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Resistance to public higher education in trade agreements.

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As these trends have been observable for some time, organizations have been formed on all levels, from global to local, to resist the distortion of educational goals by a narrow profit-orientation.

On the broadest level, there is **Education International**, which includes our own parent federation, the AFT, along with 314 other organizations representing 26 million members in 180 countries.

EI is concerned that proposals for a significant increase in the scope of, and degree of, liberalisation of trade, might cover education services. EI's central objective is to have education excluded from the scope of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).

EI is particularly concerned about higher education. At its 20th Executive Board meeting, 4-6 February 2003, EI leaders noted that governments are increasingly defining their sector of public responsibility as the compulsory sector which leaves pre-school, technical and vocational education, tertiary education and other education services outside this domain. They complain that GATS is a legal quagmire and that

their questions are not answered well. They state firmly that potential disputes over whether a [practice is restrictive to the liberalization of trade “can never be acceptable for education.”

In practice, EI has raised these concerns with the WTO, with representatives of governments, in public meetings, with national trade union centers, and with EI member organizations. It urges members to increase their efforts to stop their governments from making commitments on education under GATS. More specifically, EI urges members to work in coalition with trade unions and with civil society to ensure that GATS related negotiations do not provide public funds to private educational institutions or undermine the terms and conditions of employment determined through collective agreements.

EI's member organization, the British Association of University Teachers, notes that the GATS agreement “inevitably leads to a decrease in public funding, job security professional autonomy and status , academic quality, and will have a negative impact on academic freedom, intellectual property rights and access to education. . . the pressure to make research projects and the dissemination of their findings through teaching attractive to commercial sponsors. [see p. 22 of pamphlet for specific cases in Canada, and CAUT's successful resistance]. Also, work completed in the service of for-profit higher education providers would be registered as their property, as they sold it for commercial gain. In combination with short-term teaching contracts, members who went to work for another organization could be sued for breach of copyright if they used their own material again.

In view of these mounting concerns, EI at its 3rd World Congress in Jomtien, Thailand 25-29 July 2001, encouraged higher education trade unions to develop strategies for actively organizing members across national boundaries to ensure that the employment rights of personnel employed by transnational providers are protected. The Congress also mandated its Executive Board to continue lobbying to ensure that cultural diversity, the values and histories of societies and preparation for citizenship prevail over the commercial rules of WTO in the exchanges of education services.

In this hemisphere, two organizations have taken up those charges: **Initiative for Democratic Education in the Americas (IDEA)** and the **Tri-National Coalition for the Defense of Public Education** and the PSC has joined both.

The Tri-National Coalition was founded in 1994 at a conference in Zacatecas, Mexico as a result of concerns about possible effects of NAFTA on education. The Mexican section consists of some locals of the National Union of Educational Workers and higher education unions from universities in Zacatecas, Queretaro, Chapingo, and Mexico City's National Autonomous University. It has facilitated sister union relations especially in Canada, where the British Columbia Teachers Federation is especially active. Conferences allow members to network and plan joint activities and studies.

But a main purpose is to bring higher education unions into the discussions created by the formal participation of Education Ministers in the negotiations around the FTAA. Education Ministers are creating an Education Plan for the Americas and they are formally asking for comment by civil society. IDEA was set up to provide that comment and did so during the FTAA negotiations in Quebec City, Canada, in April

2001. In January 2002, the Tri-National coalition joined IDEA in Porto Alegre, Brazil to place public education on the formal, plenary agenda of the World Social Forum, an event I attended as representative of the PSC.

