

Independent Community of Educators

ICE

The ICE Platform

**The UFT Needs a Strong Alternative Voice More Than Ever
Teaching/Learning Conditions**

A Democratic UFT is the Key to a Strong Union

Why is it So Easy to Fund War But So Hard to Fund Education?

The UFT Needs a Strong Alternative Voice More Than Ever

UFT leader's pleas for unity in time of union bashing too little too late

The following article resulted from a series of discussions by the Independent Community of Educators (ICE) over the question of whether it is incorrect to be critical of the leaders of the UFT in times when the union is under attack. That discussion led to a debate on the role the Independent Community of Educators could play in the upcoming UFT elections. The article was written by a consortium of people in ICE.

Is our union under attack? And is this a reason to unite behind our leadership and to support Unity Caucus as our union leaders?

Clearly what we are witnessing now is an unprecedented attack on our professionalism and our rights as unionists and educators, but it was our union leaders who paved the way for this to happen. Through their long history of collaboration with the Board of Ed, and their initial endorsement of the Department of Education in its usurping the rights of all teachers to make educational decisions, they have given the DOE and its corporate media and foundation supporters ample room to consolidate and broaden their attacks on the union and the contract. It was only when they realized that the attacks were going to affect them and their supporters that our union leaders began to speak publicly about what was affecting the membership and the schools. However, their current strategy is to give up even more of our rights and contractual protections in order to appease the elites who run our city and prove that they can be counted on as working partners. We believe that only by criticizing the policies of our union leaders and challenging their leadership can we hope to strengthen and unite our tens of thousands of members in a fight back against a concerted effort to destroy both our union and public education.

UFT members working in schools have been under attack for years. Just look at the whittling away of rights, the worsening of working conditions, the loss of control over how to teach and how to manage our classrooms. For many years teachers in "failing" schools have been blamed, punished, dictated to and treated in the most unjust ways by supervisors and district staff. Most recently this type of treatment is occurring even in the "successful" schools, where veteran teachers who had been left to develop their own styles and success stories are now being told that their ways are wrong and they must adhere to a new set of teaching practices. To make matters worse, UFT leaders have shown little interest in supporting the many weak or non-functioning chapters where administrators have been able to violate the contract.

During the good years and bad, through an expanding and contracting economy, through periods of increased tax revenue then a government-induced fiscal crisis for the cities and states caused by tax cuts to wealthy taxpayers and corporations--during all these ups and downs, we have seen how our union leaders have adopted the government's position that there is just not enough money to fund education fully. They say that to build more schools, cut class size, install paras in every early childhood class, create effective guidance services and institute similarly costly reforms would not be financially possible. How many times have we heard union leaders tell us that lowering class size can only be achieved through salary cuts or other givebacks? Each contract negotiation involved our union leaders collaborating with the Board of Ed and the city over a ceiling on funding for education. It was always in their interests to counterpose salaries against working and learning conditions because their base of support was not in schools which desperately needed smaller classes and supportive services. Instead, relying on a low level of union consciousness due to lack of chapter leadership in many schools, and low expectations fostered by pronouncements from the top, our union leaders have needed only to meet the needs of those Unity Caucus members and supporters in plum jobs (out-of-classroom positions, better schools). Telling us at every

contract negotiation that they were staving off massive givebacks, UFT leaders successfully sold us one bad contract after another. They also successfully ingratiated themselves with each city and state administration by refusing to put up a serious fight while the city and state shortchanged education in New York City. Through the UFT president's position on the Municipal Labor Council they allowed the city to cry poverty, leaving the unions to fight over their respective shares.

Unfortunately, givebacks is what we got--this time insidiously, under the guise of "gains".

At what point did our union leaders consider the latest DOE policies an attack on the union? Only when the leadership was no longer consulted by the inner circle of decision makers. Up until that point, Weingarten was always willing to sell out the interests of union members...

First there was the pilot program known as the Chancellor's District, in which teachers agreed to work an additional 15% more time for an additional 15% salary. What sweetened the deal were smaller classes in these schools, but at the enormous expense of an almost total loss of control in the classroom. The Board of Ed knew that it would get many teachers to go along with this plan, especially in schools where there had been great demoralization due to difficult teaching conditions and incompetent and/or oppressive school administrations, and where there were a great many inexperienced teachers who were not fully aware of their rights or too new in their positions to fight for them.

