GANIZING COMMITTEE

EDUCATION AND CORPORATE CAPITALISM

THE BAY AREA RADICAL TEACHER

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III. THE BAY AREA RADICAL TEACHERS' ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

INTRODUCTION

THE BAY AREA RADICAL TEACHERS' Organizing Committee (BARTOC) was formed in 1969 as an attempt to develop a socialist program among high school and elementary school teachers. At that time the student movement was spreading from the colleges and universities to high schools, and upheaval and discontent among students was throwing into question many teachers' conceptions of themselves as performing a necessary and useful function. During the 1960s student unrest combined with a widespread budgetary crisis to challenge the security, prestige, and living standards of public school teachers. There was a rapid growth of teacher unionism and a series of prolonged and militant strikes. The most significant of these strikes, the 1968 United Federation of Teachers'

strike in New York, saw the teachers' union allied with a reactionary administrative bureaucracy against "community control" in the black community of Ocean Hill-Brownsville. Most groups on the left, though not all,[1] began to see teachers as "pigs," and to hold them responsible for authoritarianism in the schools. The "teacher power" racism of the UFT strike reinforced this tendency.

In 1969, when Weatherman emerged, one of its major thrusts was directed at the schools and capsulized in the slogan "Shut 'em down." Attempts were made (for example, among some members of Teachers for a Democratic Society in New York) to win teachers to a program of "joining" students in destroying the educational system. Other left tendencies opposed Weatherman's uncritical exaltation of student violence but accepted the movement's distrust of teachers as "middle class."

BARTOC was organized by school teachers in Berkeley and San Francisco who identified with the movement but rejected the movement's view of teachers. While there were at first several tendencies in BARTOC, the idea that teachers could become socialists on the basis of the oppression they experienced in their own lives won out within the organization. Teachers, like other strata of the proletariat, were seen to be in a dual position—while they oppressed others, they themselves were oppressed. Transforming their own position was an integral part of rebelling against their own oppression. As a result BARTOC focused on the individual teacher in the classroom and tried to develop curriculum, teaching methods, and classroom relations that could help lay the foundations for a socialist movement in the schools. They saw the development of such a movement as a long-term process centered on the school as a primary instrument of socialization in capitalist society.

In addition, members of BARTOC tried to bring a socialist perspective to the issues of state- and nation-wide educational reform. The BARTOC editorial "The Politics of Teachers' Lives" is an attempt to relate the schools to the system of

1. Exceptions such as Progressive Labor and the Labor Committee made their case on the basis of an attack on "community control."

economic and political rule of which they are a part. The major lesson of their attempt to develop socialist alternatives in education is repeated in several of the articles below: any attempt simply to "negate" the prevailing social values, no matter how disruptive, is ultimately wasted, unless it is part of an explicit and coherent alternative. "Towards a Movement" was directed specifically against Weatherman-influenced tendencies that based their politics on student anger and nihilism. "Summerhill, Some Are Hell" and "Breaking Out" discuss efforts at a free school and at a political school in which the rejection of bourgeois society nevertheless replicated its ideas and values.

At the same time it was difficult for BARTOC to give content to its commitment to socialism in the absence of a mass socialist movement. BARTOC's socialist politics was not necessarily relevant to the everyday desperation of high school teachers. The position of teachers within the proletariat did not become an urgent question in the absence of a working-class movement.

During a two-year period, BARTOC established about twenty workshops for teachers in the Bay Area. The politics of these workshops varied greatly as did their relation to BARTOC; the longest-lasting of them were workshops for women teachers which attempted to integrate a discussion of work and a discussion of personal relations. Other workshops had no explicit politics and were oriented to helping teachers survive in the classroom. At present, no workshops are meeting. During the 1971 San Francisco teachers' strike BARTOC temporarily broke out of the confinement of the classroom and, as described in "Strike and the Union," played an active role in the rank-and-file caucus of the AFT. But overall, BARTOC reflects the problem it originally hoped to solve: the isolation of teachers from the students, parents, and other sectors of the working class. The group itself is currently questioning much of its previous activity.

BARTOC publishes a periodical entitled *No More Teachers' Dirty Looks,* from which the following selections are reprinted. Subscriptions are available at two dollars yearly and back issues at fifty cents each from BARTOC, 396 Sanchez Street, San Francisco, California 94114.

I. THE POLITICS OF TEACHERS' LIVES

THERE'S A CERTAIN CONFUSION in being BARTOC. While everyone understands vaguely what it means to be a "radical teacher," we find ourselves lumped in at one moment with the Weathermen, at another with Herbert Kohl, and at a third we discover that someone has us crawling around with our eyes closed, feeling and touching one another.

We're really like none of those, but rather than attempt to deal with the problem through alterations of our name that would show we're socialists—BASTOC—or socialist revolutionaries—BATSROC—we'll try to explain what we are and how we got to be that way.

When BARTOC started, most of us were suffering from a divided consciousness. Each of us identified in some way with the movement, confused and fragmented as it was, and through the movement we saw the war, racism, and poverty as problems with political solutions.

However, the movement told us very little about our lives as teachers or about our situation in the schools. Schools were places where students were socialized. Teachers were cops or sellouts who should quit or help their students close the schools.

That was the general movement perspective and we accepted most of it. But we also had ideas about the schools and teaching from non-movement and non-political sources. John Holt and Herbert Kohl and Paul Goodman, and others, described the schools in a way that helped us understand our own experiences and projected a vision of education with which we could identify. But they tended to ignore the social origins of school problems, such as racism, and to see problems and solutions in psychological or humanistic or individualistic terms. Seeing only the children's problems and their own successes, they, like the movement, generally ignored the lives of teachers.

Education Is Politics

PART OF WHAT WE HAVE TRIED to do as BARTOC is to put the understanding that Holt, Kohl and the others provide in

the political context that we brought with us from the movement. We began with the assumption that what happens in our lives as teachers—the frustration, the weariness, the anxiety—is a function of the same process that distorts the lives of the children, and that, like the children's school lives, our school lives have political meaning and make political sense.

To make political sense of what happens in the schools means us trying to understand the function that schools serve in our society. We do not believe that the schools are repressive because principals are crazy, superintendents irrational, and teachers old-fashioned, or because some greedy, evil genius is hatching plots in Washington or Sacramento. We believe the schools as they now operate provide almost the best possible preparation for life and work in a capitalistic society.

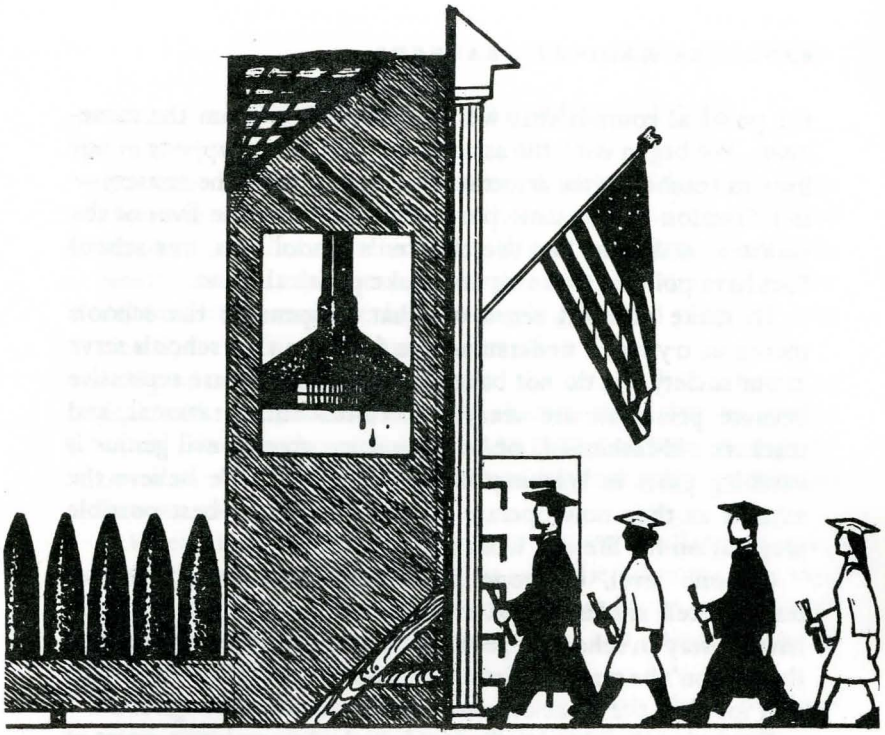
On one level, everyone understands that. Principals and teachers tell students, and students tell each other, that you have to stay in school to get a job. Often they even understand that it won't be math or history or woodshop that will get them that job, but the piece of paper won by lasting through it all.

