

New Action/UFT

...a caucus of the United Federation of Teachers
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JANUS - IT TAKES A FIGHT TO WIN!

This year the UFT and membership may face the most difficult year in our history with the adverse U.S. Supreme Court decision in the Janus case. We are convinced Chapter Leaders and activists in our schools will rise to the occasion and support our union by convincing every member to pay union dues. New Action is committed to make that happen.

But much more needs to be done to make this a reality. While the union has made considerable efforts to inform members about the benefits they derive from being members (specifically their efforts to set up committees in each school; sending activists to go door to door knocking, and using the NY Teacher to publicize the importance of the union to its members) they have missed the boat in key areas. UFT members want and need a more pro-active, militant response from our union. There is no simple solution but New Action offers a few for your consideration:

COMBAT ABUSIVE ADMINISTRATORS – Principals who harass our members and single out chapter leaders are a persistent problem in too many schools. The union needs to go after these abusers and let the membership know we will not tolerate this behavior. We have helped some members find support by appealing to the leadership at the UFT Executive Board. But members are too often rebuffed before they get there. The union, at every level, needs to take on abusive administrators.

INVOLVE MEMBERS IN A REAL CONTRACT FIGHT – The secret negotiations must end. Members should be involved any contract fight. What are the issues? We must ask school chapters to meet and hear reports on any progress! We must have them engaged in a real struggle.

UPHOLD THE CONTRACT – Principals are doing an end run around the contract. The union needs to consistently show it is there for us, has our backs. Too many administrators ignore our rights on programming, class size, professional assignments, etc. These should be challenged aggressively, individually and collectively. We must restore the right to grieve letters to the file.

ADDRESS THE PROBLEMATIC EVALUATION SYSTEM – Members have the right to challenge technical problems in APPR, but not the AP's mistakes. And we know that administrators are often wrong – members need the right to challenge supervisory judgment. The number of observations is unnecessarily high: teachers who are year after year satisfactory need not be observed more than twice a year. But fundamentally the problem is deeper – ratings based on student test-scores are arbitrary and unfair. We need to repeal the State Law that established this.

END PATRONAGE – Hundreds are given part time union jobs based on membership in Unity Caucus. All they have in common is the agreement, when there is a vote, not to make up their own mind but to vote as Unity tells them. This system undermines members' confidence in our union.

EMPOWER LOCAL LEADERS – Chapter Leaders (CLs) are volunteers. They are directly elected by their members. They should be the backbone of our union. But their representatives, the District Reps (DRs), are appointed by the President. They are responsive to 52 Broadway first, and issue directives to CLs. We should return to a system where DRs are accountable to CLs; we should return to the long-established practice of direct election of DRs by Chapter Leaders.

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STAND WITH THE PEOPLE OF PUERTO RICO!

September 20 marks one year since Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. Over 4,600 people died in this catastrophe. One year later, the destruction of Puerto Rico has not ended. Nearly 300 schools have closed. Around 400,000 Puerto Ricans have left the island.

Yet, President Trump declares an, “incredible, unsung success” with Hurricane Maria relief efforts. He refuses to even acknowledge the death toll of nearly 3,000 people. This is a total disgrace!

New Action/UFT is a co- sponsor of a September 20 rally calling for support for rebuilding efforts for the island. Join us at Union Square, 6pm immediately following our city-wide Chapter Leader meeting.

Primary Endorsements; Primary Elections

High School Executive Board asked for endorsement of the anti-IDC Challengers

There was no meeting to decide who the UFT would support at the NYSUT endorsement conference in August. And there were hot races for the NY State Senate – in the wake of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s victory, progressive challengers, including Robert Jackson who the UFT awarded the John Dewey Award for his work for education, were organizing strong primary challenges.

So we wrote to UFT President Mulgrew, all seven of us: KJ Ahluwalia, Arthur Goldstein, Ashraya Gupta, Jonathan Halabi, Marcus McArthur, Kate Martin-Bridge, and Mike Schirtzer. By the way, we are the only UFTers elected directly by the High School Division. We urged support for challengers in the races against the IDC (the group that ran as Democrats but caucused as Republicans, enriching themselves while blocking legislation we needed). The challengers we wanted to support were: Alessandra Biaggi, Robert Jackson, John Liu, Zellnor Myrie, Jessica Ramos, and Jasmine Robinson.

And then, since we didn’t really get an answer, we wrote to ask who the UFT leadership were supporting. The response was that there was “a neutral start” to each discussion.

NYSUT’s Endorsements were Embarrassing

At NYSUT, only one challenger, Zellnor Myrie got the endorsement. The UFT blocked the endorsement of Biaggi. Worse, two IDC members were endorsed (with UFT concurrence): Jose Peralta and Marisol Alcantara. Endorsing Alcantara meant working against Robert Jackson, a true champion for public education. What a shame.

But the Challengers Still Won

Despite the NYSUT mistakes, five of the six challengers in NYC won, including Jackson and Biaggi, who defeated IDC kingpin Jeff Klein. UFT members, despite the NYSUT mistakes, worked on the challengers’ campaigns, and were part of the successful grassroots mobilizations. These members are showing the way forward, away from backroom deals, towards progressive, participatory activism. Our union’s political action needs to follow suit.

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