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AFT says no to attacks on education



By Michelle Kern

An energized resistance to ongoing attacks on education was on display at this year's American Federation of Teachers national convention here, July 11-14. Under the theme of "Reclaiming the Promise of Public Education," speakers and more than 3,500 delegates pledged to rebuff attacks by corporate forces on teachers, while also vowing to bring back equity in higher education for students and faculty.

Keynote speaker Rev. Dr. William Barber, founder of North Carolina's "Moral Mondays," sounded the charge in support of public education and teachers. Addressing the convention for 40 minutes, Barber developed the theme that supporting education means fighting for civil rights and helping to end racism and class oppression. "Every time we fail to educate a child on the front end of life, it costs us on the back side of life," he said. "Every time those in our nation attack teachers and undermine public education, it rips not only the nation's economy, it rips at the very integrity of who we are." Political strategist Donna Brazile, self-described in her address as a "labor Democrat," teaches at Georgetown University and is presently organizing her fellow part-time faculty adjuncts into a union.

Brazile described the recent Vergara v. Cali-

fornia decision as "perverse," in its ruling that teacher tenure violates the civil rights of children. Social and economic inequality are the result of bad policies that have resulted in 22% of children living today under the federal poverty line, Brazile reported. "As a lifelong Democrat I am ashamed by attempts by some within in my own party ... who are trying to undermine public schools under the guise of reform," Brazile said. "Let me state this bluntly: the assault on public education is an

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assault on the principles of democracy and the foundation of our country."

Brazile introduced Democrats for Public Education, a new organization to counter Democrats for Education Reform and other billionaire-funded organizations that pour money into charters

The delegates pledged to rebuff attacks by corporate forces on teachers.

and laws rolling back union protections. Former Gov. Ted Strickland of Ohio and former Gov. Jennifer Granholm of Michigan will be working in partnership with Brazile in the new organization. Tom Torlakson, California's Superintendent of Education, highlighted the progressive role of the California Federation of Teachers in crafting a bill in response to the crisis of education cuts, sending Proposition 30, a measure that would raise taxes on the wealthy, to the polls and winning. Citing the adage "No good deed goes unpunished", Torlakson decried the attempts to roll back teacher protections in California by corporate interests via the Vergara v. California decision. Torlakson, facing an election year challenge from a former Wall Street trader turned charter school CEO, contrasted his own approach to doing work in education policy, bolstered by experience as a classroom teacher of many years. "I'm proud to take the teacher's approach into all of my work," he told the AFT delegates.

In the sphere of higher education, this year's convention featured the first-ever meeting of the Adjunct Caucus, a body created by adjunct activ-

ist William Lipkin and other part-time faculty, to address the lack of equity for part-time college and university instructors. As part of the promise to reclaim quality public education, the AFT has also created a web resource addressing the challenges of contingent labor, connecting the need to end the exploitation of part-time instructors with the need to curb rising tuition costs that limit educational opportunities for students. The AFT has been conducting its own surveys of contingent faculty and creating a campaign to raise awareness of the negative effects of the over-reliance on part-timers on higher education and teachers.

Part-time faculty often have no access to benefits like health coverage. In response, the AFT has partnered with the Freelancer's Union to offer a health plan to adjunct faculty, including part-timers who are not part of the AFT. The program is slated to open for applications for the fall enrollment period.



Michelle Kern is a contributor to Peoplesworld.org.

Home care workers file for Minnesota union election

By Barb Kucera

With support from the clients they serve, Minnesota workers who care for people in their homes officially filed representation election cards in early July to form a union. Organizing under the slogan, "Invisible No More," they said unionizing will improve pay, working conditions and the quality of care. Minnesota's Bureau of Mediation Services will conduct a mail ballot election among the state's 26,000 home care workers, making it the largest single union vote in state history. The workers seek representation by SEIU Healthcare Minnesota, a statewide Service Employees local. They filed cards signed by more than 9,000 home care workers, triggering the process for a vote. Organizers expect the election to take place in August. "We are coming together because we know that in other states where home care workers have formed a union, they have won significant wage increases, access to benefits and training opportunities, and most importantly, a voice in the state

decisions that affect them," said Darleen Henry, a home care worker from Rosemount. Home care workers are employed by their clients - seniors and people with disabilities - but are paid mainly through public funds. Some home care workers gave up good-paying jobs to become personal care assistants and direct support professionals for a family member. "My partner, Nicole, needs PCA (personal care assistant) support 24 hours a day. With the help of several other PCAs, I work every day to see that she gets the care she needs to accomplish her goals," said Tyler Frank, a home care worker from New Hope. "Because of the high turnover of Nicole's workers and the extra work their absence leaves for me, I often have to support Nicole at the expense of my own aspirations. We need to recognize the importance of home care work and make it a stable career-that will improve the stability of my life and Nicole's life," Frank added. Pay is so low that many caregivers qualify for food stamps.

Cards were signed by more than 9,000 home care workers.

Metropolitan Opera unions: We're being forced to strike

By Mark Gruenberg

Deep salary cut demands, which its unions say are unjustified, and a company threat to close down at least temporarily, are combining to force members of the 16 unions at New York City's Metropolitan Opera to plan to strike, if necessary.

And with contracts expiring July 31, it's increasingly looking like it may be necessary.

One Met union, the American Guild of Musical Artists, is warning its members the Met may lock workers out if it doesn't get its way.

Met General Manager Peter Gelb demands \$180 million in pay cuts from the unions, including AGMA, Musicians Local 802 and Theatrical and Stage Employees (IATSE) Locals 794 (broadcast technicians), 1 (carpenters and stage hands), 829 (artists and designers), 751 (ticket sellers), 764 (costume shop workers) and 798 (stylists).