For example, almost all of us have had to endure a series of education courses that were boring and meaningless to our future lives as teachers. We took those courses only because they were required for certification.

But while it is almost universally understood that school is job preparation and that it offers little or nothing of value in and of itself, there is little sense of the connection between the school system and the social system. Schools offer little or nothing of value because they are preparing students for jobs in a society where work offers little or nothing of value in and of itself.

Corporations and Education

AS PART OF JOB PREPARATION, students are taught to think of work as unpleasant and to accept deferred, extrinsic rewards for sticking with it. They are readied for the regimentation and stratification that they will find in the corporations that will provide most of them with jobs. The world of the schools is organized to reflect the world of the corporations and its values.



In the school, as in the corporation, social relations are hierarchical: administrators over teachers and teachers over students, with college-bound students above vocational-track students, and with custodians, cooks, and secretaries somewhere in between. Personal relations tend to be competitive within levels of the hierarchy, and authoritarian, repressive, or paternalistic between levels. Racial and sexual discrimination express other dimensions of organizational hierarchy; and the competitiveness and individualism valued in the business world also reproduce themselves in the schools. Even the greater freedom of suburban schools and colleges mirrors the greater freedom their graduates will have in the corporate world.

In other words, it is nonsense to examine the schools as if they were not connected with the larger society. They are not only connected with it, they serve the specific function of creating the stratified work force or proletariat of future generations.

Teachers and the Movement

MUCH OF OUR UNDERSTANDING of the political meaning of education we shared with other groups in the movement. Where we differed is that we did not see teachers as cops who might magically or accidentally be transformed into radicals. We saw in our own experience as teachers the basis for a socialist revolutionary perspective that identifies teachers as members of a diversified proletariat, of which students and workers are also a part.

The movement denied teachers that status. Past socialist movements defined the proletariat as industrial workers, and the movement accepted that strict definition, even though the proletariat has changed as capitalism has changed.

Our socialist perspective emphasizes that teachers, as well as factory workers, have to live by selling their labor-power to others. Where the factory worker is dependent on the corporation, the teacher is dependent on the state—a state whose function is to preserve corporate capitalism.

But within the proletariat, groups are divided from each other by the different positions they occupy in a hierarchy of income and authority. Whites are divided from blacks; men from women; welfare workers from people on welfare; teachers from students and from the parents of students.

In the schools we have to overcome what divides us from our students by creating a movement based on what we have in common—our ultimate powerlessness and our common experience of helpless humiliation at the hands of others higher up.

Public Schools or Free Schools?

WHEN BARTOC BEGAN, we took the position that teachers should work in public schools because the greatest number of children and teachers were there. Also, we were committed to free public education and opposed the use of supposedly democratic, public institutions for the socialization of children into the non-democratic hierarchy of the corporate state. More broadly, we advocated socialism and were not interested in alternative schools that could happily do their own thing in a generally repressive society.

Our commitment to the public school remains, but the experience of two teachers—described elsewhere in this issue—has forced us to re-examine our ideas about alternative schools.

The two teachers wound up in alternative schools for very different reasons: one because she could find no other job, the other, through out-of-school relationships with her students and former students with whom she shared a political commitment.

From these two different starting points both have had to face the same problem. Like those of us in public schools they found that without a conscious, shared political understanding and without common values derived from it, actions were framed in bourgeois terms and understood according to bourgeois values.

For example, a teacher in the public schools who refuses to discipline his or her students may find that the students understand that refusal as fear, weakness, or lack of concern. In a free school, parents with no consciously shared political perspective may reject all rules and all authority in reaction to their own experience of the oppressive rules in capitalist society. Or radicals in a political free school may act without being aware of the social meaning of their actions, and reproduce in their classes much of the repressiveness of public schools.

In all those situations and others like them, we first have to work with others to understand the political meaning of our actions and of our attitudes. We do that not out of some abstract desire for "consciousness," but as socialists who want to create a society in which people can work together to determine their lives. Secondly, we have to challenge existing social relations and offer alternatives, making clear why we are doing so.

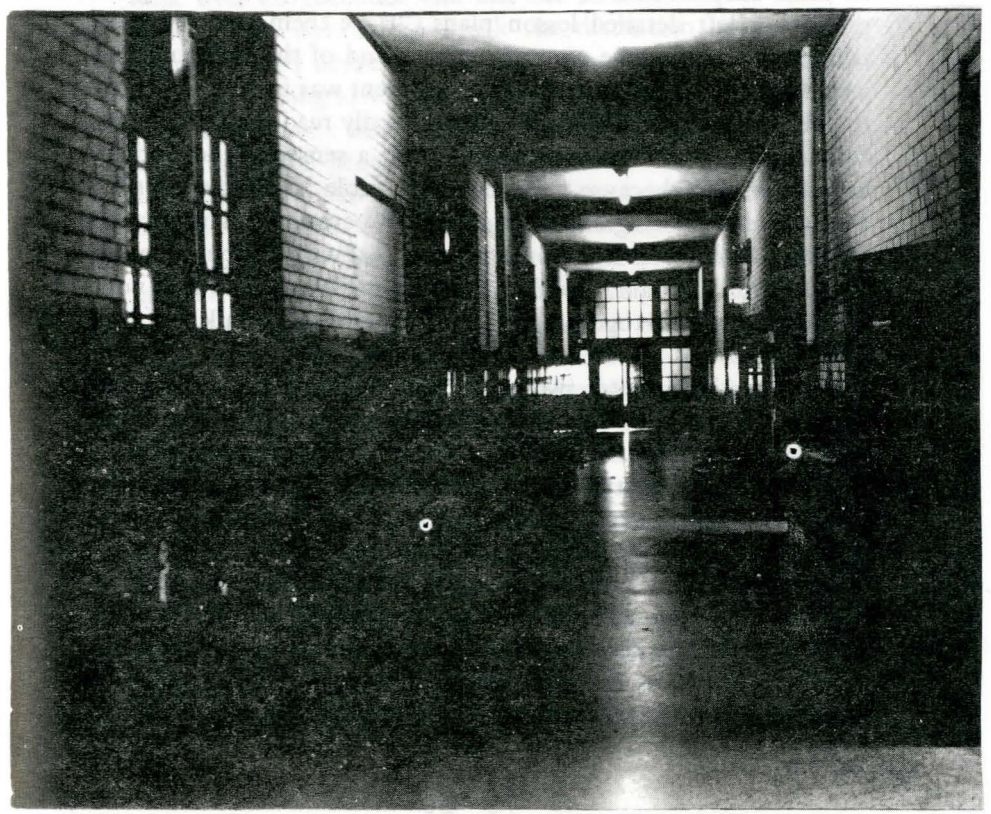
Yet any action in itself will lose its meaning unless it is made and understood in the context of creating a socialist movement. The formation of BARTOC and the publication of *No More Teachers' Dirty Looks* express both our perception of our individual impotence, and our faith in collective power. Isolated and alone, individual teachers or small groups like BARTOC can do nothing. With others who share our needs and our understanding we can transform the schools and the society. Our primary objective as BARTOC is to take part in the development of a socialist movement that will make those changes.