Then came our contract. Borrowing from the "successful" experience in the Chancellor's district (district 85), the Board and union agreed that everyone should work extra hours for additional pay. UFT leaders portrayed this as a win-win-win situation: a "productivity" gain for the Board, an increase in income (but not a raise) for teachers and the promise of greater student achievement. From its inception, the UFT leaders strongly supported and played a central role in the administration of district 85, which was portrayed by both the Board and union as being the prototype for school design and administration in schools that had been "failing". It was this model which brought locked-in periods, scripted lessons, rules for room decor, and corporate ("Success for All" program) management to thousands of classrooms. In fact, the UFT fought to keep the Chancellor's District alive during the current reorganization.

Next came the consolidation of centralized control by eliminating the Board of Education, local school districts, rearranging the hierarchy so that administrators were all beholden to the center--the chancellor and the mayor.

Upon assuming total control, the newly formed Department of Education put into motion their divide and conquer strategy. They put the schools through a sifter, allowing the "failing" schools to fall to the bottom, and allowing the students in the "successful" schools with their more highly educated, better off and more vocal parents to escape the extreme measures the union and educational "leaders" were devising.

Their next move was to institute the corporate model: The universalization of locked in periods of reading and math instruction; test-driven curricula; corporate-driven programs; mandated approaches to everything from teaching fractions to furniture arrangement; one-size-fits-all methodologies; and pressure and threats as the means

of enforcement.

To insure the success of their corporate model, we presently see the DOE orchestrating a systematic attack on the contract and on all union rights and protections, all but eliminating the opportunity for working educators to challenge their dictates.

Where were our union leaders during the many years of the reign of the school boards--many of which the UFT leaders had major influences over--when teachers were blamed and abused for the failures of students? Where were they when the Chancellor's District carried these abuses even further? And where were they when Mayor Bloomberg dismantled the Board of Ed and the school districts and installed a new regime whose primary assumption is that only a top-heavy educational hierarchy that micromanages our schools can bring about educational improvement?

The Board and the Department of Ed. have always alternated in blaming teachers or parents and students when it suits them. When Bloomberg was pushing for mayoral control he was parent-bashing in order to curry favor with President Weingarten. (Remember his comment that the parents were too ignorant to know that the system was failing?) When Weingarten thought that mayor control would be a DOE/UFT collaboration with parents as the odd man out (remember the words she used, "how breathtakingly possible") she went for it all. During contract negotiations and citywide elections the mayor targets teachers to get support from those who want to destroy teacher unionism and from a sizable number of voters who see teachers as self-serving.

At what point did our union leaders consider the latest DOE policies an attack on the union? Only when the leadership was no longer consulted by the inner circle of decision makers. Up until that point, Weingarten was always willing to sell out the interests of union members, as long as she could protect the privileges of Unity Caucus members and other supporters who had the better jobs, worked in better schools and were on the inside track to move up as administrators.

So now that they are under attack, do we rally to defend the very leadership that paved the way for these attacks? Do we want a union that allows administration after administration to cry poverty in a city of millionaires and astronomical rents? Do we want a union that is constantly sacrificing the long term interests of members for the short term crumbs it can portray as gains? Do we want a union that allows the city and the Department of Education to carve away at our rights and working conditions? Do we want a union that makes its decisions based on the interests of its leadership while holding down membership voices through a maze of undemocratic structures and practices?

Or do we start the process of building a movement capable of removing those who are standing in the way of building a union that will address the needs of all its members and the school system as a whole? Our goals are a fighting union that educates the membership, builds strong chapters, and is then able to mobilize all of us to stand up against givebacks and for the rights of educators and children.

Independent Community of Educators

Email: VoteICE@aol.com

Phone: 917-992-3734

The Independent Community of Educators (ICE) are people currently working in the schools and a number of retired educators who have been active in the union for many years. We started meeting this fall and have engaged in an intense discussion on the state of our union and the NYC schools. One of the first questions we tackled: With the perception that the UFT, and unions in general, are under attack, do we accept Randi Weingarten's rationale that in these times of trouble we must stick together, the very rationale that led the major opposition caucus, New Action, to run a slate without a presidential candidate in the UFT elections in the spring of 2004? We answered with a resounding NO!

In one of the most difficult times in the history of the UFT and of unionism in this city and indeed, the nation, with a union leadership that has not only failed its members, but has been a contributor to the current crisis for our membership through its support for mayoral control, we have chosen to come together for these elections. While we are all united as members of the union against the attacks, the leadership's 40-year record of stifling

voices of dissent has weakened our union. Thus, we speak up to make the union stronger! Our aim? To provide an opportunity for any UFT member who is critical of the UFT leadership to get involved. One of our major goals is to bring the entire opposition movement together through this election process.

