

Peace & Justice Caucus News

Winter, 2007



Mission Statement

The mission of the **NEA Peace & Justice Caucus** is to promote economic and social justice and peaceful resolution of conflict. The NEA Peace & Justice Caucus will advocate that the NEA work for public policies that:

- Reduce violence.
- Promote tolerance.
- Increase awareness of basic human and civil rights.
- Support the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively
- Work for world peace & disarmament.
- Reduce the military budget and increase funding of education and other social needs.

www.neapeaceandjusticecaucus.org

Join us for a massive march on Washington to tell the new Congress:

ACT NOW TO END THE WAR!

On Election Day the voters delivered a dramatic, unmistakable mandate for peace. Now it's time for action. On Jan. 27, 2007, help send a strong, clear message to Congress and the Bush Administration: **Bring the troops home now!**



**Saturday
Jan. 27**

Washington, D.C.
see website or call for more details

united for peace & justice
www.unitedforpeace.org (212) 868-5545

Tell Congress:

Defund the War Bring the Troops Home Now

By Rhonda Hanson, Chair, NEA Peace & Justice Caucus

Many of us heaved a huge sigh of relief when the electorate repudiated the president's agenda. Throwing the Republicans out would at least slow down the Bush administration's ability to continue wrecking havoc on virtually every aspect of American life. The Democrats might even enact some desperately needed reforms such as an increase in the minimum wage. But if the vote was a referendum on Bush's Iraq policy, it is much less clear that returning control of Congress to the Democrats will result in an end to the war. With Bush planning to deploy tens of thousands of additional troops to Iraq, Democratic Congressional leaders are talking tough. But will they use the one power they have to actually end the war—the power to cut off funding? Clearly the Democrats want to avoid blame for any problems that might result from a rapid withdrawal. Moreover, with a presidential election on the horizon, they would undoubtedly like to see George Bush continue to sink in the quagmire he has created. The danger, of course, is that if the Democrats concede too much and act too little, come 2008, they will be perceived as part of the problem.

When Congress reconvenes in January, it will take a massive effort on the part of the peace movement and the American public (85% oppose deploying additional troops to Iraq) to force Congress to act to end the war. But act we must. On Jan. 1, the U.S. troop death toll exceeded the 3,000 mark. Tens of thousands more have been wounded and disabled. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqi men, women, and children have died. We are spending \$2 billion per week in Iraq; \$360 billion to date. Yet under the occupation, sectarian violence gets worse every day.

Congress controls the purse strings. They can end the war by refusing to authorize the \$100 billion dollars Bush will request to continue the war effort. **Congress should authorize funding for the safe evacuation of the troops, full funding for their care when they return, and funding to finance reparations and the reconstruction of Iraq under control of Iraqis.** We must demand that Congress redirect national spending to serve human needs and promote peace and justice at home and around the world.

On Jan 27, Americans from every congressional district in the country will gather in Washington, DC to express support for those members of Congress who are prepared to take immediate action against the war; to pressure those who are hesitant to act; and to speak out against those who remain tied to a failed policy. We should all be there.

Report from the

THIRD NATIONAL USLAW LABOR ASSEMBLY AGAINST the WAR

Cleveland, Ohio
Dec. 1-3

In Jan., 2003, 75 trade unionists met in a Chicago Teamsters hall to discuss how labor could play a role in stopping the rush to war—a war that they correctly predicted would be disastrous for Iraqis, U.S. soldiers, our domestic budget, and world peace. Out of that initial meeting, U.S. Labor Against the War has emerged as the most effective anti-war labor organization in the country. More than 140 labor organizations have affiliated with USLAW, including 5 national unions and AFL-CIO constituency groups, 18 state and regional labor organizations, 16 central labor bodies, and 78 local unions. (The NEA Peace & Justice Caucus is a USLAW affiliate.) In 2005, USLAW conducted a coordinated campaign to get the AFL-CIO convention to break its silence on the war and to oppose the continuing occupation of Iraq. This campaign led the AFL-CIO to adopt a resolution calling for rapid withdrawal from Iraq and support for Iraqi unions and labor rights. USLAW has helped to pass antiwar resolutions at the conventions of a number of national unions, including NEA (which in 2005 called for a timetable for withdrawal) and the AFT, SEIU, CWA, and AFSCME.