II. TOWARDS A MOVEMENT

FOLSOM HIGH SCHOOL, its students will tell you, is the tightest school in the Bay Area. It still has a rigid dress code that is strictly enforced and a principal who has publicly stated that if he has to be the Hayakawa of the school district, he'll do it; he does it every day.

Folsom certainly has an order to it as any teacher or visitor will tell you, but underneath and not too far underneath the surface, is an anger that goes beyond anything I've ever seen in students after three years of teaching in fairly rough schools.

Even as a substitute teacher, I felt a knot in my stomach every time I worked there because I knew that from the moment I entered the classroom I would have to choose between the repressiveness of the school and the students' response to that repressiveness. I remember the first day we were having a pretty heated discussion when the principal walked in



and told us that our behavior (he treated me as he did the kids) was appalling and that there was too much noise in the halls. When we didn't quiet down, he kept the class after school for an hour.

But the biggest confrontation came over passes to the bathroom. There was a constant cat-and-mouse game between the administration and the students over smoking regulations, and because the kids knew that I wasn't about to ask them, every time they left the room, whether they really wanted to go or whether they wanted a smoke, they converged on me for passes which I freely gave.

Usually I had one-day stands at Folsom and that was quite enough. But one day this year I was called in to do a three-day stint with a "low achiever" science class. The teacher I was subbing for was a large, authoritarian male, and the students breathed a sigh of relief when they saw me. Some laughed because they knew this would be an easy three days. The regular teacher left detailed lesson plans ("Have them read pp. 109–117 and answer the questions at the end of the chapter") and strict orders that none of his equipment was to be handled by the students. I timidly and embarrassedly read the assignment, and when the students groaned, I felt a sense of relief and anguish—relief because I felt uncomfortable administering such a nonsensical assignment, and anguish because I knew that if I didn't administer it, I would have to deal with all their pent-up hostility. So I said, "He'll be expecting this work, do it at your own pace, do it together if you want, feel free to talk, but let's keep it cool."

Five minutes later two boys came up to the desk and asked to go to the john. I let them go, only one at a time. About ten kids left during the period, some of them freely borrowing cigarettes and matches from their friends. We talked about the absurdity of the regulations which made them sneak their way out of classes and through the halls to the johns.

Things went pretty well until the fourth-period class of thirty-five boys. (The teacher had described them in his plans as animals, and so they understandably acted out his expectations.) My pleas for quiet went unheeded; they told me not to bother writing the assignment on the board, and went about

the room throwing the equipment that they had been told not to handle. After about fifteen horror-filled minutes during which I frantically tried to take roll, I yelled, "Please tell me why you're so angry. I know that having a sub means letting loose but I really sense that something else is happening here." One boy said, "This is a goddamn prison and we're just breaking out." Another boy said something else. In about three minutes, we reached in a discussion of what was wrong at Folsom the calm which the teacher had wanted for his assignment. But the noise of the previous few minutes had carried. While one student was enthusiastically laying out his ideas for organizing some kind of strike, the science teacher from next door appeared, with arms folded, at the door. The student looked up at me and then at him and said, "Mrs. Z., do you think if we had a strike here they'd call the cops?" And I, feeling like the floor was giving under me, not having the good sense to walk over to the door and ask the science teacher what he wanted, not wanting to break the discussion, sympathizing with the boy's desire to let the spy from next door know that he was not going to be intimidated, said: "Well, the police have been called into other places when that's happened, but it hasn't stopped people." At that point, the science teacher noticed a kid playing with some lab equipment in the back of the room and, not knowing how to react, screamed out, "Get your hands off that, it's private property." The kid looked back at him and yelled, "No, it's not! It's public property and this is a public school and I can touch this equipment," at which point the bell rang and the science teacher said, "Don't think I won't report what's been happening here back to your teacher when he returns."

The kids filed out and I walked up to the intruding teacher and poured out my feelings. I told him I didn't know how teachers were able to teach anything in a school where students were so angry about the way they were treated and where teachers lived in continual fear of the administration. He softened a little (he didn't like the principal too well either). At the end of the conversation, I felt like I had a temporary reprieve.

After lunch, I told the new class some of what had happened

earlier and that we ought to be cool about passes to the bathroom and noise. I would have liked to express my own anxiety about losing my subbing job—but on the basis of one day they had no reason to trust me or to give a damn whether or not I lost my job.

The last period of the day came and I thought I was already home free, when midway through the class the principal came in. He pulled out of his pocket about five passes he had collected during the day, slapped them on my desk, and asked, "Is this your handwriting?" I answered yes. He said, "Well, we don't give out passes except in extreme emergencies." I told him I had no way of knowing if a student really had to leave the room. He said, "Well, I'll solve your dilemma for you. Starting tomorrow, no one in any of your classes leaves your room for anything." He walked up and down the rows checking what students were doing and left.

The next day I told the students what had happened and that no one could leave. They listened, muttered something about the principal, and I went on to show a movie that the regular teacher had scheduled for that day. About fifteen minutes into the movie, I smelled smoke and realized that the students were lighting up cigarettes all over the room. I went over to each group and told them, "Hey, listen, I just told you what went down yesterday. We're all going to get into serious trouble." (Me mostly, I thought, since a five days' suspension for smoking is welcomed by a lot of kids!) As each group I spoke with put the cigarettes out, another group lit up, and round and round it went until, in desperation and anger I flicked on the lights and what I saw were looks of terror, kids frantically putting out their cigarettes, waving the smoke away from them, and some heads bowed with guilt. What struck me in that moment was that, while they sneakily defied the rules every day, in some part of them they believed that what they were doing was wrong; that in fact, stealing off to the bathroom was not for them a way of confronting the system but, in some strange sense, was a reaffirmation of the principal's legitimacy and of his definition of them as troublemakers. And so I said to them, "You know you're right in everything you want, but the sad thing is that you don't know it. Whatever

you're sneaking around to get, whatever you're hiding, you have the right to ask for in the light of day, and when are you going to start doing just that? When are you going to stop telling each other that there are only five kids in the school who'll stand up and demand anything, when there are twenty kids right here who took a chance and smoked?" No one said anything for a minute. Then a boy asked if he could open a window to clear the room of the smoke. We talked a little bit until the end of the period. I told a few of the kids about student unions being formed in the city, about what black and white kids were doing at Balboa and that it wasn't impossible to get some of the things they wanted. . . . The bell rang and the rest of the day was quiet. Kids had heard about what had happened in the first-period class and they somehow ordered their classes themselves that day. A few kids started asking for passes and other kids said, "No, not today—she'll get in trouble and so will we." A few said they had heard about the student unions and asked if I could get them something to read on them.

