

Meeting the Right's Attack on Public Sector Unions in the US- Are there Effective Strategies?

Introduction

The rapid turn to the political Right in domestic US politics compelled the writing of this paper. It is not a traditional academic undertaking, but, rather, an effort to inform our international colleagues of what this worrisome shift looks like and what at least one union, the United Federation of Teachers in New York City, is doing to counter this attack.

The numbers describing the unionized public sector¹ in the United States' work force over the last 2 years are not pretty:

- More than 200,000 workers² have been laid off in the past year, with 48,000 state and local government workers laid off in July alone; many hundreds of thousands more experienced "furloughs," e.g., forced days off without pay.
- A July 2010 government report filed by leaders of city, municipal, and county agencies predicts that layoff totals (including non-union employees) will likely approximate 500,000 workers by the end of 2012. Unions represent 37% of the public-sector work force in the US, although nearly one half of those workers are in the states of New York, New Jersey, California, Illinois, and Pennsylvania.
- Eligibility for excellent health care coverage at modest or affordable cost is rapidly disappearing, especially for retirees.
- Wage decreases from 3-7%, ostensibly to avoid layoffs in the sector, are on the increase throughout the country.
- Historic job security for public school teachers is threatened by sharp decreases in funding for public schools, publicly subsidized, non-union "charter schools," and statutory changes in "tenure" definitions making it often easier to get rid of so-called "underperforming" school teachers; 26 states have already laid off public employees and five more have engaged in the furloughs mentioned above.
- Although these projections and current worries caused the US Senate in late July, 2010, to allot \$26 billion more for state and local governments to pay for teachers and fire and police protection, "It's pretty clear even with the \$26 billion, you're still talking about public sector layoffs, particularly with teachers," said Ernie Goss, a labor economist at Creighton University in Omaha, Neb., who conducts three surveys each month of 15 states that consistently show economic weakness. "The recovery has definitely weakened."³

¹ When this paper mentions the "unionized public sector," it refers to city, municipal, county, and state workers.

² Federal Reserve Chairman, Ben Bernanke, August 9, 2010, Washington Times

³ CNNMoney.com, August 6, 2010, Jennifer Liberto,

This paper will further detail certain pieces of this economic and political reality, and then explain through case studies the efforts of New York City's education⁴ union, the United Federation of Teachers (affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers and the AFL-CIO) as it struggles to blunt the crisis' harshness that affects so many of our friends, families, and neighbors.

Why Are Public Sector Unions Blamed for this Governmental Crisis?

It is helpful to begin answering this important question with some other numbers. In the US, union density barely exceeds seven percent of private sector workers, while 37% of public sector workers are in US unions. 2009 was the first year that the raw number of unionized public-sector workers exceeded those in the private sector.⁵ The federal government agency that annually monitors these statistics also found that the density of public sector membership actually increased during 2009, despite the recession, layoffs, and furloughs.

This resiliency of the public sector unions alarms the Right⁶ in this country, and it has resorted to vilifying the growing strengths of the sector's Movement by referring to the UFT's "cozy" relationship to Mayor Bloomberg of New York City as a "cartel," and the public sector's growth in power as having "become so powerful as to threaten the Madisonian system set up to constrain any one faction from overwhelming the public interest."⁷ Websites⁸ are filled with salary tables of every public school teacher, fire fighter and police officer. Newspapers are fed stories about the "gross" earnings, often through overtime, of public safety officers, as exemplified here:

"In New York City, where public sector union benefits have grown twice as fast as those in the private sector since 2000, firefighters may retire after 20 years at half pay. Pension benefits for a new retiree averaged just under \$73,000 (all exempt from state and local taxes). Many also collect an annual \$12,000 "Christmas bonus." To top it off, they

⁴ Actually, the fact that the UFT represents and seeks to represent public day care workers, nurses, and school related personnel, amongst others, and not just teachers, is what makes it effective in these difficult times.