USLAW spawned Educators to Stop the War, which held three successful conferences in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco that brought together educators from K-12 and higher education, from NEA, AFT and AAUP. Most importantly, USLAW has helped to open a discussion within the labor movement about the war and the impact of U.S. foreign policy on the domestic welfare of working people and the impossibility of pursuing an aggressive, unilateralist foreign policy and at the same time meeting the needs of the people for health care education, housing, elder and child care, veterans' benefits, infrastructure maintenance, and protection against natural disasters.

On Dec. 1, 2006, USLAW convened its third national conference in Cleveland, Ohio. Delegates to the conference adopted three important political objectives for 2007:

1. Compel Congress to defund the war and bring all U.S. troops home now, with continued funding only for the safe evacuation of the troops, full funding for their care when they return, and funding to fully finance reparations and reconstruction of Iraq under control of Iraqis, and to redirect national spending to serve human needs and promote peace and justice at home and around the world.
2. Strengthen membership and organizational activity at every level of the labor movement, including international unions and their

federations, in opposition to the war and occupation in Iraq.

3. Further develop USLAW solidarity with Iraqi unions, and other organizations that promote the interests of Iraqi working people, who are the key forces for the progressive democratic development of their country.

The delegates also took action on a number of resolutions that had been submitted for consideration by USLAW affiliates. These included resolutions to:

- Oppose military action against Iran; promote diplomatic non-military solutions
- Support repeal of the Military Commissions Act
- Build labor participation in the Jan. 27 antiwar demonstration in Washington, DC.
- Redirect funding from the war and occupation in Iraq to the rebuilding of New Orleans
- Expose the War Profiteers: encourage screenings of the film *Iraq for Sale: The War Profiteers* and demand Congressional hearings into war profiteering

A number of other resolutions, including one to open a dialogue on the Israel/Lebanon crisis, were referred to the incoming steering committee for further action.

On Saturday evening, Cindy Sheehan and Congressman Dennis Kucinich brought the delegates to their feet with calls for immediate withdrawal and for mass pressure on Congress to defund the war.

Rhonda Hanson, Chair of the NEA Peace & Justice Caucus, was elected to the new USLAW Steering Committee.

(For more about the work of USLAW, go to www.uslaboragainstar.org)



Oaxaca

In May 2006, Oaxaca's 70,000 member state-wide teachers' union initiated a strike and non-violent occupation of the city center, demanding better pay and work conditions, as well as improvements to the state's educational infrastructure and specifically that all school children are provided with shoes, breakfast and uniforms to go to school. At dawn on June 14, state governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz sent in state police to violently break up the ongoing, peaceful teachers' protest. The brutal police action, which included the firing of tear gas from helicopters onto the crowd below, sparked widespread outrage in many Oaxacans. However, the forthcoming repression against the teachers backfired. The entire world began to watch the events and this summer, NEA took a position that our President, Reg Weaver, write a letter to the President of Mexico in support of the teachers. Most importantly, the violent police actions sparked a widespread, broad-based, non-violent popular movement with the common demand for Governor Ruiz to resign. This demand awakened thousands of students, housewives, small business owners, workers, professors, professionals, campesinos, intellectuals and artists. Over 350 different civil organizations joined together and formed the People's Popular Assembly of Oaxaca (APPO). The United States intervened in late October when the U.S. Ambassador, Tony Garza, stated that the Fox government had "delayed too long" in resolving the situation in Oaxaca and needed to send Federal Troops. The next day, Fox sent in Mexican Federal Troops. Since the conflict began more than seven months ago, the situation in Oaxaca has become increasingly volatile and violent with hundreds of activists, teachers, human rights leaders and community organizers arrested and/or disappeared. There have been at least 20 people killed, including a United States journalist, Brad Will. Brad was shot in the chest by plain-clothed police while videotaping a protest.

The Peace and Justice Caucus joins with USLAW and other labor and democratic rights organizations throughout the world in urging the federal and state governments in Mexico to:

- Seek every avenue to a peaceful solution to the conflict in Oaxaca.
- Urge Mexican authorities to settle the conflict by meeting the legitimate demands put forward by the teachers and the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca:
 1. Immediate withdrawal of all troops and paramilitary units from the city and state of Oaxaca
 2. Stop repression and killings
 3. Remove from office Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz
 4. Release all detainees and political prisoners
 5. Bring to justice Governor Ruiz and all others responsible for the killings



Band-Aids or Bulldozers

What's next for NCLB?

