

# Yo!

Publication of NJ Youth United Against War and Imperialism

# The Youth Organizer

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V.1 No. 1 - Fall / Winter 2011  
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## Student - Teacher Unity: The Only Way Forward

by Kayla Walden

Early this summer, while students and many teachers were scattered to the winds on break, many away on pre-planned vacations, NJ Governor Christie and about half the Democratic state legislators led by State Senator Stephen Sweeney and the entire set of Republican legislators were busy indeed. The bipartisan anti-teacher and public worker putsch occurred in June, when the New Jersey State Legislature passed a law that threatens the retirement security and health benefits of public employees. Under the bill, teachers will pay more into their retirement pension, and will get less when they retire. In terms of health benefits, the average teacher will be paying thousands of dollars more for their healthcare. The bill translates into a huge payout for our teachers.

Further, Governor Christie and the Democratic legislature plan on taking up the issue of Education 'reform' this fall. New Jersey has some of the best public schools in the nation, consistently ranking in the top five of all states using various measures. The schools where students do tend to struggle – places such as Trenton, Newark, and Atlantic City – are the result of extremely high poverty not poor teaching. The proposed bills will make it easier to fire more experienced teachers and will allow school districts to evaluate teachers based largely on student's standardized test scores.

What will be the effects of these laws and proposed bills on New Jersey's teachers? The initial effect will be a lessening of teacher's democratic rights as union members. Public school teachers in our state have unions that have traditionally allowed them to negotiate their health benefits, and the way in which teachers are evaluated. This is being undermined. The lasting effect will be good teachers leaving the profession and others deciding that it is not worth it to become a teacher – given the attack on teachers pay, benefits, and union rights.

This summer, a \$26 billion bill was passed by the House regarding teachers and public workers. Democrats promoted the bill as saving 300,000 public workers from being laid-off during the 2012 election year. President Obama signed the bill into law.

\$10 billion of the bill has been put toward the re-hiring of laid off teachers and to make sure that other teachers would not be let go before the beginning of the new year. The other \$16 billion is for a 6 month extension of Medicaid payments granted to the states. That money means that states can now focus on meeting other budgets, ensuring the safety of 150,000 jobs.

However, the Republican Party does not agree with said bill. They have labeled it "a giveaway to teachers' unions and an example of wasteful Washington spending that voters will punish the Democrats for in this fall's elections."

Schools all over the country have felt the impact of budget cuts made by local lawmakers, state governments, and the national government. New Jersey is doing no better.

Republican Governor Chris Christie has made numerous cuts in New Jersey budgets, most notably to education. Last year, he made more than \$1.3 billion in cuts to all school districts, resulting in the laying-off of teachers and the removal of classes and extra-curriculars. While all public schools were hit hard, none of the private schools were affected. Later, it was pointed out that Gov. Christie's children attended private schools. Suspicious, no?

In an interview with Caucus NJ host Steve Aduabato, a woman named Gail asked Christie

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## United States At War Without End

It seems like the US will never stop the many wars it now has going. Big companies make billions from selling weapons and hiring mercenaries in support of the wars.

One war is in Afghanistan one of the poorest countries in the world. The war was a response to the 9-11 attacks and it is now the longest war the US has been in. Obama has greatly increased the US war through a "surge" policy which has increased the number of US soldiers dying there, surpassing the totals from the entire years of Bush's 2 terms. Now drone strikes are launched regularly in Afghanistan and Pakistan many times resulting in civilian casualties.

In Iraq, the US made false charges of WMD's (weapons of mass destruction) and launched an attack in 2003. Some scientific studies have found that over a million people have died as a result. Now there are about 50,000 troops there participating in various missions.

Like Pakistan and Afghanistan, the US regularly makes drone attacks in Somalia and Yemen and those attacks result in many civilian casualties as well.

In the last half year the US and NATO conducted a war in Libya. At first it was supposed to be a humanitarian mission to prevent casualties but it soon changed to a regime change action as the US allied with armed militias. It is unclear what the civilian death toll is there but there are reports about reprisal actions largely targeting Black Africans who were there as guest workers. It is likely that foreign troops probably including

Americans will be sent there to "stabilize."