⁵ According to a January 2010 report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of labor, there were 7.9 million public sector workers versus 7.4 million unionized workers in the private sector.

⁶ The "Right," for purposes here, includes press and blogging critics, Tea Party activists, and substantial segments of the Republican party, many of whom primarily blame the massive state and city budget deficits in the US for excessive salary and benefits and pension promises that public- sector unions have achieved through collective bargaining and legislation.

⁷ The quotes are from a Weekly Standard article in October 12, 2009, co-authored by Fred Siegal, who wrote an admiring biography of former NYC mayor, Rudolph Guiliani. The reference to Madison refers to one of the key creators of the US Constitution who is considered by many as a key architect of the "inherent fairness" in the balance of power reflected in the US Constitution.

⁸ A good example of this "blasting" of public sector salaries is the conservative think tank, Empire Center's web site, www.empirecenter.org

receive a health insurance policy that is worth about \$10,000 annually. New York City is also paying benefits to 10,000 retired police officers under 50 years of age. Such cases abound. According to the *Boston Globe*, 225 of the 2,338 Massachusetts state police officers made more than Governor Deval Patrick's \$140,535 annual salary in 2006. Four state troopers received more than \$200,000, and 123 others were paid more than \$150,000. The *Chicago Sun-Times* reports that in suburban Chicago, there are school administrators--a unionized profession--who are making over \$400,000. California teachers are represented by one of the country's most powerful teachers' unions and earn 25 percent more than the national average. *Forbes* has reported that there are California prison guards making \$300,000 a year.⁹

Reports like those shown here leave the relatively uninformed citizenry with the dual impression of public sector unions' naked power, and, worse, that that power is used to increase the average citizen's tax burden- how else are these monies paid to police, teachers, and public workers? Even moderate national publications print incomplete stories and exploit these concerns by telling America that government workers make 20% or more than their counterparts in the private sector, but barely mention that their statistical "conclusions" do not take into account the education levels of the workers compared nor their years of experience.¹⁰

This broader anti-tax, anti-union, and thus anti-government sentiment has risen in many quarters in the United States since the recession's onset. The fact that many banks, financial houses, and auto companies like GM have paid back considerable sums of the monies they were loaned is not a key part of the public conversation. It is in this context as well that the attack on the unionized public sector in the US must be understood, and with unemployment remaining very high, taxes still increased, at least locally, and school children's advances in most major cities stalled again, support for unionized public workers continues to sag. The ability of the Right to control the public dialogue so skillfully, and develop this distorted narrative, is also helped by the very fact that often public employees are part of the few families that have good health care and a pension, with it paid for by their neighbors, who are likely to have neither.

Fighting this blame game and its demonization of public-sector workers is increasingly difficult as the US economy recedes and stubborn and very lengthy unemployment magnify working families' frustrations. While the stories of excessive overtime and ballooned fire fighter and police earnings jeopardize their credibility and thus support amongst the citizenry, public education professionals and their unions find themselves undermined by President Obama and his educational advisers who reward "winning"¹¹ states with significant monetary infusions if they change their educational systems to an untried, more free market model. Unions have not

⁹ Siegal, Weekly Standard, page 4

¹⁰ USA Today, August 10, 2010, and many, many other publications

¹¹ The President calls this contest "Race to the Top" but its criteria involve heavy reliance on testing, very controversial in the US, as the measure of "school and teacher success"

succeeded in offering different explanations to this disturbing narrative created by the Right, and, as a result, their bargaining and political strengths are slipping.¹²

Given these developments, has the United Federation of Teachers been able to create a different trade union narrative?

Although New York City is often thought to be amongst America's most liberal cities, since 2002 its public education system has embodied a classic neoliberal design. Its mayor, billionaire Mike Bloomberg, seized control of the 1 million student system by legislative action, and through his education czar, Joel Klein, has tried one free market change after another, with the latest being installation of nearly every school principal as an entrepreneur, meaning her/his yearly evaluation will in part depend on the success of their economic "report card."