However, the first such conference organized by IDEA that I attended was in Morelia, Mexico, Oct-31-Nov.2, 2001. The theme of the conference, held from October 31 to November 2, was “Women, Public Education, and Globalization.” Over eighty women delegates representing faculty unions in virtually every Latin American country offered testimony after testimony about how their educational institutions, from elementary to university level, are threatened by the same moves toward privatization that we at CUNY are battling. The Argentine representative, whose country teetered near bankruptcy, described how neo-liberal structural adjustments had weakened education, forcing science and technology sections to capitulate to profit-oriented economic institutions. The Canadian representative noted that gains made in the 1970s began to be eroded in the 1990s with government attacks on class size, sick leave, and students with special needs. Canada, once proud of its humane equalizing policies, now spends less than before on education and has entered “the race to the bottom.” Mexican representatives pointed out that universities now had to sell their services to get funding and were reducing student access through testing carried out by private evaluation companies. Higher ranked schools got more resources. Federations of unions could no longer bargain collectively and local negotiators faced demands for merit pay and bonuses, while confronting deeper divisions between full-time and part-time faculty over issues of hierarchy and competition.

Four workshops brainstormed ways to resist these tendencies. Since the theme was on women's roles and needs, some proposals focused on these: establishing women's leadership training in faculty unions, initiating women's studies programs and sex education courses, as well as developing non-sexist pedagogy. More broadly, proposals aimed at mobilizing parents and other social groups to oppose the privatization and corporatization of public education in general and the inclusion of educational services in the agreement for the Free Trade Area of the Americas in particular. Most exciting of all was the planning for hemispheric cooperation. One such was a Continental Campaign in South and North America on designated days of October 2002 against the commercialization of education, with coordinated activities. This became the occasion for our own conference on October 26, 2002, about which more presently.

The next Tri-National Conference that I attended was in Toronto, Canada, May 9-11, 2003, hosted mainly by the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, which allocates a percentage of its dues to international issues. Here we heard good news and bad news. The bad news is that globalization is making inroads into public education everywhere. The good news is that some resistance has succeeded and that international solidarity is solidifying. Some of the bad news:

- De-funding, vouchers, standardized tests, hostility to educators' unions, rising tuition, distance learning, privatization.
- Mexico experiences daily defensive struggles. Focus on specific local struggles have been obstacle to transnational focus. Casualized labor in technological

universities; tuition hikes. Pres. Salinas in 1992 opened education to privatization; Coca Cola already helps run some schools.

- Ontario encourages privatization on grounds that competition would improve public education.
- Quebec has suffered cuts in funding for public education; while the population has declined, more students are now in private schools.
- Early tracking, with poorer students channeled into practical trades.
- BCTF contract includes “open learning,” a form of “**unbundling**” that designates **wages per task**, breaking down teacher functions into e.g. **knowledge discoverers, purveyors, assessors**. This encourages piecework and privatization.
- Technology encourages privatization, e.g. proprietary platforms like “Blackboard” are software that lock people in. The expense of technology makes the up front costs high, giving advantage of wealthy companies or universities that can then drive out local education.
- Accreditation endangered (this from Mary Burgan, AAUP): Current Asst. Sec’y of Education for Higher Education was a former lobbyist for the U. of Phoenix. There is an attempt to substitute **branding (logo) of universities for accreditation**, which requires a campus, library, and faculty. Branding, by contrast, can offer **single courses**, which can now get **student funding** – rather than a process of course-work.

- Academic freedom endangered (Burgan, AAUP). AAUP had a Ford-funded committee to examine this; report appeared in summer 2003. See www.aaup.org Some universities have not protected their faculty from corporate interventions. In the Mexican Polytechnical U. no professor got tenure in last 4 years; students divided: some informers in classrooms, others are repressed even physically.
- Globally, education is a \$2 trillion industry, hence the commercial interest in it. Distance learning currently spends \$300 billion/year: it's the Trojan horse. In favor of market access are U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Japan. If successful, this would undermine local hiring preferences, local content, subsidies to local students, would disallow preference for non-profit over profit institutions.

WAS THERE ANY GOOD NEWS IN TORONTO? SOME:

- Mexico and Canada have supported each other's strikes, e.g. when Mexicans demonstrated on behalf of OSSTF in front of Canadian Embassy in Mexico City.
- Quebec has fought off vouchers and advertising in schools.
- Some Mexican schools have halted standardized testing for admission.