My assignment ended, but I continued to go back to Folsom periodically for the rest of the year and talked with as many students as I could. A few things did happen. At a rally in early May, the principal ordered the students back to class after somebody set off a cherry bomb. Most of the students refused to leave the auditorium and began chanting in protest. A few organizations got started and I attended one meeting where kids were writing a letter to the community telling them about some of the things happening at Folsom and inviting them to a meeting to discuss possible action. The meeting never came off as far as I know, but something had begun.

There were several things that I learned from my experience at Folsom. As a sub—and even as a regular teacher—you rarely know what is your own failing and what is the result of an impossible situation. I did see that you can't teach independence or creativity in a prison-like atmosphere. At some point, you have to start confronting the general repressiveness of the school. You can't delude yourself into thinking that *your* classroom will be different, because the anger carries over and you have to deal with it whether you have created it or the principal has.

The question of how to deal with that anger is a more difficult one. The movement talks about the kids who rebel today, it revels in stories about fires being set, riots in schools and the like. What I learned at Folsom, where rules are continually broken, where vandalism abounds, is that this doesn't necessarily result in kids getting a better conception of themselves or in getting them to work together to change things. As radicals and as radical teachers we have to stop saying "Right on!" to every individual act of defiance. We have to begin helping students to understand that their anger is legitimate and what their acts of defiance mean. Only with this kind of self-consciousness will students and teachers move from what are now individual and desperate acts of rebellion toward building a movement that will change the prison-like atmosphere of our schools once and for all.

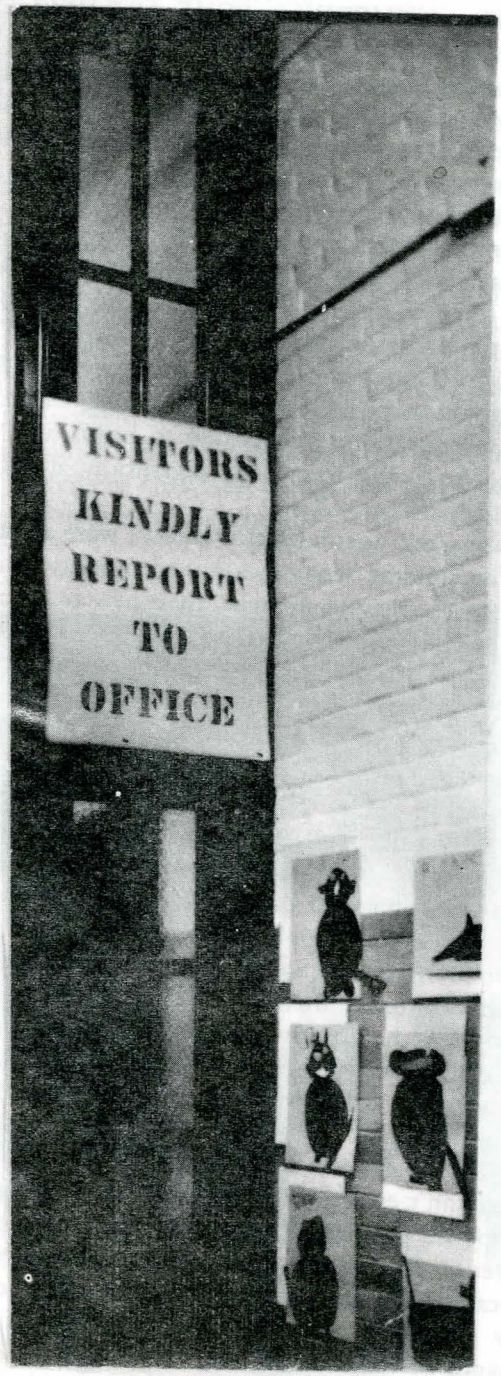
III. SUMMERHILL, SOME ARE HELL . . .

MOST FREE SCHOOLS BEGIN with the best of intentions. So did the one at which I taught last year in Portland. It was a school for five- and six-year-olds; parents and teachers decided on policy together at biweekly meetings. We began meeting before school opened to discuss the philosophy of the school. Noble-sounding ideas were the order of the day: we would provide an atmosphere where our children could explore the world as their needs and desires dictated; we would remain subtly in the background while our children played and learned according to their own natural rhythms; we would contribute to the revolution in the schools by providing alternative modes of humane education. We decided to begin with no rules or structure; these were to emerge, organically, if and when they were needed.

The first week was delightful and we were all proud of ourselves. The children seemed calm and friendly. They were excited about the new equipment, their new teachers, their new friends. Little did we realize that our kids were calm on the outside and sixing up the situation on the inside. By the second week, all hell broke loose. By ten a.m. each day the school looked as if a herd of elephants had stamped through. The paints were all over the floor; books were written in with magic markers; the brand-new microscope lay disassembled on the table; oil paint had been thrown in the fish bowl; Louisiana and Maryland were missing from the United States puzzle. Our casualties included one black eye, one busted lip, and a hamster lost in the supply room. As one child sat down to lunch, he found his Dr. Seuss lunchbox filled with sand instead of a peanut butter sandwich.

It's not that the teachers weren't aware of the need for some sort of order. When we told the kids to pick up their mess they'd screech, "Shut up. This is a free school and I don't hafta do anything I don't wanna. You told me so on the first day."

We couldn't even get enough quiet to describe the fabulous field trips we planned. When we managed to get some children interested in a project, it was sure to be disrupted by our cootie-catcher brigade, a group of six or seven boys who spent all day using our 89¢ art paper to construct various sizes and shapes of machines which caught cooties off unpopular people—meaning, naturally, everyone not in the brigade.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CHAOS, DESTRUCTION, and physical injury weren't the only problems. We had hoped to change basic attitudes in our school simply by allowing children to interact in a free environment. Yet racism and sexism were as rampant in our school as in any public school. At our Halloween party we had four brides, six nurses, one bunny rabbit, and two stewardesses among our girls; the boys were adorned in monster, doctor, astronaut, and scientist costumes. The boys still did woodworking while our girls did mosaics or played in the Wendy corner. When a black kid visited our school he was called stinky by two of our kids, and when an Indian visited our school one kid said he wasn't really an Indian because he didn't scalp anyone while he was there.

We tried to deal with these problems at parent-faculty meetings. But when someone suggested that we search out minority children to enroll, it was described as tokenism or as unfair to discriminate by color. When someone suggested the need for rules about the legitimacy of destroying a scientific instrument

(our microscope), another person would scream, "Stop! That would be laying a trip on our children. If they're catching cooties all day or breaking equipment it's because we failed. The children are bored. We don't have enough for them to do here." And so we would all rush out and bring in bigger and better projects, all the while feeling guilty that we weren't John Holt or Herb Kohl.

Somehow we managed to muddle through the year without any serious physical injuries; the psychic ones were more serious. Since then I've gotten to know other free schools and done quite a lot of thinking about what went wrong with ours. I've noticed that most free schools have one thing in common: their founders band together as a reaction against the negative aspects of public schooling. Their violent reactions against the horrors of public education enable them to do away with testing, rote learning, and regimentation. But they become so adamant about the rules and structure of the public school that they consider all structure to be detrimental to children. Instead of an attempt to differentiate sensible rules from repressive ones, or an order which makes children feel secure from one which hinders their growth, most free schools (like mine) begin by throwing out all structures.

Another thing that happens is that free school people become terrified of their so-called liberated children. They haven't really discussed what freedom means, and so their own children's testing of their new-found paradise scares them. The adults don't like what they've created but aren't self-conscious enough to change it.