What unites us? The sense that we can be both strong trade unionists and strong educators. The sense, that by its very nature a school is a mini-community, and everyone who works in one, from teachers to social workers to paras to secretaries to custodial workers to security guards – all union members who work there – have some role in the education of children. We aim to provide a voice for all UFT members, in particular the classroom teacher, often the most neglected by the people managing the schools and the union leadership. They bear the brunt of the work and the blame when things don't go well. We share a sense that every school community should be a village in which all those who work in its environs are encouraged to participate in its governance. It is through grass roots movements such as this that individu-

als become empowered and active in shaping the roles of the institutions and the people working and learning within them. Our union, when it is truly ours instead of in the hands of a narrow band of misguided and self-interested union leaders, and with greater participation of its members, can be the instrument for positive change that will insure better working conditions for its members and better learning conditions for the children.

We have attracted a band of independent outspoken UFT members with a variety of viewpoints on many issues and an intention to find solutions through consensus. Included are a number of independent chapter leaders and delegates who have declared a willingness to become a resource all UFT members can go to for advice and assistance. Working together in an open and democratic manner, in an extremely short amount of time, we have come up with a set of principles, as laid out on the next four pages. These principles are a work in progress and will be modified as new voices are heard. We invite you to join us in this campaign.

TEACHING/LEARNING CONDITIONS

Mayor Bloomberg's Children First Initiative has surprised many by the way it not only brought a restructured district-level administration but also quickly pushed its tentacles into the classroom. Many teachers feel that the instructional mandates and new administrative pressure tactics are changing the nature of the job.

We address specific issues of teaching and learning conditions below. But first it is important to note that New York City's command-style "school reform" is not an isolated development. The federal No Child Left Behind Act is the most massive single exercise of government power over education in U.S. history. Virtually all schools serving large numbers of poor and minority students face the threat of mounting sanctions in the next few years. The ultimate measures for such schools include replacement of school staff and privatizing of school management. The arrival of a CEO-type billionaire chief for New York City schools forms one part of a larger context in which the corporate leaders have successfully seized a moral high ground by proclaiming standards-based school reform a movement for excellence and opportunity for all. The nationwide obsession with accountability based on test scores is itself the product of two decades of concerted effort by America's private sector, especially its corporate executives, to impose a business-oriented agenda on the public schools. Since 1989 that agenda included testing and a narrowing of educational objectives to serve the needs of the workplace. An emphasis on basic skills, and centrally-determined programs and methods of instruction has increasingly negated the ability of schools and classroom teachers to determine programs and methodology, thereby diminishing the role that training, experience, individual insight, and creativity plays in the educational process.

Sandra Feldman's AFT leadership was closely involved in the drafting of the No Child Left Behind Act and she remains a steadfast supporter of it. The law has like-

wise been welcomed and supported by our UFT leadership, which seems to be troubled only by its underfunding. To explain how a union leadership could applaud and promote a program so destructive to public education is beyond any satisfactory explanation from us. It testifies to a loss of belief in what teachers do for a living. Our union leadership had long given up its role as an agent of genuine change for the public schools. It signed on to the corporate agenda, choosing the rhetoric over the reality. But for those at the school level the reality is impossible to avoid.

We need a leadership that, understanding the relationship between teaching and learning conditions, challenges the DOE as it pits the needs of classroom teachers against those of students. We need a leadership that puts its muscle behind the struggles for:

1. Lowering class sizes. Small classes are the underpinning of an effective classroom, and are especially crucial where children have low performance levels and special needs. Let's remember that in the mid-1970s the union leadership went along with the Board of Ed when it shut down schools and gave the buildings away, paving the way for the current overcrowding. Our union leaders continue to undermine the fight for lower class sizes by:

- Not successfully tying class size to learning conditions.

- Adopting the strategy that a referendum was the only way of lowering class size. Even if voted on and passed it would have allowed the union leadership to take the issue off the table since the proposition would have taken years to implement. Experience has shown that many state and city regulations are selectively enforced. So, even in the context of regulations grievable limits are important.

- Continuing to support out-of-classroom positions which in fact contribute to

large class size because it diverts money for pedagogical personnel away from the classroom. Included in this are the thousands of facilitators, mentors, staff developers, coaches, and teacher center personnel.

- Supporting currently mandated programs and strategies from the DOE, multiple grouping, balanced literacy, and the new math program, which are impossible to implement with class sizes over 18 to 20.

Our union's position on class size should be:

- Class size limits comparable with other districts in the state and capped by contract

- No half-class size loopholes, and no excuses in overcrowded buildings where classroom teacher-student ratio can still be lowered.

