

New York City teachers rally against attacks on education

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Ten thousand New York City teachers rallied outside City Hall October 21 to protest attacks on the public schools. The podium chiefly consisted of city elected officials and union leaders leading ambiguous chants of “Let teachers teach” and “They just don’t get it.” UFT President Randi Weingarten thought it was something to boast about that of the 864 paraprofessionals laid off with no real action by the union at the end of the school year, 710 have received their jobs back.

No mention was made of the lack of a contract since June 1. In negotiations, Weingarten has offered to concede work rules, as an “experiment” in 50 or more schools, which limit class size, assignments outside the classroom and class scheduling. UFT action against overcrowding has been limited to proffering a resolution for the ballot in November that would merely set up a commission to study class-size limits for some future time. New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg has been successful so far in using the courts to prohibit this question from the ballot.

The UFT is also calling for a “no” vote on the Republican mayor’s resolution to end elections using political party labels. Weingarten is head of the Municipal Labor Council, of which none of the unions have contracts now except transit. Having no alternative in the face of government claims of cuts needed to meet city debt, Weingarten’s central strategy is to save labor’s alliance with the Democrats. City Council Speaker Gifford Miller, a Democrat, is proposing \$12.9 billion over five years for school construction and renovation, less than the minimal \$28.4 billion proposed back in 1998 before cuts.

Teachers at the rally enthusiastically denounced the “micro-managing” of classroom practices by Chancellor Joel Klein. New teachers expressed with dismay to the *World Socialist Web Site* that they did not

find teaching to be the profession they thought it was because of the conditions and bureaucracy.

A second-year teacher at elementary school P.S. 126 held a sign stating he was among the 3,900 teachers who will not begin being paid until November, which will also result in a bigger tax bite on the larger lump-sum payment then. Those not paid for the last nine weeks include mostly new teachers and some who were “excessed” and then re-hired. “Klein thought it was smart to cut people from the payroll. Way to go,” he said.

A teacher with a group from P.S. 151 and 145 described classes that are too big. One of the schools had 820 students after 250 more were added than last year when P.S. 2 was closed and its students merged. “I am acting only as a safety guard. Classes went from 20 students to 30 or 32. There is the reason why teachers classes in New York City will score lower. Teachers should be respected as much as firefighters. People aren’t getting paid because of the cuts. There are so many kids and too little resources. The principal can only buy so many cartons of paper. The chancellor prescribes programs which we cannot implement in the classrooms. They don’t have any real working knowledge of education.”

A spontaneous chant from the crowd broke out of “Recall Bloomberg,” referring to the mayor. One high school teacher stated: “I am here to show unity with teachers. They dropped programs like physics, French, and Italian that we used to have.”



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