Free school people need to be more conscious of where they came from and where they want to go. They need to band together not only because of the things they hate, but because they share certain values. This means knowing what sorts of human beings they want to create. It also means giving up the notion that children will just naturally change for the better. Children come to the free school with capitalism's values in their heads; they've learned sexism, racism, extreme competitiveness, obedience to authority, etc., from TV, from their storybooks, from the kids down the street, not to mention from their schools. My school failed because it left its children

structure-less and unguided, thus ensuring the retention of their old consciousness. If free schools really want to challenge the school system, the adults must create a new set of values in themselves and in their children with as much energy as they devoted to criticizing the old. —*Jane Goldman*

U.S.A. Bob Willoughby

IV. BREAKING OUT—A POLITICAL FREE SCHOOL

LAST SUMMER I WORKED in a tutorial school program which was a striking contrast to my teaching in the public school.

In the public school I had been involved in running a new program and had faced many problems. One of the hardest things to deal with was the fact that everyone, from the administration to the students, expected me to be authoritarian. When I tried to change this, I got stepped on, primarily by the students. Of course, when you think that starting from grade one, teachers tell students where to sit, when to get up, what to do, and why to do it, you can understand that by the time a student is nine or ten, this manner of teaching is his only experience, and he can't handle anything else.

Furthermore, in the public school I found that it was the boys who were bent on breaking me. Even though the girls had been through the same school experience as the boys, they were always well behaved. They, of course, are always expected to be quiet and ladylike. When a girl didn't understand something, she usually had no chance to express it because the boys made fun of her, and were so unruly it was impossible to explain anything. In public schools, particularly lower-class or working-class schools, boys who get into a lot of trouble often use it to gain status with their peers. By contrast, a girl who can't submit to authority is an oddity and is generally unpopular with the other students. A boy who gets sent to the principal is usually seen in the center of a group of boys bragging about it; a girl who gets sent to the dean usually walks around the school alone or as part of a group which is socially unacceptable. Boys like "nice" girls. Girls want the hero who has adventures with authority.

Another value encouraged in public schools is competition. Learning is individual. How many times do you remember

hearing "Do your own work?" Teaching children who can do the work how to teach others is stressed very little. Tests are competitive. And to top this off, classes usually have a curve according to which the majority will get "C"s no matter how much certain students improve, or how close they come to a higher grade.

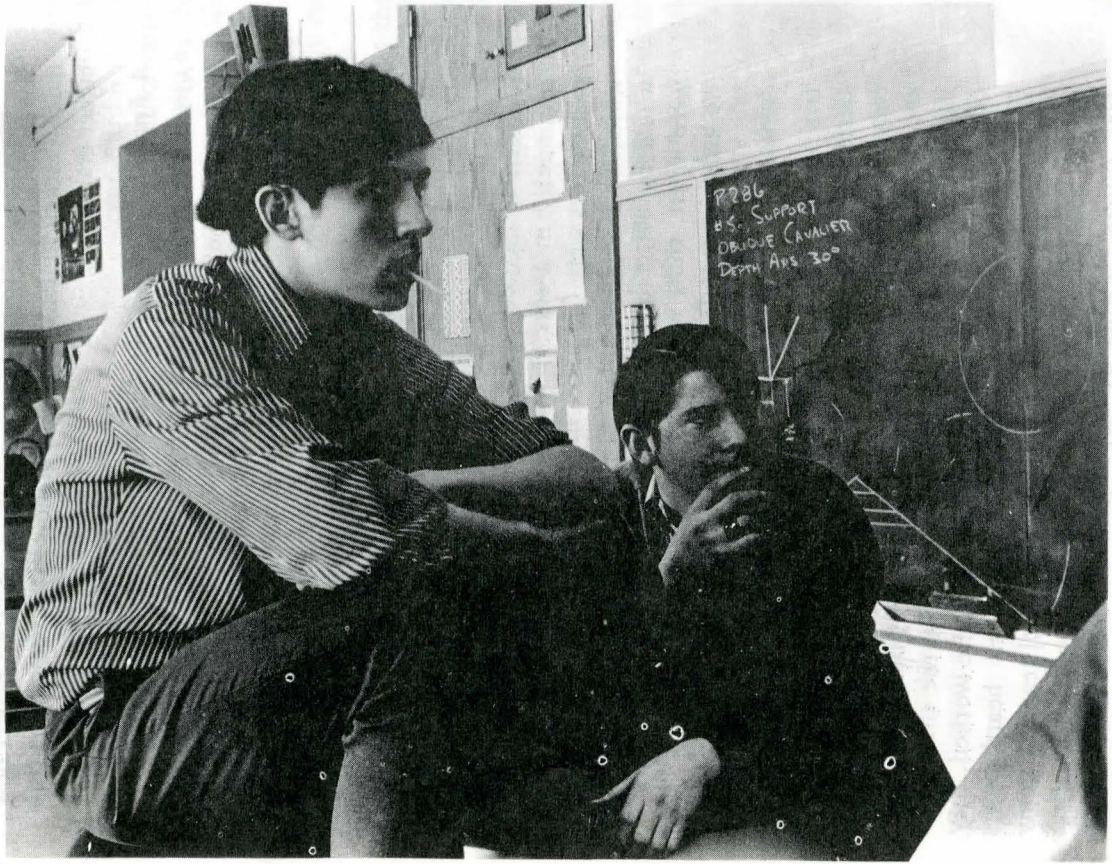
A Free School Would Be Different

AFTER HAVING TAUGHT in this situation a few years, I was excited by the chance to work in a summer program with different values and different relationships. Most of the leaders in this program were radicals, a fact which really pleased me since I had felt so isolated in public school because of the lack of teachers who shared my political perspective. Most of us in the summer program saw this as an opportunity to begin changing the values of the public school. With no administration around, and all us "groovy" leaders, what could go wrong?

The school ran all day. In the morning the students, ages fourteen to eighteen, were hired to tutor children from their community in a sort of head-start type school. Most of the participants were Chicanos. In the afternoon we set up classes which were supplementary education for the tutors, so they would be better prepared for high school in the fall. Classes were in art, third world history, science, math, and reading. We had movies and guest speakers and artists.

Public School Values Don't Just Disappear

THE FIRST THING I NOTICED was how public school values carried over into the "free" program. Student tutors who said they hated public school began treating the children in accordance with the only model they knew, that of being in authority. They made rules and they tried to force the children to obey them, unconditionally. When nothing else worked, they resorted to corporal punishment. I constantly heard tutors saying what I used to hear from public school teachers in my faculty room: "All I do is yell and scream for quiet, they can't take orders." Fights developed between tutors who, from necessity, shared the same room for classes and didn't know how to cooperate with each other. Most tutors felt that the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model of reading, writing, spelling, math, and history out of textbooks was the only way to teach. Even if it was summer, and the children were supposed to be on vacation, this is a school, learning isn't fun, and therefore follow rule number one written on the board: "sit down and be quiet."

In the afternoon, tutors came to classes taught by the directors and various guests. However, who becomes the disciplinarian when students don't want to come? We all had our egos involved in the program. We felt competitive about who was most hip, most radical, most far-out, etc., and you don't look very hip when you tell students to get into class or they won't get paid for that hour. Moreover we were running a program in which we wanted students to discipline themselves, but we found it difficult to discipline ourselves. It was hard just to get ourselves together in one place to talk, let alone to bring the students together. Directors walked out in the middle of each other's conversations (sometimes for good reasons, like the other person had interrupted you anyway), didn't show up to meetings, and generally took individual actions to solve problems. To some counselors it was okay to have dope and alcohol in school, to others it wasn't. Problem not solved. We all felt the need for more discipline; how to get it we never resolved. Some days it almost seemed like the public school wasn't so bad after all, particularly to some students who had their discipline together and wanted *us* to force the other students to get it together.