By Stan Karp

Spring 2006

We are now in year five of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Once hailed as a historic new federal commitment to leave no child behind, today NCLB inspires fear and loathing from coast to coast — and beyond. Puerto Rico and Hawaii hate it too.

Every one of the 50 states has introduced legislation rejecting all or part of NCLB. Several have filed lawsuits against it. More than 10,000 schools have been put on NCLB's infamous list of "schools in need of improvement" and face an escalating series of sanctions that address neither their needs nor their challenges. Thousands more will be added to the list in the next few years as increasing numbers of schools are squeezed in the tightening vise of unreachable "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) test targets and inadequate resources. This year more than a quarter of all public schools (nearly 23,000) failed to reach AYP. Missing AYP two years in a row earns a spot on the list.

Today, NCLB is almost as unpopular as the administration and Congress that created it. With the law coming up for reauthorization in 2007, debate is heating up about whether we need Band-Aids to "fix" NCLB or a bulldozer to bury it.

So far, efforts to make NCLB more reasonable have been largely futile. Margaret Spellings, the new secretary of education, has used less inflammatory rhetoric than her predecessor (Rod "the NEA is a terrorist organization" Paige). But her department's much-lauded "flexibility" about NCLB regulations has been marginal. New guidelines allow schools to exempt more of their most severely disabled special education students from NCLB tests. Rules that require schools to give tests to limited English proficient (LEP) students in languages they don't know and then remove them from that category as soon as they know enough English to improve their scores have been modified slightly. States have been allowed to manipulate thresholds for "proficiency" and vary the number of students required before a subgroup's scores count. These changes have helped limit, temporarily, the number of "failing" schools, though a new study from the Harvard Civil Rights Project indicates that many of the changes have allowed more wealthy and white districts to avoid penalties imposed on poorer districts with more students of color.

But none of this tinkering has altered the fundamental problems with the law. Districts remain under mandate to reach 100 percent passing rates on state tests for all students by 2014. Next year, all districts are required to give math and language tests in every grade three through eight, and once in high school. Required science tests must

be added by 2007–08. The testing plague is spreading so fast even the companies making millions off it are having trouble keeping up. The Education Sector, a Washington, D.C., research group, recently estimated that public schools, which already give more than 33 million tests under NCLB, must add another 11.4 million by the end of the current school year. With states spending only about \$20 per student developing these tests, many are poorly made and even more unreliable than existing ones. Thirty-five percent of state testing offices reported a "significant error" by a testing contractor in scoring a state test since 2000. As researcher Walt Haney of Boston College has noted, "There is more public oversight of the pet industry and the food we feed our dogs than there is for the quality of tests we make our kids take."

Less well known, but soon to become much more familiar, are the law's more drastic measures for schools that miss AYP for four or five years. After four years, schools are required to choose one of the following:

- Replace school staff relevant to the failure.
- Put in place a new curriculum.
- Decrease management authority at the school.
- Appoint outside experts to advise the school.
- Extend the school year or the school day.
- Restructure the internal organization of the school.

After five years, the choices are:

- Reopen as a charter school.
- Replace all or most of the staff.
- Contract with an outside entity to operate the school.
- Institute other significant governance and staffing changes likely to improve the school.
- Turn over operation of the school to the state.

Since NCLB sanctions are cumulative, schools also must presumably continue to offer transfer and tutoring while instituting these measures.

These sanctions are a formula for chaos, not school improvement. Some (like extended school years and days) would require large sums of money that NCLB does not provide. Others are hopelessly vague ("a new curriculum," "other significant" changes) and others are a license to sell off public schools to private management firms ("contract with an outside entity"). But none of these strategies has any record of success when it comes to addressing the problems of educational inequality and academic achievement gaps that trigger their imposition. As researcher Gerald Bracey has pointed out, NCLB uses the phrase "scientifically based research" 111 times, but has "zero" scientific evidence to support the sanctions it imposes on the schools to improve performance.