In Latin America where several governments like Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia and others are trying to be more independent from foreign companies, the US is building a troop presence in Colombia. That is a possible threat of more military action in that region. The US also continues a military presence in support of military operations in the Philippines.

At Guantanamo prison and secret prisons around the world, the US holds prisoners accused of either terrorism or of opposing the US military actions somewhere in the world. There are many reports that torture takes place at these prisons. The US also says it has the right to strike militarily anywhere in the world in pursuit of its "war on terrorism."

Our group Youth United Against War and Imperialism wants an immediate end to all of this war making and wants the US troops brought home immediately. The money being wasted should be spent on free tuition, universal health, jobs and housing for all, full funding of public education and meeting people's needs instead. Our generation is the cannon fodder for these wars and we need to resist the wars if we are to survive. Like young people around the world who are taking to the streets to work for changes, we need to heed the call and work to end the wars here.

Contact us TODAY and get involved in the efforts to end the wars immediately. [ See related articles on military recruitment on page 3. ]

## NJ Students Fight the Hikes

The cost of college has risen sharply in recent years, making it much harder for young people to access higher education, forcing many into dead-end jobs. It was not always this way. In 1996, a year at Rutgers cost only four thousand dollars, as opposed to the \$12,755 it costs now. The federal and state governments used to subsidize colleges much more. NJ used to give public universities 2/3 of the cost of each student's tuition. But now, NJ covers only 1/3 third of the costs. Each student has to come up with the remaining 2/3 on their own. The average 4-year student in the US graduates \$24,000 in debt.

Government support can make higher education accessible without forcing students into debt. An active, united student movement is the only thing that will make government officials take measures that help us, instead of helping the banks that profit from our debt. At Rutgers, such a movement just won a major victory, cutting hundreds from a planned tuition hike.

There, students formed Rutgers United, as an umbrella group to organize against tuition hikes. Rutgers United includes the Women's Center Coalition, the United Black Council, Queer Caucus, Asian American Leadership Cabinet and others. Rutgers United reached out to progressive students from Rutgers Newark and seven other public universities around New Jersey, and formed New Jersey United Students (NJUS).

Rutgers United members ran for Student Assembly (RUSA), an assembly which currently acts like a student government, although the administration can override its decisions. The Rutgers United candidates said that the Student Assembly shouldn't be an organization for governing students, but rather, a student union that represents student interests to administration— that is, stands up for lower tuition, the rights of students to privacy and due process, and other concerns. Rutgers United gained a majority of Student Assembly seats in 2010 and voted to affiliate Rutgers New Brunswick with the United States Student Assembly (USSA). The USSA works like a student union on the national level.

"Being part of a national organization expands your capacity to

organize," said Rutgers United organizer and RUSA vice-president Matt Cordeiro, mentioning that the USSA was helping to raise funds for NJUS.

In fall 2010, Rutgers United hosted a teach-in on how the banks were profiting from student debt, and how it could be resisted. This was followed up by a number of large-scale actions in the spring of 2011.

The Walk Into Action was the first major demonstration of the semester. On April 13, over 300 students walked out of class and shut down College Ave. Similar actions occurred at state colleges throughout NJ. These actions were coordinated with similar actions at state colleges throughout California as well.

"The way I see it... we put pressure on the administration all semester, from storming into McCormick's office during the Walk Into Action, to the sit-in, to constantly having a presence at the Board of Governors meetings. And it was the mix of all these that [gave us] the means to exert power intelligently," said Renee Coppola, a student on RUSA who also took part in the Old Queens occupation.

The Board of Governors is the unelected group of officials who run Rutgers. The B.O.G. is headed by Ralph Izzo, the CEO of Public Service Enterprise Group (PSEG, formerly Public Service Electric & Gas). This is a typical example of a university B.O.G. representing corporate interests. On April 27, twenty Rutgers students occupied the Old Queens administration building. They held a sit-in at President McCormick's office that lasted a day and a half, demanding a more democratic B.O.G. structure, fair pay for campus workers, and an immediate tuition freeze.

These actions have been stronger and more effective because the student movement has built a coalition with the faculty and staff of the university, who also suffer from the decisions of the Board of Governors.

In 2009, when negotiating the budget for the upcoming year, these Rutgers workers agreed to forgo salary raises for inflation, but signed a contract with the administration, that said these raises would be given to

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