In spite of the problems the summer school definitely made a beginning in changing values and expanding experiences. For one thing, tutors were placed in positions of leadership while teaching small children, an experience many of them never had before. Furthermore, there were many males in tutor positions, which was important in breaking down the idea that only women teach small children. Many tutors started changing their methods. For example, in the nursery school, tutors learned that children can learn just by being with other children, playing with clay, or playing with others. There were art projects, science projects, and all sorts of productive activity. A great deal of physical contact, romping around, and game-playing developed between children, directors, and tutors.

These were new relationships and were generally good for those involved.

Another thing we did, which never happens in public schools, was to hold meetings in which we all—tutors and directors—tried to solve the problems of the school. Although these meetings were very chaotic, we were attempting to get equal participation in the running of the school. We felt that the manner in which orders are given in a public school sets up a hierarchy which reproduces itself wherever people work. We wanted to teach pupils that schools could run with equal participation of all involved so that people have self-determination. The difficulties we encountered because we have all been programmed to take orders were incredible, but at least it was a start.

During the summer students learned that something called the "movement" exists. The cultural history class told students about their own history and how it affects their lives. It was effective not only because the material was relevant to the students but also because the teacher was of the same background as the students and could identify with them. Students said over and over again that the teacher being of their race and talking about their specific problems really changed their lives. This class had the best attendance, although the white students found it hard to relate to.

We wanted students to see things they would never see in the public school. We visited the Los Siete trial, we heard speakers who had visited Cuba, and we talked about many things that are off limits in a public school. These experiences were important because along with attempting to change relationships between people, a free school should acquaint students with the movement that seeks to change our present conditions of living.

The difference between our school and most free schools is that the directors of the program saw themselves as radicals coming together with common goals. Although we often didn't agree with one another, at least we could fight about how to get what we all ultimately wanted. The isolation that radical public school teachers feel was not present, In this context, we could see that changing relationships between people and

changing the content of education are ultimately ways of changing the way we all are forced to live.

V. STRIKE AND THE UNION

On March 10, 1971, six hundred members of the seventeen-hundred-member San Francisco Federation of Teachers (AFT, Local 61) voted 350–250 in favor of a strike. Two weeks later, on March 24, the strike began. It effectively crippled all junior and senior high schools in the city, but for five days nothing happened.

On March 29, for the first time in its history, the Classroom Teachers' Association (NEA) voted to join the strike, and for four days the two organizations picketed together.

Spring vacation began April 3, and Mayor Alioto intervened in the negotiations. On April 10, the day before the end of the vacation, the two teacher organizations approved a memorandum of understanding with the Board of Education to end the strike.

1. The Leaders and the Led

In all the wide field of human struggle there are no politics to be found which are rougher or more ruthless than the politics of the labor unions.

Up top, the big lads play for keeps for the big jobs, the big expense accounts, and right to hobnob with the President of the United States as equals—Potentate to Potentate—and to indulge in the ultimate luxury, the exercise of raw power.

In the locals the struggle is scarcely less fierce, for the same kind of personal rewards on a lesser scale. Once "in" the union politician tends to stay in. He is usually in firm control of all the in-gluing apparatus, from the union treasury to the union newspaper, and as an "in" also enjoys the support and sustenance of the "ins" higher up, for whom he often holds his local as a fiefdom.

Rank-and-file members of the locals rarely struggle much with the politics of the unions. They tend to pay their dues and keep their mouths shut. Rebellion is rare

> and it can be risky. So long as the power elite of the union can deal successfully with the power elite of industry and government, dissent within unions can usually be held to a murmur or mutter.
>
> —Dick Knowland, *San Francisco Examiner*

PERHAPS YOU FEEL this too harsh an evaluation of the teachers' union. Well, let's take a look at the San Francisco Federation of Teachers' March strike. Both before and after the strike began the union leadership acted without taking direction from the members. Certainly union teachers had voted at some point on the issues to be included in a strike package, but the leadership aroused the anger and resentment of a great many union teachers by then assigning priorities to the strike issues without consulting teachers.

The union leadership asked the membership to go out on strike for higher wages, a better dental plan, and smaller classes. But to most union members there weren't enough good reasons even to consider the act. When the San Francisco Federation of Teachers, with a membership of over seventeen hundred teachers, had a strike vote meeting, only six hundred people showed up. At this meeting, educational issues were clouded and tentative. No issue dealt directly with the improvement of education.

Many of the union members from our school did not attend the strike vote meeting because they couldn't believe the leadership wanted to call a strike. To their surprise the motion to strike passed by a margin of some one hundred votes. How could we go on strike? What were the issues? We were ill-informed and ill-prepared for this turn of events. Most of us spent the next week and a half (the San Francisco Labor Council met twice before giving the SFAFT strike sanction) hotly debating whether or not the union should go on strike. Some of us, along with teachers from other schools, tried to get petitions signed calling for another strike meeting. Some teachers sent telegrams to the union leadership proclaiming their lack of support for the strike. We were constantly frustrated by the inability of the leadership to clarify strike issues.

Many union teachers informed their colleagues that they would not honor picket lines because the strike was a meaningless power play by the union leadership. The only thing most of us seemed to agree on was that we were angry—angry at the union leadership for having manipulated us into a strike we could see no justification for.

As the strike progressed, it became clear that the leadership had no firm issue package, but rather a fluid set of statements that could be subtracted from or added to as each day of the strike passed. Luckily for the union leadership, the tentative budget reduction proposals were leaked out of the Superintendent's office on the third day of the strike. The Superintendent was proposing to reduce or discontinue programs that teachers had spent years working to establish. This document gave doubting strikers a reason for manning the picket lines. But now we were not striking for any positive new gains for ourselves or the educational system. We were striking to save many of the things we had struggled for years to establish in the San Francisco schools.

2. *Blacks Stay In, Whites Go Out . . . What's the Union All About?*

THE LATIN AMERICAN Teachers' Association, LATA, announced at the strike vote meeting that its members would cross union picket lines. The union's Black Caucus never made a formal statement, but most black teachers, even those who were not members of the Black Caucus, stayed at their jobs throughout the strike.

At my school, for example, every black teacher crossed the picket lines. While they made no clear charges against the union, their attitudes suggested they didn't feel the union was their union. It didn't express their concerns and it omitted their demands.

But besides the missing concerns and omitted demands of Local 61's strike package, the minority caucuses could point to specific earlier events that alienated them. At the 1970 state convention for example, a resolution of support for Angela Davis, prepared and supported by the statewide Black Caucus, had to be watered down before it was accepted. A meeting of our local, Local 61, had defeated attempts by members of the Black Caucus to include in the strike package student-oriented demands—for example, a statement on student transfers and expulsions. And when minority caucuses asked the union to support the Board of Education's proposal to demote over a hundred white administrators but to leave minority administrators in their places, the union refused to take a stand. "It is not our business," Ballard the union president would say, "what happens to administrators."

That statement reflects the limited vision that characterizes our union and perhaps unions in general. It is a vision that distinguishes between teachers' concerns about the conditions of their jobs and broader concerns about what happens to Angela Davis, to students, and to minority administrators. It defines the union as a special interest group for teachers, and thus alienates the minority teachers who see themselves not only as teachers but as members of the black and brown communities the most of our schools serve.