2. Basic trust in the professionalism and knowledge of teachers. The current school "reform" is premised on a distrust of teachers (as well as any independent-minded local school leadership) with change to be commanded from the top supervisory levels. Our union leadership is allowing the DOE to violate Article 24 of our contract, which states, "The Board and the Union agree that professional involvement of teachers in educational issues should be encouraged", and provides procedures to work out differences between teacher and administrative judgment. With the DOE model, decisions about instruction are made prescriptively and through packaged programs, and place enormous restrictions on a teacher's ability to service the needs of individual students.

- Teachers must have a say in what goes on in the classroom, a contractual right that is presently violated by the DOE.

- Teachers' own practical knowledge should be the basis for change, rather than a one-size-fits-all program.

- Planning for instruction and curriculum reform should be arrived at through respectful relationships among all staff.

3. An end to mandated programming and school organization:

- Teaching blocks mandated by the DOE have successfully minimized or eliminated music, art, and foreign language, destroying programs meaningful to so many youngsters, making a mockery of New York State requirements, and putting talented subject teachers in classroom situations for which they have not been prepared. This has been done without comment from the UFT. We believe music, art, foreign language, phys ed, health, library, technology and vocational learning are basic to education and should be restored to the curriculum.

- Mandated out-of-classroom positions take a tremendous chunk of the school's budget, as well as taking away real flexibility of program decision-making.

- Principals have been given autonomy over the budget which determines school programs, bypassing the School Leadership Team's decision-making power.

- Whatever validity there is to parts of the mandated programs is cancelled by the way they have to be implemented because of inadequate resources, rigidity in implementation and poor training. For example, the NCEE literacy program in the high schools requires that teachers do a one-on-one authentic reading assessment with each student in the class. In practice this has been impossible.

4. Ending the misuse of city- and state-wide tests, which increasingly distort the curricula and misrepresent true academic performance. Standardized test results can be a tool for evaluating instruction and pointing out where extra resources should

T/L Cont. on next page

Teaching/Learning Conditions

be focused. But the current accountability model with its simplified goals and objectives results in students and teachers alike becoming prisoners of the achievement numbers game. This model also ignores any accountability for long-term learning goals or the kinds of learning that might give educators and students cause for satisfaction. Good teachers develop an awareness of how children actually learn. The premise that children will learn more when they are subjected to weeks of teaching-to-the-test methodologies, that they become more successful students when strict standardized levels are set for them, or that they respond positively to threats and punishment are ideologically driven beliefs, contrary to what we know as experienced educators. An additional consequence of high stakes testing is that those children most in need become a liability to a school which then leads to an attempt to pass them off to another school instead of addressing their needs.

ECLAS testing for every child in the early grades is a waste of time and resources and in many schools pulls teachers away from their classes and disrupts learning for many days each year. Although ECLAS may be useful for diagnosing children with special abilities or special needs, this test rarely gives teachers useful information that they already don't know about their children.

- Teachers must play a primary role in judging student levels and progress from elementary school through high school.

- Students should have the opportunity to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways.

- Our union should call for an end to ECLAS testing for all children in the early grades.

5. Formulating a strategy to deal with troubled students that involves the collaboration of teachers, other school staff and parents. Children who come to school too troubled to maintain themselves in a mainstream class need sustained and professional interventions. In the past

there was a vast special ed structure which provided self-contained classes for some of the more difficult children and provided some relief for mainstream classes. Many special ed programs gave children the chance to work out their problems and function academically in small classes with specially trained teachers. For many reasons (including lack of adequate training of staff, vast discrepancies in quality of programs, inadequate number of staff in some programs, faulty evaluations and inappropriate placements, resistance of many parents to having their children labeled) the ideal situation was reached in only a minority of special ed settings. Now, with the dismantling of special ed for all but the most challenged children, we see thousands of teachers throughout the city having to deal with children who behave in a way that threatens the classroom environment and often the safety of other students as well as staff, and does not serve the children themselves.

- Strategies for dealing with students who disrupt the classroom must include ongoing consensus-building among adults and taking actions based on this consensus; early intervention; guidance; conflict management; a variety of settings within a school, and emphasis on mutual respect and responsibility.

- However, in the case of children who do not respond to the efforts of school staff and parents to improve their behavior, the DOE must provide alternative settings for those students who are making little progress and whose extremely disruptive behavior is continuous, prevents the class from functioning, and represents a danger to other students and staff.

6. Using teachers' knowledge of their students' communities as a basis for building successful schools. This includes the culture, history, experience and knowledge which the families and communities bring to this process. Neither the DOE nor our union leadership has an appreciation for how spending years, or even decades, working in the same neighborhood might yield valuable knowledge. Union leaders support the assumption of the school

system managers that teachers are replaceable parts and will be fine with that as long as they have transfer rights and the guarantee of a job...somewhere.