Corporate friends and allies of Bloomberg have poured hundreds of millions of dollars into the city's public education efforts, enhancing "innovation" in teaching and learning, nearly always sidestepping, ignoring, and disrespecting the voice of the educational professionals and their union, the UFT. A stated objective of the Administration's policies, a laudable one, is to close the gap between white and Asian children, on the one hand, and the other children of color. For years they claimed success at this only to find the discrepancy as great as ever when the state of New York announced this July that the tests for previous years were both too easy and too easily graded, resulting in brown and black children again, and perhaps all along, way behind white and Asian children. Many concluded that the Bloomberg Administration's key strategy of basing nearly all in public education on "teaching to the test" as a failure.

But these pieces of reality do not help the UFT in its battles with the City. After all, the children most needy of educational aid are still in the same situation, and the question remains, what can an educational workers union do in an environment like this to re-make its image and re-shape its influence to help New York's most needy families and children, and, hence, themselves?

Pursuing innovative strategies, including those that struggle with the complexity of Race, have characterized the UFT's political arm for decades. It does seem, however, that in 2004 and 2005 a more decided and determined community-based strategy emerged. What is meant by this term is that leaders and decision-makers in the organization, at least some of them, began to see their fate as tied intimately to the well-being of the communities where they worked. Instead of thinking primarily of teachers and union grievances and objectives in various undertakings and campaigns, locally or city-wide, they began to listen more carefully to and act more consonant

¹² A July 27, 2010 New York Times article wrote about how former allies of unions in New York, New Jersey, Los Angeles, Oregon, and elsewhere were challenging or rejecting key public-sector union legislative and political concerns, a surprising and unexpected development.

with the needs of the communities they served, principally those of color.¹³In order to be successful in these efforts, the UFT has looked more to young women and men of color to lead these campaigns. I will detail some of the specifics of the UFT's strategy in the following pages.

The Child Care Campaign

A telling example can be found in one of the UFT's most unusual efforts- the decision to join an Upstate/Downstate alliance with AFSCME's state wide local, CSEA,¹⁴ and organize child care workers throughout New York State. Under their agreement, CSEA received jurisdiction to organize all of the child care workers outside of New York City, and the UFT had responsibility inside the 5 Boroughs that comprise the City. Both of these unions were actually directed, not just assisted, in their organizing efforts by the remarkable ability of the now largely discredited ACORN community organization.¹⁵ ACORN somehow, and miraculously, went through the 5 boroughs of this 8 million person city and discovered, surveyed, and explained to more than 28,000¹⁶ different child care workers, many of whom worked from their homes, why it made sense to join the UFT and fight for reimbursement¹⁷ and credentialing improvements in their difficult work.

Tammie Miller, the chapter chair of the organization (formally known as UFTProviders), explained that the UFT did not have the practical ability or the political credibility to go to these "work sites" and organize these low-wage workers. She praised the determination, focus, and skill of the ACORN and UFT organizers, who worked closely with the rank and file day care workers. These efforts made success possible, but it became likely when thousands of rank and file women accepted the constant organizing message, "Everybody must be a Leader," "You take control of this organization," and "This will only work if you decide your own fate," as the core of their commitment. This messaging created an unmistakable flattening of the fledgling union's structure from the outset, and told interested workers that membership requires involvement and accountability, often key missing attributes in most US union members' relationships to their organizations.

¹³ A bit of NYC history is helpful here. In 1968, the UFT was seen by many as disregarding community concerns in the explosive racial aftermath of the late 1960s, and for decades it was treated, not universally, but significantly enough, with suspicion in many communities with considerable populations of black and/or brown peoples.

¹⁴ AFSCME stands for American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, the union that organized the sanitation truck workers in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1968, where Dr. Martin Luther King was killed. CSEA, its mostly Upstate New York affiliate, stands for Civil Service Employees Association.