Beneath the Rhetoric

Contention over how to respond to growing numbers of schools in the latter stages of NCLB sanctions will only add

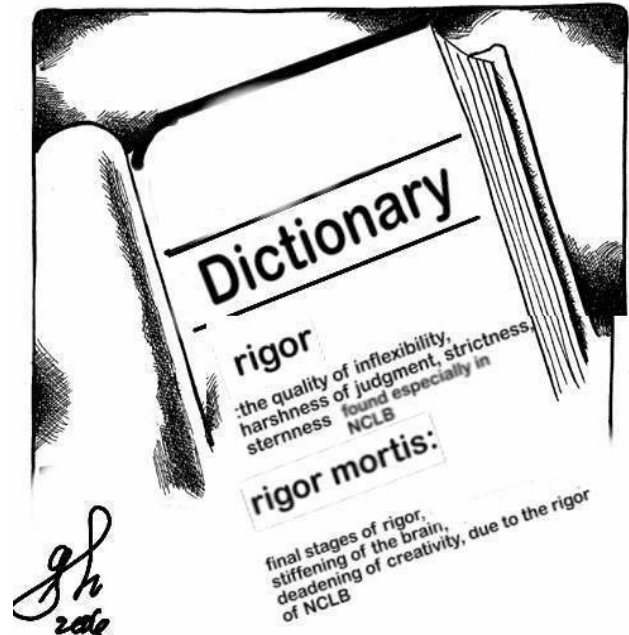
to resistance against the law. Still, the prospects for correcting such fundamental flaws while reauthorizing NCLB are mixed at best.

But beneath the rhetoric, NCLB's policy framework is toxic, bad for the health of schools and children and driven by ideological political objectives that are arrogantly indifferent to the realities of school life. It makes no commitment to bridging the deep social inequalities reflected in academic achievement gaps, but demands that schools make them disappear (and it demands more of poorer, diverse schools than richer, homogeneous ones). When schools fall short of the impossible, they face punitive sanctions that weaken their ability to serve all students and ultimately increase educational inequality instead of reduce it.

As NCLB reauthorization nears, a central question will be what can be done to limit the damage, especially since the law's harmful impact is poised to grow dramatically over the next five years as its more drastic sanctions kick in. Democratic supporters of the law generally have confined themselves to complaints about funding levels, while they continue to endorse NCLB as an essentially positive program for schools. But growing local and state sentiment against NCLB assures that other issues will surface in the reauthorization process. For that we'll need the voices of educators, students, and communities. One place those voices could make a difference will be the 2006 elections when the next Congress will be chosen. Many in the antiwar movement, frustrated by the failure of Congress to reflect the broad popular opposition to the war in Iraq, have pledged not to support any candidates who continue to support current U.S. policy. Similarly, opponents of NCLB might insist, at a minimum, on a pledge to end federally mandated testing, eliminate the direct ties between test scores and sanctions, and replace NCLB's privatization agenda with more funding and stronger support for improving the public system.

Sending people to Congress who are committed to ending both the war in Iraq and the war on our public schools would be a big step toward making good on the promises — empty so far — of No Child Left Behind.

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NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND---THE FOOTBALL VERSION

1. All teams must make the state playoffs and all MUST win the championship. If a team does not win the championship, they will be on probation until they are the champions, and coaches will be held accountable. If, after two years, they have not won the championship their footballs and equipment will be taken away UNTIL they do win the championship.

2. All kids will be expected to have the same football skills at the same time even if they do not have the same conditions or opportunities to practice on their own. NO exceptions will be made for lack of interest in football, a desire to perform athletically, or genetic abilities or disabilities of themselves or their parents.

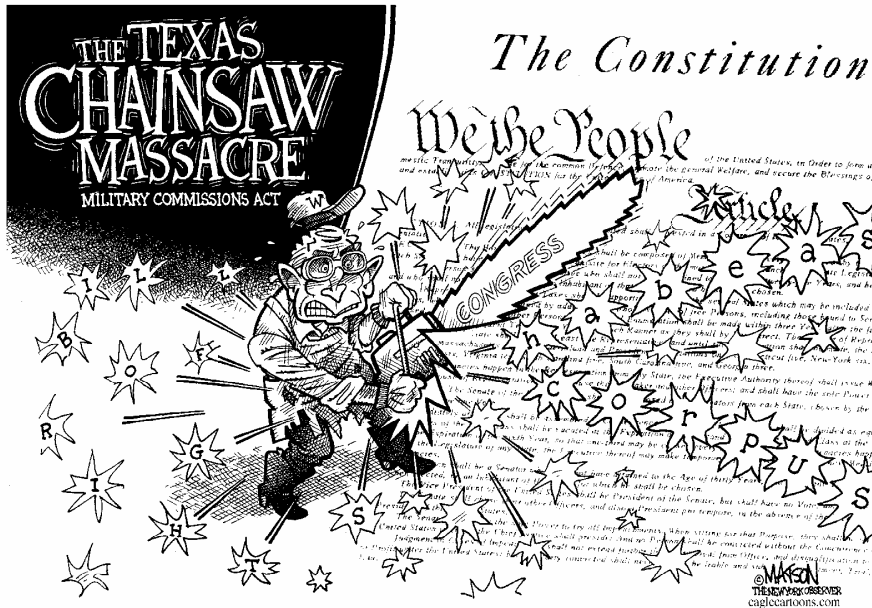
ALL KIDS WILL PLAY FOOTBALL AT A PROFICIENT LEVEL!