- Our long-term teachers could be a valuable resource in reaching out to the community and together formulating models for success.

7. Fairness in licensing and evaluating teachers. The UFT should lobby for the end of those exams that do not give a fair measurement of who is or can become a good teacher. Thousands of teachers who had earned satisfactory evaluations for many years have been dismissed because of their failure to pass specific exams. The misuse of testing can be as unjust and harmful for teachers as it is for students.

- An end to the difficult hurdles teachers must go through in order to be certified.

- Certification measures should be simplified and based on meaningful written and oral tests as well as performance in the classroom.

- The millions of dollars that the DOE expends for training and staff development should be directed instead towards mentorship programs for new teachers and individual educators who need the extra help.

8. Meaningful professional development. Presently new and less experienced teachers are not allowed to grow into good teachers. They are not given the opportunity to try strategies and take risks. Ill-prepared and poorly trained administrators, coaches, regional personnel (some still politically appointed), have reduced professional support to a checklist with the intention of instilling fear and intimidation. The UFT has allowed these methods to distort teacher training and leave teachers open to attack.

- The UFT should be demanding school-based professional development determined by teacher need.

- The UFT should seek the establishment of an apprenticeship system for new teachers.

9. Fully funded adult education programs. An expansion of the existing programs in content and number of courses available. Adult education must take into account the needs of parents and community members and should include their understandings and views of what will help serve their community. It can be a vehicle to strengthen the bonds between parents, educators and unionists that will help us in our united effort to get better schools for the city's children.

We're at a crossroads for public education in the U.S. and teachers must play a key role. The command-style "school reform" can only inhibit real, positive change. It prevents those with the best knowledge from redesigning things in a way that serves students better.

Our union must stand up to the scapegoating of teachers for the problems of our school system. It must work to build coalitions of teachers, parents, active community members at the school and citywide level, and employees of other city agencies so that we can't be played off against one another by the mayor and Department of Education. We need a union that will lead and fight for an education system that meets the needs of all the students in our city, an overwhelming number of whom are poor and of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. It would take enormous changes and massive resources to correct the inequities in our society, but well-run schools with well-trained staffs, good programs, supportive services and small classes can bring about improvements for all children. To think that communities with vast economic and social differences can succeed with identical monetary resources is a mistaken notion and a popular political ploy. The union leadership must be ready to expose such lies and not allow failures in our society to fall squarely on the backs of teachers and our union. Our union must also challenge all the various schemes to destroy public education by diverting money to private schools through vouchers, to DOE-funded charter schools or by hiring private companies to run public schools, which can only further polarize both our educational system and our society.

A Democratic UFT is a Key to a Strong Union

One of the major goals of a movement seeking change in the union is to take on the task of democratization - setting up structures and procedures that will give the rank and file the opportunity to have direct and constant ability to formulate union policy.

But isn't the UFT a democratic institution whose leadership represents the views and interests of the membership? Don't they hold regular elections and meetings?

From its earliest days, the leadership has organized the UFT into a body which they tightly control and manipulate. This gives them the ability to promote their policies with the least amount of criticism or interference from the membership. While

deliberately stifling any dissent, they always try to portray the UFT as a democratic institution, equating democracy with having the opportunity to "choose" our leaders every three years (just as we choose our mayor, governor or president). The attitude is: "We do what we want; if you don't like it vote us out at the next election."

Tom Pappas, presently the head of the retired chapter, who while he was secretary to President Weingarten virtually controlled the day-to-day running of the union, said that the UFT is the most democratic union in the world. On paper the UFT is more democratic than many unions, with our union officers receiving large majorities in elections. But in

practice what we see is a well-oiled political machine rather than a democratically functioning union:

- The least number of people make the decisions.

- The rank & file are deliberately kept unaware of what is going on in regards to most issues, When "informed" by leadership it is usually in the form of propaganda (getting the "line") after choices have already been made by Unity Caucus leadership on "behalf" of the membership.

- There is a conscious attempt by the leadership to limit rank and file participation in meetings, discussions and the decision-making process, with union structures set

up to enforce this policy.

- There is a consistent effort by union officers on all levels to stifle dissent and opposition, They go so far as to modify or violate previously existing democratic practices and procedures in order to do this.

As soon as their monopoly of power is challenged, our union leaders change the rules of the game. When UFT members elected an opposition candidate for high school vice-president and came very close in the junior high division, the union leadership changed the voting procedures for divisional leaders, making them at large positions. They eliminated elections for district representatives who left mid-term,

Continued on next page

Democracy in the UFT

continued

and instead had them replaced by people appointed by the union leadership. District Reps play key roles for the union leadership by rewarding friendly chapter chairpeople and punishing dissident chapters through the delivery or withholding of services. They intervene in chapter elections by stealthily supporting candidates against known dissident chapter chairpeople and sometimes even delegates.