Gelb says the \$180 million equals a 16 percent pay cut. In radio interviews, he portrays the unions as refusing to give back even a penny of pay. And the Guardian reported another Gelb threat: That the Met would have to file for bankruptcy protection within three years unless it got its way. And the paper quoted British opera general managers as refuting Gelb's stands.

The unions reply they're willing to sit down with Gelb to discuss cost-cutting measures. The Met ran a \$2.8 million deficit last year, on a \$311 million budget. But they say cuts can easily occur elsewhere. They cite Gelb's high pay and the \$169,000 he spent on one set of painted poppies for a production of Prince Igor as examples of inflated costs.

Local 1 also noted its members' workload multiplied due to new requirements for the Met's HDTV broadcasts nationwide, while its labor costs have risen 2.1 percent annually since 1997. The 1997 Met budget was \$190 million, Local 1 noted.

Joe Hartnett, director of the stagecraft de-



partment and spokesman for all the IATSE locals, noted Gelb himself just turned back 10 percent of his most recent compensation hike. The hike was 26 percent, the Met's tax forms, which are public because it is a non-profit organization, show. Gelb made \$1.8 million in pay and compensation before his turnback.

"We don't see how you save the Met by cutting the onstage and backstage talent responsible for presenting the greatest operas in the world, while avoiding all discussion of bloated management salaries, repeated cost overruns, failed productions and poorly executed marketing and sales strategies," Hartnett added.

"The real issue isn't worker compensation; the real issue is a management team with big dreams and a credit card that has no limits," the IATSE unions said in a joint statement.

"We agree" that "to save the Met Opera, Gelb and our unions will have to sit, talk and compromise. Our members are more than ready to do our part."

Musicians President Tino Gagliardi said other Met giveback demands - sharply higher payments for health insurance and work rule changes - would, with the pay slashes, produce real cuts for Met orchestra members ranging from 25 percent to 38 percent.

Management is proposing cuts ranging from 25 to 38 percent.

Postal service is not pulling out of Staples

Special to Peoplesworld.org

Mark Dimondstein, president of the American Postal Workers Union, said a Staples announcement this week that it was ending its no-bid deal with the U.S. Postal Service is a ruse.

Staples made the announcement saying it was replacing the mini-post offices with an “approved shipper program” already in place at thousands of other retailers the postal service uses to do a variety of deliveries.

“Staples and the USPS are changing the name of the program, without addressing the fundamental concerns of postal workers and postal customers,” Dimondstein said, adding, “If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it’s a duck.”

A USPS spokesperson all but confirmed the union claims when he told the Boston Globe: “We look forward to continuing the partnership (with Staples) whether its called Retail Partner Expansion (the name given to the post office program in Staples) or approved shipper. We just want our customers to know they can continue to get postal services at these 82 (Staples) locations.”

Dimondstein said the recent “Don’t Buy Staples” movement is having an impact.

In the state of Massachusetts, the home state for Staples, prominent political figures have been backing the boycott, among them gubernatorial candidate Martha Coakley.

Earlier this week the American Federation of Teachers and its 1.6 million members joined the anti-Staples boycott.

Cuba contra la diabetes

Por Ladyrene Pérez y Rosa Miriam Elizalde

Amparo Hernández ha comprado una caja de tiras reactivas para el control de su diabetes, en la farmacia de los bajos de su casa en el Cerro, uno de los municipios más poblados de La Habana. Enfermera jubilada de 80 años, hace 15 que debutó con la enfermedad. “Me cuido como gallo fino”, y muestra el paquete de diez tiras o biosensores que acaba de obtener sin receta médica. “Del azúcar no me voy a morir”, asegura.

No tiene idea de que esa caja que lleva en la mano se ha producido gracias a una transferencia de tecnología, la primera que tiene lugar en Cuba en el sector de la ingeniería biomédica, tras un acuerdo comercial que selló las relaciones entre el Centro de Inmunoensayo (CIE) y la empresa china Changsha SINOCARE Inc.. Con este convenio, se están beneficiando desde hace varios años todos los diabéticos tipo 1 –los insulino dependientes- y la población más vulnerable –niños y embarazadas.

En el contexto de la visita oficial del Presiente Xi Jinping al país caribeño, este martes se inaugura la Planta de Producción de Biosensores del CIE, que permitirá producir las tiras reactivas que necesita toda la población diabética del país, unos 800 000 cubanos diagnosticados con la enfermedad.

“Se estima que en la población cubana hay un grupo mayor de diabé-

ticos y no saben que lo son”, afirma la ingeniera Niurka Carlos Pía, directora del Centro de Inmunoensayo. “Queremos llegar también a ellos”, añade.

La Diabetes Mellitus, enfermedad producida por una alteración del metabolismo, ocupa el tercer lugar entre las dolencias más serias que enfrenta hoy la humanidad, después de los tumores secundarios y las enfermedades cardíacas. En Cuba, sin embargo, es la octava causa de muerte, según la Ofical Nacional de Estadísticas e Información (ONEI).

Los programas de asistencia a los diabéticos disminuyen notablemente el riesgo de complicaciones. La directora admite que la atención de los diabéticos impacta en el índice de esperanza de vida en Cuba, el más alto en la región -76,5 para los hombres; 80,4 para las mujeres-, “porque no se espera a que el enfermo llegue grave al hospital; se busca en la comunidad”.

Está demostrado que, a pesar de que se instruye a la población para lograr estilos de vida saludables, muchos no lo tienen en cuenta. “Para acercar la tecnología a los necesitados concebimos los Centros de Pesquisa Activa Integral, laboratorios donde están los equipos Suma y que tienen sedes en todos los municipios del país. Acercamos el diagnóstico al paciente”, dice Niurka.

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