The union sets itself apart from those communities. It asks only what is good for teachers, what will increase our power. For example, publicly the strike was for reduction of class sizes, an issue presumably related to our concern with educa-

tion and with children. However, at strike rallies we were told the real issue of the strike was power, our power as teachers and as a union, over administrative decisions that would affect our working conditions—class sizes, preparation periods, sick leaves, budget, etc. While union leaders understood that community backing for a strike is important, the communities' role was to back our strike, for our demands, as adjusted and publicized for their consumption.

The point is not that our demands were wrong or unimportant, but that they were made in the context of building teacher power, that they included no consciousness of the rights of other groups in the schools. Such a perspective has put the union on a collision course with those other groups.

For example, operating with the perspective of a special interest group, the union leadership makes a point of calling school administration "management." Ballard then acts as if he were negotiating with General Motors, as if the money "management" controls were somehow its own rather than the communities'. As a result, the union leadership, in the face of already high tax burdens, could make a strike settlement that required a property tax increase, and ignore the fact that the increase was required. Our demands were met. How "management" got the money to pay for them was their problem. If it came from parents, and parents weren't involved in the decision, that's the parents' problem.

The union game is to pit its strength against the source of power in the schools—the board, the administration—with a demand that we be allowed some of that power. We justify our game by promising that somehow—once we have the power—we'll make schools better. That kind of promise has been heard before.

In other phases of American labor history, an interest-group perspective—workers lined up against management—was a source of union strength. For teachers, and for other public employees who work both for and with a client group, that perspective will mean growing isolation and alienation from the communities we serve. Our struggle for power will pit us against them. Here in San Francisco, that perspective has already meant the disaffection of black and brown minorities, and nearly produced a head-on confrontation.

THIS YEAR SAN FRANCISCO got a new Superintendent of Schools, Thomas Shaheen. Shaheen and the administration had taken credit in the black and brown communities for the Board's decision to skip over minority administrators when making the mass demotions Shaheen's administrative reorganization plan had recommended.

Shaheen publicly became the friend of minorities through that act, and privately throughout the year he had convinced minority teachers in the district that he was their friend, that he was for change, and that when change came they would get power. Then, during a period of the strike when he couldn't find time to negotiate with strikers, he met before newsmen with non-striking black teachers and parents who were concerned about the effect of the strike on their children's education. For them and for newsmen, he agreed that whatever happened, he would keep at least some schools open and staffed.

At the time there was no violently aroused community, and the strike ended quickly before the community could be aroused and could create the teacher-community confrontation that Shaheen's tactics projected. But all the ingredients were there and simmering, and if the explosion didn't come this time, it could come next time. If it does, the teachers and the teachers' union will play the racist villain, regardless of their good intentions. For they will be trapped by circumstances and by their own unwillingness to give up the perspective of a special interest group with the goal of teacher power.

3. The Radicals' Dilemma

ONE OF BARTOC'S FIRST DECISIONS was to reject the idea of working as a caucus within the AFT. We did this not without a struggle. Of the eleven of us in the collective at the time, two were union members. They didn't object to our decision to work outside the union but they did object to our article in the first issue of *No More Teachers' Dirty Looks* announcing and explaining that decision. In the article we attacked the union for concentrating on collective bargaining, which, we argued, was only a teacher-power ploy.

Those in the collective who objected to the article felt that any struggle by working people against their bosses should be supported. In their opinion workers would learn through their struggles that they were members of the proletariat, that their bosses were their enemies, and that socialism was the only answer.

Most of us didn't accept that argument. We knew that there were millions of good trade unionists—many of them even in unions that had been organized by the Communists—who had learned no more from their trade unionism and their struggles with their bosses than the old and basic tenet of capitalism—"Get yours."

The AFT, including Local 61, San Francisco, was part of that union tradition. Its main goal over the past several years has been a collective bargaining contract—illegal in California because of the Winton Act. Its issues are limited to wages, working conditions, grievance procedures, etc. (If you complain about this, union leaders will privately tell you that, personally, they are much more radical, but that most teachers will only go for the bread-and-butter issues.)

We didn't think that those issues were unimportant, but we were much more troubled by the social relations in which we participated as teachers. In our classrooms we were expected to be cops to our students. We were expected to smile and toady to our principals. We were isolated from other teachers, and even more isolated from the parents of our students. We wanted to challenge these social relations because they oppressed us and because we saw in them the social relations of capitalism.

Not only did the union ignore these issues, but for us to go into the union in order to raise them would have meant facing a morass of parliamentary procedures even more alienating than our daily lives in school. So as a collective we turned our back on the union, although as individuals we all joined.

Through our first year it would have been very difficult for BARTOC as a group to have been active in the union anyway, We were scattered all around the Bay Area, with one or two teachers in each district and only one teacher, a substitute, working in San Francisco. Then, through last summer, our membership changed, so that in the fall we had five teachers working in San Francisco.

Sometime during the current academic year we began to feel uncomfortable about the position we had taken. We still didn't see the union as an instrument for revolutionary change, but it would at least have offered us a forum for presenting our ideas to other teachers. Still, we had no way to relate to the union until the union itself and another group of teachers offered one.

A group of teachers at one school were enraged by the strike. One of our members in that group reported to us that the discontented strikers in that school were meeting and talking together. Two days later, several of us had joined those teachers in passing out leaflets to other strikers throughout the city proposing the formation of a rank-and-file caucus.

Fed by the emotions and spurred by the pressures of the strike, we organized at top speed, faltered slightly over the spring vacation, and then recovered. As of the time we go to press we have produced a full slate of candidates for the union election to be held at the end of May. Excerpts from their position papers appear as Part 4 of this article.

Unlike BARTOC, the caucus does not have a socialist perspective, but it addresses the same issues that we addressed in *No More Teachers' Dirty Looks* and that we have raised in the previous two sections of this article. For example, in response to the elitist social relations that now characterize the union, the Rank and File Caucus has proposed a new kind of leadership, more responsive to its members and more dependent on their ideas and participation. Faced with the racism implicit in an interest-group or teacher-power perspective, the Rank and File Caucus proposes community schools in which parents, teachers, and students all share power.

In other words, the Rank and File Caucus has suggested fairly specific solutions to specific problems. We cannot predict its success or failure as an organizing and educational action in the union. We don't know whether our perception of the relationship of school problems to the capitalist economic system and ideology will ever become important to the Rank and File Caucus. But we do know that the Rank and File Caucus, by raising serious educational issues, is attempting to make a contribution to teacher unionism.

And BARTOC members are relating to the union in a more organic, less artificial way than we would have if we had gone in as a bloc when we first organized. The relationship has arisen out of events and the similar response to those events by BARTOC members and other union members. Interestingly, it was just at the point that we had believed we were not and would not become an activist organization that the strike precipitated our San Francisco members into an activist role. We feel justified in our strategy of not creating artificial issues and organizational relationships but rather of relating to the issues of a situation and the needs of the teacher community of which we are a part.

4. What to Do until the Revolution Comes: Statements from the Rank and File Caucus

WE OF THE RANK AND FILE CAUCUS stand, individually and together, on issues rather than on personalities. We believe the following have been lacking from past Union programs.

We need to redistribute authority in the Union to provide two-way communication between leadership and members. The Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities should be adopted by the district and modified for use in individual schools. Sexism and racism must be openly examined and ended—not ignored. Students, parents and teachers should become more involved in the school, and the Union more involved in helping this community. The school budget is too important to be left to the administrators; we believe an "unbiased" third party should be in charge of this budget. Drug addiction and war both destroy; we advocate the end of each.