If you're looking for democracy within Unity Caucus, however, you won't find it there either. Caucus discipline is maintained through a system of rewards and patronage: a career ladder within the union, out-of-classroom jobs in schools (in the past at district offices and the Central Board), assistance in getting good administrative jobs, and transfers to desirable schools. It's the Success for Unity Caucus Faithful Program. Simply put, dissension within Unity Caucus is not tolerated. There has rarely been a delegate elected on the Unity Caucus slate who has voted against the Unity Caucus position at a NYSUT or AFT convention. Unity Caucus utilizes its well-disciplined base within the UFT to control the state and national unions so that it can implement its political agenda.

Our union leaders know that an informed, involved membership with a greater voice would challenge their policies and would also vote them out of office. That's why they work so hard to keep us from knowing what's really going on and having regular access to viewpoints that differ from theirs.

What are some of the key structural changes needed to bring greater democracy to our union so that the membership can decide what their union should stand for?

1. Divisional Elections for Divisional Vice Presidents. (i.e. high school members alone should vote for high school V.P., vocational high school members alone should vote for vocational high school V.P., middle school members alone should vote for middle school V.P., elementary school members alone should vote for elementary V.P., special ed members alone should vote for special education V.P.)

In 1994 the Unity Caucus union leadership ended the practice of people within a division voting exclusively within their division for their own vice president because Unity wanted to make sure that a V.P. would never again be elected from an opposition group, as had happened a few years earlier. Unity changed the procedure to make the balloting for vice presidents at large. That means that all the members of the UFT vote for divisional vice presidents, even if they don't work in that division. Retirees, who in the last elec-

tion cast 35% of all votes cast, also vote for the high school, junior high school and elementary divisional vice presidents which means that non-working members have a tremendous influence over who will represent working teachers.

2. Retirees should not vote for UFT officers, who are responsible for negotiating the contract for active members.

The New York State Public Employees Relations Board has ruled that retired members of the UFT are not members of our bargaining unit. Therefore, retirees should not vote for those who represent active members in collective bargaining. There should be a special retiree V.P. who handles retiree issues and is elected exclusively by retired UFT members.

3. Retirees should vote for three teacher members of the Teachers' Retirement System Board.

Only active UFT members vote for the three teacher members on the TRS Board. Retirees should have a vote for these positions which directly affect them. State law restricts TRS membership to inservice members and does not allow retirees to be the teacher reps. The UFT should be working actively to change this.

4. District Representatives (a full time UFT position to support the chapter leaders and members in a district) should be elected by all the members of a district.

Last spring the UFT leaders suspended District Representative Elections and appointed DRs. The DRs must represent the members in their districts, bringing their members' voices to the leadership rather than under the present system acting as mouthpieces for the leadership.

5. At large UFT Executive Board Seats should be apportioned based on proportional representation. (The number of seats given to a caucus (political party) on the executive board should equal the percentage of votes that a caucus gets in an election.)

Divisional seats and functional seats should still be voted on by each division to ensure representation from each division so that no group within the UFT is excluded from the Executive Board. A caucus getting 30% of the vote in an at large election deserves 30% of the at large Executive Board seats to present their positions and shape the policies of the union.

6. UFT Delegates to the AFT and NYSUT Conventions should be apportioned based upon proportional representation.

Without proportional representation Unity Caucus has been able to use the UFT's

winner-take-all method to control the NYSUT state-wide union and the AFT national union, thus controlling all our policies from the local to the national level.

7. All full and part time union jobs (non-elected) that are for UFT members who work for the Department of Education should be posted in the schools. The senior qualified candidate should be hired.

Today virtually all jobs are doled out as patronage positions. Department of Education employees who work for the UFT serve at the discretion of Unity Caucus and owe their loyalty to them, rather than to the members. This recommendation excludes union staff employees who have nothing to do with the Department of Education (lawyers, cleaning crews, etc.).

8. Every issue of the NY Teacher should be opened to opposing viewpoints.

A full debate in print on union issues twice a month will allow members' opinions to be fully disseminated. A resolution was put forward at the Delegate Assembly last year proposing that every issue of the NY Teacher be opened up to articles by people who oppose the UFT leadership on a particular issue. Unity voted it down saying that allowing opposition viewpoints to be published in the union's newspaper once every three years was sufficient.