¹⁵ In this regard, the UFT learned what other unions have learned across America- they need Worker Center and other community organizations to successfully reach poor or immigrant workers.

¹⁶ In the literature about this campaign, the number of child care workers in the City has mentioned both the 28,000 and the 32,000 figure of prospective UFT members.

¹⁷ "Reimbursement" refers to the years long fight by the child care workers to get the full value of what they contracted for, which, in essence, is their daily wage. Promising to address and solve this problem was critical to the UFT's success in organizing these workers.

Besides lining up tens of thousands of historically isolated workers into one organization, the child-care workers drive required the UFT's (and CSEA's as well, which is a political powerhouse outside of New York City) legislative clout, and ultimately were only "legally" successful because of an executive order signed by the short-lived Governor, Elliot Spitzer. After a two year, difficult struggle, and in the midst of this awful recession, they succeeded in obtaining a decent first contract that improves the lives of nearly all of their members.

Much remains to be done and fought about, but the UFT's commitment to this new class of worker establishes membership in nearly every neighborhood in every corner of New York City. In the conservative Borough of Staten Island that presence resulted in the ability of the UFT Providers to promptly advance critical assistance for a family suffering from one of its children killing several members. Providers were on the scene shortly after the police and played a key supportive and compassionate role that was prominently acknowledged by the police and other community organizations. Actions such as these lend considerable community credibility when in fact UFT members are acting simply consistent with who they are and what their work and responsibilities as community leaders are. (a profile of one of the new child care union members and how he evidences the Providers' and thus UFT's relationship to the communities it serves is attached) [Provider Profile](#)

Corey Ortega, Harlem

A passion for politics and for providing child care for homeless



children

Orte

ga and his mother, Aminta Ventura (bottom right), pose with staff and children at their 134th Street daycare.

Corey Ortega is a real renaissance man. In addition to his work as a group family child care provider in Harlem, he works as a special assistant to the neighborhood's state assemblyman, Keith L.T. Wright, a position he has used to help other providers navigate the challenges of the profession.

Now in his eighth year as a provider, Ortega got his start in family child care helping his mother, Aminta Ventura, while still a student at St. John's University.

Ventura, a former history and special needs teacher, opened the Give, Be, Grow daycare on 134th Street in Harlem in 2002 after retiring from the New York City public school system. She turned over management to Ortega after he finished his degree in business finance four years ago.

"If it wasn't for my mother, I wouldn't be here," Ortega said. She encouraged him, he said, to work for himself, not for a corporate employer.

Business has thrived under Ortega. While Ventura prepares the lesson plans, Ortega balances the books, expanding Give, Be, Grow from one to two sites, with a third site set to open this summer.



Ortega hard at work in the offices of State Assemblyman Keith L.T. Wright.

But, Ortega says, things weren't always so easy. When they first started, they were persistently under-enrolled. Then, one day, a family living in the local shelter sent their child to the daycare and soon more parents in the shelter followed suit.

So many children followed, in fact, that Ortega quickly struck up a relationship with the shelter's directors and arranged to provide childcare for any children living there. Today, the majority of children at Give, Be, Grow are homeless kids sent from the shelter. Working with children from the shelter system presents a unique set of challenges, and Ortega said he is glad to be able to help.

He is also happy to help his fellow providers through his position in Assemblyman Wright's office. Ortega got to know the assemblyman through his volunteer work with a Harlem tenant advocacy group and while he never intended to enter politics, he seized the opportunity when it presented itself.

As Wright's special assistant, Ortega has worked to strengthen the assemblyman's ties to the UFT and to the community of providers in his district.

Many providers, he said, come by the office for help with landlord problems and other issues – and Ortega, who once had to face down his own landlord, does what he can to help them.

“When providers come here with tenant problems, I call the landlord and explain that the provider has a legal right to have a daycare,” he said.

As a result, Wright's office has become known as a safe space — and Ortega as a friendly face — for area providers.