It's Your Union. The union has become an authoritarian organization, much like the school administrations we resent for being authoritarian. Policy flows from the top down. Much policy is determined by the leadership rather than the membership. A vicious cycle has developed which encouraged apathy among union members, particularly less active members (the majority of our members in this case). The less information that travels between the leadership and these members, the more apathetic they are. The more apathetic these members become, the less active they are. And so it goes until the union becomes a hierarchy in which power flows on a one-way street —top to bottom.

What must be done to revitalize this union of ours? We can start by establishing the following policies:

1. The union leadership must consistently poll the opinions of all its members before each membership meeting on issues pending. This should be the responsibility of the building reps. The results of the polls must be available for all who attend the membership meetings.
2. The union leadership must come to individual area meetings at least once a semester. At these meetings the leader-

ship would be expected to listen to what its members had to say and inform the members of the actions they have taken as particular issues come up.

3. Members will be informed at least one week in advance, except during emergencies, of where and when the Executive Board will meet and what will be discussed.
4. The union leadership must inaugurate a period of time at the beginning of each union meeting for the free exchange of ideas, unencumbered by parliamentary procedure. Students and parents should be encouraged to open communications with the other two-thirds of the school community.
5. The union must have a regular newsletter which prints not only news from the leadership, but also the opinions and suggestions of all officially recognized minority caucuses. While the number of words can be limited, no censorship should occur. The benefits of such a newsletter are undeniable. Discussion, thinking and decision-making by the membership will be encouraged.

Community Schools: A Coalition of Teachers, Students and Parents. The Rank and File Caucus wants to see the development of community schools, with "community" defined as parents, teachers and students of a given school. All participants must be given a voice in the operation of these schools. To develop responsibilities and strengthen the rights of those involved we would like to see these programs instituted:

1. Invite parents to participate in curriculum workshops. Have school time devoted to discussions between parents, teachers and students on problems facing the school. Invite parents to assist in developing activity programs. Have them help chaperone dances, plays, field trips and picnics.
2. Involve parents in the school and classroom as resource personnel—as aides, counselors and perhaps even as students. This could be done on a paid or on a volunteer basis, perhaps facilitating participation by creating a day-care center for the small children of the parents of our students and also for our students who are parents.

3. Develop a grievance procedure which would allow students to have a say in the rules and their enforcement.
4. Give teachers conference time to talk individually with parents and students.
5. Set up workshops for teachers to help overcome the distance that creates fear and mistrust between parents, teachers and students.
6. Allow teachers to elect department heads as well as joining with parents to help select school administrators.
7. Allow the school community to set up its own budget priorities.

Tracking. We are against tracking—at all levels. This includes honors classes, top classes, top schools. Because in order for there to be top classes and top schools, there have to be mediocre and bottom classes and schools and students.

Tracking and elitist schools and programs have been and are bound to be racist in the way they work, probably as they were intended. This is so in San Francisco, and has been so every place in the country where tracking prevails. Studies show that homogeneous grouping does not fulfill its alleged aim of helping the slow and the fast both to learn better. In fact, the fast do not learn any faster when separated out from their fellow students, and the others learn less. Tracking merely reinforces society's judgment that children from well-to-do homes are supposed to be successes in school, and children from middling and poor homes are supposed to be failures. The teachers believe this, the parents believe this, and the children believe this. So there is a self-fulfilling prophecy; the ones who are supposed to succeed, succeed, and the ones who are supposed to fail, fail. In the end, it is mainly the children of the middle class who get into college, or into the good colleges, and get the good jobs, while the children of the poor drop out, go to community colleges, and get the lower-paid jobs, or welfare.

Racism. As part of our platform we want the Union to oppose the omission from our schools of any detailed history or any

broad sense of the discrimination and oppression in this country. Through that omission, plus the repeated assertion that in this country anyone can make it if they really try, the system continually suggests to our students that their failure, their poverty or their personal situations are their own fault.

Not attacking and exposing that suggestion of infinite and equal opportunity for all is where we fail . . . this is racist. It fails to acknowledge the greater burden, the greater hardship of peoples who have had to suffer discrimination for which they were not responsible. The Union must formally recognize and work to end racism by omission.

Racism has been used for years to keep people of different races apart. We of the Rank and File Caucus feel that racism in the schools can be eliminated only by positive programs. Therefore, we support the following:

1. We support the preferential hiring of minority teachers until their numbers are equal to their proportion in the school population.
2. We support the Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities.
3. We are working to place control of the schools in the hands of the student-teacher-parent community.
4. We support the formation of the Union committee on racism.

Sexism. [Sexist] discrimination is traditional in the American Federation of Teachers at all levels (as it is throughout the labor movement). Women are not given consideration in hiring. They are not considered in membership resolutions or in policy formulated by our executives. There are no women employed as full-time national organizers. Dave Selden, president of the AFT, said last summer, "Women don't want to live out of a suitcase." This is why we don't have more full-time women in the national office—these are traditional and false ideas. At the state level, convention delegates passed a resolution (December 1970) stating that the next state organizer to be hired would be a woman. Our executives went against this policy and hired Jim Gallagher.

Female students, throughout our school system, are limited in what courses—and thus what job opportunities—are open to them. Our counselors say they encourage female students to enter the traditionally male-dominated fields, but this isn't true. If a young woman says she is interested in medicine, she is advised to enter nursing, not medical school. A potential female law student may be discouraged from pursuing what is regarded as a male profession. These are traditions.

Textbooks have constantly left women out of their pages or depicted them as the passive, non-creative stay-at-home. We never see a woman as a high school principal or as a pilot. Our textbooks carry on the training of our youth to believe that this passiveness is natural, that women have no ambitions, that women don't want creative jobs. So we train our female students to become secretaries, waitresses, keypunch operators, or domestics. These jobs offer little money and little chance for advancement. Yet, a great many mothers support their families alone. The schools help prepare the women who are going to be income-earners to be low income-earners.

We question why we don't have more elementary school teachers in our Union ranks. We question why so many of our "brighter" female students do not pursue a career. We question why girls play the role of being silly and "feminine" instead of accepting new academic challenges.

We in the Union must take the lead in educating all our students, not only half of them; in reaching all our teachers, not mainly the men; and in supporting our women members in leadership positions.

Student Bill of Rights. The Rank and File Caucus gives its full support to the proposed Student Rights and Responsibilities manual, which was recently presented by the City-Wide Youth Council and is now being considered for adoption by the San Francisco Board of Education.

The "Student Bill of Rights" proposal would guarantee to all San Francisco students the right to freely express their political beliefs by wearing buttons and armbands, and protects their right to choose their own clothes and hair styles. Students would be guaranteed the right to use school bulletin

boards, they would have the right to petition the school administration for grievances and they would be allowed to freely distribute leaflets on campus, all without prior censorship by school authorities as long as the materials posted for display or handed out on campus were not obscene or defamatory.

We support the right of students as stated in the proposal to a meaningful, relevant education which meets their needs. Students also have a right to a meaningful voice in the development of classroom curriculum. The manual calls for the participation of students on administrative committees, which affect students or student rights, Students will also be given the power to participate in the development of rules and regulations to which they are subject, and they will be immediately notified when new rules are put into effect.

Elementary Schools. What we need in the elementary schools is imagination, creativity, and maybe even a little chaos. Unfortunately, although there is sometimes chaos, there is far too little creativity and imagination. In addition to teaching the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic, elementary schools also begin the painful process of homogenizing the kids' minds.

Teachers have to be willing to experiment. They have to view students as people, not things. They have to realize that children are sensitive and impressionable and that, to learn, they need an encouraging environment. It is our responsibility to make schools meet children's needs. □

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