9. Meet the President meetings held during UFT Election years should be Meet the Candidates' Forums.

Candidates of all declared slates should be able to have equal time at these forums. Otherwise, Meet the President meetings become thinly disguised campaign rallies for the incumbent president and the other officers. Free and fair elections are essential in a democratic union. Unity Caucus has a tremendous advantage by controlling the union newspaper and through the distribution of all its literature that only reflects their positions. This outreach is prohibitive for opposing caucuses who have neither the mechanisms nor the resources to match what Unity Caucus has at its disposal from our union dues.

10. All caucuses (political parties) who have met requirements to run in an election should be able to mail at least one piece of literature to all the members at union expense during election time.

An advertisement in the NY Teacher is not sufficient to be able to get a political message across to the members, given the advantages Unity Caucus already has.

11. There should be an open microphone at all Union meetings.

Presently the chair has discretion to call on whomever he/she wants, and in this way he/she manipulates the discussion. At each delegate assembly, for example, we see the same people constantly recognized while others rarely or never get the floor to present an alternate position. Anyone who wants to speak should have the right to do so.

12. UFT committees (special education, high school, middle school, etc...) should vote on proposals presented at their meetings, with the understanding that such proposals shall be forwarded to both the executive board and the DA.

Top-down UFT meetings where officers merely disseminate information prohibit other positions from being discussed, voted upon and officially recommended by the bodies.

13. When an elected position becomes available in the middle of a term, there should be a special election by all eligible members. This would include officers, District Representatives and chapter leader positions from functional chapters.

Typically Unity Caucus replaces its officials by having them retire or move to a different position in the middle of a term. This gives the Unity dominated executive board the opportunity to choose the replacement long before there is an actual election. For example, Sandra Feldman resigns as UFT President to become AFT President in 1998 and the Executive Board picks Weingarten to replace Feldman as UFT President. Randi doesn't have to face the voters until 1999. The NY Teacher then prints a series of publicity pieces about Weingarten. She, thus, gets a load of name recognition and good press and she runs for election in 1999 as an incumbent, giving her a huge advantage over potential opponents.

14. Make the delegate assembly a legislative body where officers and executive board members have limits on how long they can speak. Often the regular business of the agenda is not taken up until way past 5:00 p.m. which leaves very little time for delegates to discuss the motions. The President's and other reports must be limited so that the delegate assembly can truly be a legislative body.

15. There should be a majority rather than a 2/3 vote required to put motions on the current and next month's delegate assembly agenda.

16. Limit the total percentage of retiree delegates at the delegate assembly. There are now 300 retired DA delegates which make up 11% of the total delegates and who have a disproportional say on working conditions.

COMING SOON: ICE FORUMS (See back page to sign up.)**A. Security in the Schools: What Can Be Done?****B. High Stakes Testing and NCLB: Getting the UFT to Take Action****C. The New DOE Curriculum: Is There Anything Worth Saving?**

Email: VOTEICE@aol.com
Phone: 917-992-3734

Why is it so easy to fund war but so hard to fund education?

We live in the wealthiest country in the world and it is certainly evident that the major problem we face is not that we don't have enough, but rather that some people have too much, many people have nothing at all, and those in the middle struggle to get along in times of "prosperity" and are forced to suffer greatly during times of "crisis." Let there be no doubt that sufficient resources exist to provide full funding for basic human services like health care, education, and social security. The struggle that needs to be waged is one that attempts to force a change in the priorities at all governmental levels.

One need only pick up the newspaper to read the latest story about a corporate executive having a "compensation package" worth in excess of \$100 million a year. Even the head of a quasi-regulatory body, the New York Stock Exchange, was forced to resign when it was revealed that he was to "earn" \$139.5 million in the current year. That pay package could have funded the hiring of 3,500 New York City teachers at \$40,000 a year. Most of the corporate elite in this country earn thousands of times as much in a year as the employees that work for them.

We are constantly being told by our government officials and union leadership that there isn't enough money to provide what school workers and their students need. At the time of our last contract negotiation, the economy was booming, yet we were told the only way to get a decent salary increase was to pay for it ourselves by working extra time each day. That is not a salary increase, it is overtime, and it is usually paid at time and a half. As part of the deal, the UFT endorsed the re-election of Governor Pataki and joined with Mayor Bloomberg in his successful attempt to win "corporate control" of the school system. The union leadership hailed the contract as the greatest ever and signed onto the notion that the way to get increases is to have the city pay us for giving up elements of our contract that had been won

years ago. Perhaps we can give up prep periods or maybe even lunch. Even more insidious is the notion that we shouldn't be fighting during negotiations for things like smaller class size because that would cause us to get less of a salary increase. Maybe the union leadership will next argue that we could fund a salary increase by agreeing to larger classes as well.