The School Closing Campaign

Amongst other powers provided in the last decade¹⁸ to the City of New York's mayor, mentioned above, was the ability for his appointees to better control the process of closing so-called “failing schools.” Numerous criteria are involved in this decision, including educational viability, safety, improvement in outcomes, and impact upon the community served and other communities affected. The law requires considerable notice, ample opportunity for public involvement, an educational environmental assessment, and then a final assessment of closings based upon what was learned.

The City's chancellor, in late 2009, announced the likely closing of 19 schools, for a variety of shortcomings. The UFT felt that several were poor performers, but that many were considerably

¹⁸ The NYC Board of Education was the public entity responsible for determining which, if any, New York schools, needed closing. This administrative decision was re-located with the city's chancellor, a mayoral appointee, but in 2009 a number of legislative restrictions were imposed upon the Chancellor to enhance community and parental presence and due process in the determinations. Since the public's interest in these decisions was reified in this legislative change, the UFT built the coalition that resulted in the school closing campaign described in this section of the paper.

worse, and believed politics¹⁹ played a key role in the schools selected. Closing a school often has a wrenching impact upon families and children, forcing students to travel much further than their own communities to pursue their education, and affects child care arrangements, local businesses and their commerce with children and faculty, as well as the resources that are evidenced by the building as a place to convene and work on community issues. Closing can also burden neighboring schools with excessive over-crowding and demographic changes that they are not prepared to meet. In short, the issue was and is significant enough for there to be very specific, restrictive legislation passed in 2009 that required the City to make a very careful and thoughtful decision in these matters.

The UFT, through its parent-liaison²⁰ in each Borough, and two specially assigned, highly skilled central Headquarters staff members, actually set up a war room and went to work coordinating the community opposition that existed in many of the areas slated for school closing. It met with a number of community based organizations (CBO's), policy groups, and city council persons whose districts included the targeted schools, and built an effective and formidable city-wide coalition that dealt with the Chancellor's failure to comply with the law.

Key alliance members included the NAACP, a leading national civil rights organization, and New York's leading independent educational advocacy group, the Alliance for Quality Education, a key contributor to the 2009 restrictive legislative requirements that made it much harder for New York City to close any of its schools without detailed findings presented to the affected communities. The UFT and its allies discovered that significant parts of the statutory requirements that the Chancellor needed to complete were overlooked or ignored. The notice of public hearings which required the city education officials to gauge the community's sentiment was often too short, and the Chancellor's "environmental impact" of the closings was not undertaken with the rigor the law required. When the coalition believed that the near universal public and community opposition failed to force the Chancellor to conform the school closing process with what the law required, the UFT and its innumerable community and political partners sued the City of New York, seeking a negation of the Chancellor's decision to still close the selected schools.²¹

The judge that heard the case agreed with the union and its coalition partners, ruling that the Chancellor could not proceed with the closings, for many of the reasons already mentioned. The decision was a clear cut victory for the communities and their schools, but it also strengthened the UFT community coalition strategy- building a meaningful and fully endowed campaign with

¹⁹ "Politics" here mean that the chancellor might in one school seek to remove a principal or a particularly irritating program, that in another school the Chancellor needed space to place a smaller second school or a charter school, or that some other explanation other than that required by legislative policy was operative.

²⁰ These parent-liaison officials, as official UFT representatives, had responsibility to work with parent groups on educational and community issues of importance. These officials acted as de facto UFT community organizers, particularly in the Bronx and in Brooklyn, meeting with parents affected directly or indirectly by the school closings, and their community organizations, and forged quite meaningful community and personal ties. This was, similar to the child care campaign, a further expression of the union to deepen its ties to underserved communities on an issue of great importance to the citizens who lived there.