RECOMMENDATIONS WERE HEARD:

- Adopt a sister union and establish bilateral relations with it.
- Educate on the issues.
- CopyLeft instead of CopyRight: preserve social forms of learning, non-commercial open access.

- Besides lobbying, there should be more mobilization and connection to wider social movements. Educational organizations alone can't stop privatization; wider support is needed. Form coalitions with students, parents, NGOS.
- Do research on private education companies and demand an end to public subsidies for them. 30% of their profits come from drop-out rates.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE PSC:

Chartered by the PSC in 2001, for solidarity and the education of our members, the International Committee has accomplished a number of things in the past three years. [see list] What I would like most to share with you is the content and effect of our conference in October 2002, as part of IDEA's "Continental Campaign," on "Globalization, Privatization, War: In Defense of Public Education in the Americas," to which we invited speakers from the Mexican and Canadian sections of the Tri-National Coalition.

Besides the plenary speakers, who were very informative about academic unionism their particular countries, we held ten workshops on: responses to privatization and corporate influence on education, intellectual property and distance learning in the Americas, academic freedom, higher education unions in a globalized environment, contingent labor organizing, racism internationally and access to higher education, migration and higher education in the Americas, gender and sexuality in the education crisis, education in a time of war, and campus health and safety internationally.

The workshops brimmed with creative proposals to meet the challenges, ranging from dramatic actions to extended research. There was agreement on the central issue of the public budget and its financing. Local budgets should be made transparent, as the Campaign for Fiscal Equity has proposed regarding the opaque New York City budget. A study is needed on the direct cost to education of the prison-industrial-military complex. Alternatives should be elaborated, for example on the model of the participatory budgets used by cities in Brazil governed by the Workers Party.

An underlying debate among workshop participants emerged, however, from different analyses of the present situation. One view was that we should accept the fact that corporatization has already arrived in the university and that we should negotiate within that paradigm for equal citizenship and greater empowerment through co-determination of such new issues as intellectual property rights as well as of traditional issues like employment and curricula. Contesting this was the view that we should resist corporatization and privatization by following militant Latin American models, by employing direct action, for example to restore remediation and open access to CUNY, and by forming local and international coalitions for such actions.

Coalitions were also deemed essential. For international solidarity, the PSC has made a beginning by joining *IDEA*. Independently the PSC, through its International Committee, has begun solidarity work with university professors in the state of Colombia, where in 2002, nearly half of the 184 murdered activist unionists were teachers. Their “crimes” were their struggle against the privatization of public higher education, against budget cuts to the University system, and especially against increases

in tuition costs that close the educational opportunities of young people from poor families. This made the teachers suspect of participating in the civil war ravaging Colombia.

SINTRAUNICOL, the union of university workers and employees of Colombia, with affiliates at 27 public universities there, has suffered the effects of this state terrorism. In 2000, the national President of the union (Gilberto Agudelo Martinez) was “disappeared” and in 2002, the union leaders (Tito Livio Hernandez) of the University of Narino and (Cesar Orlando Gomez) the President of the local at the University of Pamplona, were assassinated. The National Executive Committee of the Union has been threatened as a whole and several members have been threatened individually, forcing them into exile.

One of the exiles is Wilson Moyano, a professor of chemistry at the University of Pamplona. As a beneficiary of an AFL-CIO program offering temporary asylum through an internship program, Prof. Moyano visited a meeting of the International Committee and explained the situation in greater detail. As a result, we have written letters to President Uribe of Colombia and to the Interior Ministry on Moyano’s behalf (as he has returned to his university), indicating our concern that measures be taken for the protection of his life and that we are prepared to use our influence to guarantee that those who violate human and labor rights would be held responsible.

We are now preparing to select a union at one of the universities in Colombia for a sister relationship. We have been in contact with the union of the university at

Bradford, UK, which already has a “twinning” relationship with the union of the university at Cali, Colombia.

Colombia is, of course, a worst case scenario. However, we are all in the same boat on the global seas and we need to be attentive and helpful when the waves wash over our colleagues. In the end, we sink or swim together.