It is an interesting phenomenon that when the government needs money to build a new weapons system or invade another country, the money always seems to be there, but when people call for increasing the funding of human services they cry poverty. Since its inception Unity Caucus, acting within the UFT and AFT, has been instrumental in getting the labor movement to endorse the large expenditures for weaponry and wars. They've consistently argued that there's enough money for guns and butter, but where is their voice when education is shortchanged at a time when the military is being allocated more and more?

Over the course of the last year, the administration has invaded Iraq and is currently occupying that country with a force of more than 130,000 men and women. The cost of this endeavor is already approaching \$100 billion, and the end is obviously nowhere in sight. The war was fought using warehouses full of high tech, expensive "weapons of mass destruction." These warehouses will now be restocked with even more armaments. The economic costs of this war will grow even after the war is over when the costs of taking care of the disabled veterans gets factored in.

At the same time as the Bush administration has waged war, they have pushed through a series of tax cuts (\$674 billion over the next 10 years) that have primarily benefited the most wealthy among us. As these people earn hundreds of millions of dollars a year, they pay a smaller and smaller percentage of their huge incomes to the government. The Bush 2003 tax

reduction law will result in the richest 5% of the population getting almost 50% of the rate cuts on their income. If that isn't enough, the wealthy have seen the tax rates they pay on dividends and capital gains reduced. The same 5% will be getting just over 70% of the dividend tax cuts. Even when they die, their heirs will have to pay increasingly lower estate taxes on the huge fortunes they inherit. Currently, fewer than 3,000 estates pay the bulk of the estate tax, yet the new tax law raises over the next few years the threshold for paying estate tax to \$3.5 million. What makes matters worse is the flight of corporations to offshore addresses to escape paying any taxes at all. This drain of hundreds of billions of reduced tax dollars could pay for great improvements in education, health and other human services. This drain will also result in a huge government deficit, which threatens the ability of government to deliver services well into the future.

For many years New York State has shortchanged New York and the other major cities when it came time to allocate funds for the schools. The governor and state legislature have used an archaic and unequal formula that favors the wealthier suburban districts. It has taken a monumental court case known as the Campaign for Fiscal Equity almost ten years to attempt to right this wrong. The court has given the state legislature until June 2004 to design a formula that would give New York City a fair share of the funds. It is here on the state level that it is easy to view the pitiful performance of the UFT leadership in securing equitable funding for our schools. All one has to do is point to the UFT endorsement of Governor Pataki in the last election to highlight this failure to attain necessary funding. The governor spent \$11 million in taxpayers' money to fight the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. It was a Pataki-appointed judge that ruled that "an eighth grade education is all the state must provide." This governor continues to stall by creating a

study commission to investigate the issues instead of carrying out the mandate of the courts. The endorsement of Pataki is typical of the endorsements made by the UFT leadership under its VOTE COPE campaign. It chooses to support politicians who give us a few crumbs off the table but then become invisible when we need them for the important battles. Politicians like State Senator John Marchi have been supported by the UFT for 30 years but would not support the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. In fact, if all of our COPE-endorsed officials had been truly on our side, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity would not have been necessary at all.

Over the years, the New York City and State governments have also cut taxes and subsidized projects for the wealthy. New York State used to collect a stock transfer tax of a penny for each share of stock bought and sold on the major stock exchanges in the city. When this tax was eliminated in 1981, New York became one of the only major financial centers in the world without one. If reinstated, this tax would produce more than a billion dollars for improved state and city services. The city government has continued to subsidize the wealthy by providing them with real estate tax rebates to continue to do business in the city or even to build in parts of the city that would have been built in even if rebates hadn't existed.

It is self-defeating for our union to focus only on money for education. Instead of trying to outmaneuver the other unions for a larger share of a smaller pie, we must campaign with them for a larger pie that will give all of us and all public services the resources we need. Together we must bring the message to the public and our own union brothers and sisters about where and how we can get enough money to provide critical human services, and we must challenge union leaders and politicians who stand in our way.

.....

Independent Community of Educators (ICE)

Name _____

School or other agency _____ Level: Elem__ IS/JHS__ HS__ Functional__ Ret.__

District/Region _____ Phone _____

Address _____ Email _____

I am interested in running in the elections _____

I would like to distribute literature _____ *Number of copies* _____

I would like to contribute _____ *Amount* _____

I am interested in an ICE Forum (see page 9): A _____ B _____ C _____

I am not ready to get involved, but put me on your mailing list _____

ICE, 775 East 19th St. Brooklyn, NY 11230
 Phone: 917-992-3734
 Email: VOTEICE@aol.com