3. Talented players will be asked to workout on their own, without instruction. This is because the coaches will be using all their instructional time with the athletes who aren't interested in football, have limited athletic ability or whose parents don't like football.

4. Games will be played year round, but statistics will only be kept in the 4th, 8th, and 11th game. It will create a New Age of Sports where every school is expected to have the same level of talent and all teams will reach the same minimum goals. If no child gets ahead, then no child gets left behind. If parents do not like this new law, they are encouraged to vote for vouchers and support private schools that can screen out the non-athletes and prevent their children from having to go to school with bad football players.

In Defense of Constitutional Rights

By Tom Wolfe, P&J Midwest Regional Coordinator



unpatriotic and servile but is morally treasonable to the American public."

That is my position as well. We must speak loudly and forcefully against these outrages. Sitting on the fence just won't do it. All you'll get from that is hemorrhoids. Jimmy Carter once said that "the sad duty of politics is to establish justice in a sinful world." We must light a fire under our newly elected Congress and force them to confront this evil as we try to build that "city on a hill" where social justice reigns supreme. Let us begin by urging members of Congress to repeal the provision of the Military Commissions Act that denies the Constitutional right to habeas corpus.

During our nation's two hundred plus year history, Americans have endured a great many assaults on their constitutional rights, and at the end of each convulsion our republic still stood, a bit torn and tattered perhaps but still there. I mention all this because we live in troubled times. For several years now we Americans have seen our basic constitutional rights threatened and in some cases actually removed while our government conducts a war in Iraq for highly questionable reasons. Our government taps our phones and reads our mail; it detains Americans without charges and offers them no chance to use the due process clause supposedly guaranteed in our constitution; the CIA presently detains 15,000 people in prisons throughout the world where American laws don't reach and where torture is sometimes used; and our president recently guided through Congress the Military Commissions Act of 2006, a bill which removes habeas corpus rights for anyone the president wishes to have detained. He can also determine what torture techniques, if any, he wishes our interrogators to use. In other words, our government can now create its own gulag! While not up to Joe Stalin's standards as gulags go, we nevertheless have come a long way from Jefferson's dream "*of honest yeomen tilling the soil in a country whose silent path of happiness would find nothing for history to say.*"

What should we do about it? A look at the ancients for advice is no help. The Roman consul Cicero would have us do nothing **because "Laws must sleep when a nation struggles for its life."** On the other hand, during the First World War former President Theodore Roosevelt wrote: "**To announce that there must be no criticism of the President, or that we are to stand by the President right or wrong, is not only**

Military Commissions Act

The U.S. Constitution specifically provides in Article I, Section 9: "The privilege of the writ of habeas corpus" [which gives an imprisoned person the right to challenge in court the legality of his or her imprisonment] "shall not be suspended, unless when in cases of rebellion or invasion the public safety may require it.." On September 28 and 30, 2006, the House of Representatives and the Senate passed the Military Commissions Act, which denies the writ of habeas corpus to individuals labeled "unlawful enemy combatants," whether U.S. citizens or citizens of other nations. President George W. Bush had insisted on passage of this Act and immediately signed it into law. For the first time in our history, U.S. citizens can be arrested and detained indefinitely without charge if the President declares them to be "unlawful enemy combatants." Under the Military Commissions Act, virtually anyone can be determined to be an "unlawful enemy combatant" by a "competent tribunal" designated by the President without meeting any objective criteria for this designation. Hundreds of people are being held by the U.S. at Guantanamo and at other U.S. installations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and in other countries all over the world without recourse to habeas corpus or any meaningful review of their "enemy combatant" status. "Enemy combatants" can be tried and executed on the basis of coerced testimony, hearsay and secret classified testimony.

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A War Budget Leaves Every Child Behind

