the Walton Family, who’ve “given grants to one in every four charter startups in the country, for a total of \$335 million.”<sup>6</sup> In her 2016 presidential campaign she added some mild criticisms of charters, causing a few jitters in the corporate “education reform” crowd that considered her a political ally. But her overall support for these privately managed schools, which siphon off money and space from public schools while receiving millions from Wall Street, did not change.

So what has been the response of the teacher union leaderships to these Democrats backing anti-teacher policies? In 2008, they were all for Barack Obama’s “hope” and “change,” which brought the “Race to the Top” program (a knock-off of Republican George W. Bush’s infamous “No Child Left Behind”) that “sent money to states that reformed their public-education

<sup>3</sup> “Chicago Teachers: Strike Was Huge, Settlement Sucks,” *The Internationalist* (September 2012). The CTU leaders forced union delegates to revote after they turned down the contract.

<sup>4</sup> CSEW, “Chicago Teachers in the Eye of the Storm” (9 March 2021).

<sup>5</sup> “Where Does Hillary Clinton Stand on Education Reform?” *The New Yorker*, 7 March 2016.

<sup>6</sup> “A Walmart Fortune, Spreading Charter Schools,” *The New York Times*, 25 April 2014.

systems by, among other things, weakening teacher tenure, introducing data-driven accountability measures and adding more nonunionized charter schools.<sup>7</sup> In 2016, AFT president Randi Weingarten rammed through an early endorsement of her pal Hillary over Bernie Sanders without a vote by the membership, while the NEA likewise went all in for Clinton.

In 2024, on the same day Biden exited, within hours the American Federation of Teachers leadership endorsed Kamala Harris, the first union to do so. Yet all that Harris had to say about education policies when she spoke to the AFT convention a few days later was, “God knows, we don’t pay you enough.” Of course, almost every union-busting education “reformer” has called to raise teachers’ salaries, combined with weakening or abolishing teacher tenure, in order to be able to fire them more readily. So come November, teachers will be asked to go to the polls and vote for Kamala Harris, being told that, even if you oppose Biden/Harris genocide in Gaza and railroad strikebreaking “at home,” Democrats are a “lesser evil” – “vote blue, beat back Trump.” But *lesser-evilism is a ticket for defeat*.

### **Dump the Democrats, Oust the Bureaucrats, For a Workers Party to Fight for a Workers Government**

Considering the Republican vituperation against teachers unions and their ties to the Democratic Party, it is striking that Democrats have been at the forefront of many of these schemes to regiment teachers and corporatize or privatize public schools. Even “evil Eva” Moskowitz, the NYC “charter school queen” who cofounded Success Academy Charter Schools together with Joel Greenblatt of Gotham Capital, got her start as a Democratic City Council member. In particular, hedge fund operators and private equity funds, many led by Democrats (as opposed to the mostly Republican Wall Street establishment), which took off after Bill Clinton’s 1999 repeal of the 1933 Glass-Steagall Act separating banks from speculative investments, piled into the charter business in order to milk the cash cow of state funding.

The fact is that the Democrats, like the Republicans, defend the interests of capital. And the fundamental loyalty of the bureaucratic layer that sits atop the unions is to American capitalism rather than to their own members. This has been seen with crystal clarity in the recent (and on-going) fight in the United Federation of Teachers over the attempt by mayors Bill de Blasio and Eric Adams working together with UFT president Mike Mulgrew, to force a private “Medicare Advantage” plan onto retirees. The 2-to-1 victory of the Retiree Advocate slate in last June’s union chapter elections forced Mulgrew to back off, although the threat of forcing retired city workers off government Medicare health insurance is still there.

The fundamental point is why Mulgrew and the rest of the union tops in the Municipal Labor Committee (MLC) were so committed to this plan to gut health care for their members. De Blasio, Adams, Mulgrew and the other MLC bureaucrats are all

Democrats, and as such they accept the “responsibility” of looking out for the finances of the (capitalist) city government rather than militantly fighting to defend union gains *against* the onslaught by the capitalist state. The attacks on teachers are also motivated by a drive to cut the “overhead costs” of capital, cutting back on school funding, etc. The labor bureaucracy represents a (well-paid) intermediate layer between capital and the working class, whose task for the bosses is to keep a lid on worker discontent.

In a nutshell, the capitalist Democratic Party is a class *enemy* of working people, while the labor bureaucracy is an *obstacle* to workers’ struggles. That’s true not only of an establishment figure like the AFT’s Weingarten but also of union reform groups like the Caucus of Rank and File Educators (C.O.R.E.) in Chicago, who when they get into office are barely distinguishable from the sellouts they replaced. Now, labor officialdom is trying to corral votes for the Dems, except a few like the Teamster and ILA docks union tops who are playing footsie with Trump’s Republicans. As the bureaucrats engage in *class collaboration* with the bosses’ parties, working people and the oppressed need a workers party to lead sharp *class struggle* against the bosses.

Union misleaders argue for their alliance with the Democrats saying they get a “seat at the table.” But while the Wall Street fat cats feast, working people only get crumbs from the capitalist table. In several unions in different parts of the country (L.A. transit workers, City University of New York faculty, the Painters union national convention) where they are present, supporters of the Internationalist Group, with which Class Struggle Education Workers is fraternally allied, have put forward motions based on a model resolution by Class Struggle Workers – Portland declaring:

“WHEREAS, the Democratic and Republican parties, which have shared and alternated in power for over a century and a half, have led U.S. society into a deep social and political crisis that poses existential threats to workers and oppressed people here and around the world; and ...

“WHEREAS, it’s high time for the labor movement to ditch the endless parade of billionaire-backed capitalist politicians who keep promising “change” while things keep getting worse for the working class; and

“WHEREAS, “Genocide Joe” Biden’s VP Kamala Harris fully shares responsibility for his administration’s war-mongering from the Middle East and Far East to Ukraine; the strikebreaking legislation against rail workers that they and the Democratic Congress rammed through in 2022 while claiming to be “pro-union;” and competing with the Republicans in targeting immigrants; ...

“RESOLVED, that since labor’s continued subordination to the bosses’ parties will only deepen the threats facing the working people here and around the world, [our union] will not endorse or support the Democrats, Republicans, or any capitalist party in the elections....”

In conclusion, the CSEW together with the CSWP and other Internationalist supporters “*call on the labor movement to break from the bosses’ parties and politicians and build a class-struggle workers party to lead the struggles of the working people and all those ground down by capitalism.*” ■

<sup>7</sup> *New York Times Magazine*, 30 April 2023. See also (“Obama, Democrats Spearhead Teacher-Bashing, Union Busting Corporate Education ‘Reform,’” *Class Struggle Education Workers*, 16 June 2010

# The Fruits of Mayoral Control

Ever since school opened this September, the New York City government has been in turmoil leading up to the federal indictment on a host of corruption charges of Democratic ex-cop mayor Eric Adams, accompanied by a string of resignations, subpoenas and investigations into his inner circle. Centrally involved are the three Banks brothers: David, as NYC schools chancellor; Philip III, as deputy mayor of public safety; and Terrence, a lobbyist and consultant.

Most significant to educators is the scandal around David Banks, and what his case tells us about the school system under mayoral control (which was just renewed for two years last spring, amid much controversy). When Adams took office as mayor on January 1, 2022, the first person he appointed at the commissioner level was Mr. Banks, a longtime friend. Banks had worked as a teacher, as a lawyer in the office of the state attorney general, and later founded the boys-only Eagle Academy, a school franchise emphasizing strict rules and regimentation. Lauded by then New York senator Hillary Clinton, on her recommendation he got the approval from then NYC mayor Michael Bloomberg (at the time a Republican, now once again a Democrat). The Academy was founded, and continues to be, in partnership with Cr dit Suisse, a top Swiss bank, with a number of Wall Street execs on its board.

On September 4, the first day of school, federal agents seized **David Banks'** phone (and that of his partner and now wife, first deputy mayor **Sheena Wright**) and searched his home in an investigation on corruption charges. Note that the chancellor has not been charged. A few days later, David Banks announced his plan to retire on December 31,. That date was then moved up to October 16 by Adams, after New York governor Kathy Hochul told the mayor to clean house, or else. Wright resigned a couple of weeks later.

Among those who have since exited are Police Commissioner **Edward Caban**; the city's chief legal counsel, **Lisa Zornberg**; Adams' main advisor **Ingrid Lewis-Martin**; his longtime confidant **Timothy Pearson**; the mayor's liaison with the Chinese American community, **Winnie Greco**; and deputy mayor for public safety **Phillip Banks III**, who had been the highest-ranking uniformed officer of the New York Police Department, and was earlier an unindicted subject of another corruption investigation.

The charges of corruption reach into the Department of Education, as Phil Banks' former chief of staff, **Justin Meyers**, is under scrutiny for using his connections in city government to win a contract for the BusPatrol company he now works for just a few months after leaving city employ. **Terence Banks**, the third brother and lobbyist, was hired by the company Saferwatch to bring their products into schools. Terence also won a \$154 million contract for a company his brother Phil formerly owned to distribute fire-watch services to the New York City Housing Authority. (Wright reportedly pushed through the contract for her now brother-in-law's former business.) In turn, **Tracey Collins**, Mayor Adams partner, was hired by then chancellor Banks as a senior advisor in the

Division of School Leadership. Colleagues reported that she hadn't shown up for work since Thanksgiving.

Cronyism and corruption in New York City politics? No-show jobs, no-bid contracts and free travel upgrades from officials seeking to buy favor with the mayor? Shocking! Of course, back in the day there was Bloomberg's appointment of a no-experience, know-nothing schools chancellor Cathleen Black, who frequented the same elite Upper East Side social circles as the billionaire mayor and sat on the board of a charter school headed by corporate media mogul Rupert Murdoch. A perfect fit! Black was run out after her racist comments, that an answer to school overcrowding was more birth control, sparked a storm of protest. And, of course, the D.O.E. headquarters are in the famous Tweed Courthouse, named after the wheeler-dealer late 19th-century boss of the Democratic Party machine.

Our point is, when you impose mayoral control of the schools, or more to the point, mayoral dictatorship of public education, this is what you get . . . along with racist school closings, shutting down most of the large high schools with diverse programs, imposition of high-stakes testing, ever-changing rubrics for teacher evaluation, and so on and so forth. Not to mention school and library budget cuts over non-existent deficits, only to be restored a few months later when, lo and behold, they city has a budget surplus (though deficits are still "looming"). It is reported that the new chancellor-to-be Melissa Aviles-Ramos is the protegee of deputy chancellor Dan Weisberg, a top D.O.E. official in charge of labor relations under would-be union-buster Bloomberg. (He failed.) So the beat goes on.

But let's not forget that the United Federation of Teachers leadership under Randi Weingarten pushed for mayoral control under Bloomberg. Even today, UFT president Mulgrew only wanted to tweak it a little with more "community" representation. Others have called for an elected school board, which is no guarantee of independence from politicians: in capitalist elections money talks, witness how the ubiquitous Bloomberg bought the Oakland, California school board (see "Democrats, Republicans vs. Public Education" on page 1).

We in Class Struggle Education Workers have a very different answer: the CSEW calls for *educator-led, teacher-student-parent-worker control of the schools*, in order to support students facing poverty and racism, put an end to overcrowded classrooms, and fight to break dictatorship of the capitalist ruling class over public education with a workers government. ■

For further information: Email  
cs\_edworkers@hotmail.com

Visit the CSEW web page:  
<http://edworkersunite.blogspot.com>