²¹ Interestingly, the UFT's ability to make a transnational union connection with the German Metal Workers, IG Metall, resulted in them placing pressure on BMW, one of the sponsors of a technical high school that trained students to be auto mechanics, and the Chancellor removed that school from the closing list!

partners that advance the educational needs and interests of the community of color. A considerable amount of good will was generated by this effort, and it is a part of the UFT's effort to demonstrate that a city-wide educational union has a lot more in common with its citizenry than do the the Right –wing attackers who drone on about teachers' salaries, access to health care, and right to a pension.

Fighting for Smaller Classes and Technical Education

These next two cases differ from the previous examples in that they do not involve as extensive community-based organizing as the school closing and child care campaigns. Still, they reflect the UFT picking key issues that not only have very strong community support but evidence considerable, long-term coalition-building in which the partners, the UFT and community-based organizations, have similar, strong interests.

a.) The class size struggle

For more than 15 years a number of community and educational groups throughout New York waged a constitutional battle, alleging that the funding for New York City and New York state schools was unconstitutional. This complicated litigation posited, amongst other things, that the mal-distribution of monies between city, rural, and suburban school districts was especially harmful to the poor students in New York City. The harm suffered, so went the argument, resulted in poor pay for teachers, insufficient resources such as paper, pencils, and textbooks for the children, and over-crowding of classes to such a degree that children were simply unable to learn. A number of New York foundations and private litigants provided the monies for this effort.

After its successful conclusion in 2006, the new governor in 2007, Elliott Spitzer, proposed and the legislature passed a \$7 billion commitment to address a number of the most pressing court findings. Implementation would, in part, occur by the state signing contracts (Contracts for Excellence, hereafter, C4E) with local school districts. In fiscal years 2007 and 2008 contracts for nearly \$300 million were signed by the state and the New York City Department of Education earmarked to reduce class size²²

For more than a year prior to the contract signing, the UFT had instituted a community campaign with the demand to force the city's DOE to reduce class size. It was an effort to raise citizen's awareness of the critical relationship between class size and the ability to learn. Rallies were held, leafleting occurred at subway stops, and testimony was given at City Hall. Although, the depth of community coalition building that we saw in the child care and school closing campaigns was not present here, the UFT signaled to concerned parents and organizations that this was also their fight, and when the state-level negotiations occurred about how to spend the monies that Governor Spitzer ultimately allotted, the UFT, along with its community allies, stressed expenditure on class size reduction.

²² A very detailed "Fact Sheet" may be found on the web page for one of the UFT's litigation /coalition partners in its class size lawsuit, a community non-profit organization, Class Size Matters".
<http://www.classsizematters.org/lawsuitupdate61410.html>

Remarkably, and despite the express earmarking of several hundred million dollars to reduce class size in New York City, and considerable community and political activity by the UFT and its new coalition partners, class size increased in New York City public schools in the years immediately following the receipt of these hundreds of millions of dollars to reduce the size. Exasperated, the UFT and its educational partners²³ brought suit this year against the NYC Department of Education for failing to use the monies distributed by NY's State Education department for reduction of school class size in New York City. The UFT has used the lawsuit to educate parents and citizens in New York City about the City Administration's failure to properly use tax payers' monies, an opportunity created by nearly 15 years of litigation. The early rulings in the case, through the middle of the summer, are promising.

Perhaps more importantly, the UFT is beginning to explain that the City's failure to improve the educational opportunities and test results for children of color, and narrow the so-called achievement gap between white and Asian and children of color, reflect the mal-administration of the City's educational system by Mayor Bloomberg and his Chancellor, Joel Klein. As the high stakes educational wars ratchet up in New York and the rest of the United States, with teachers increasingly the subject of blame and scorn, the UFT's efforts in educating the public on issues like fiscal impropriety, class size, and apportionment of educational blame, take on increasing importance. The union's ability to deepen its true and honest engagement with community-based organizations is clearly the most effective way to dispense its views and have its message heard.

b.) The UFT's Advocacy of Technical Education

Career and Technical Education (CTE), that part of New York's public, "vocational" education, comprising high school training for beauticians, graphic arts, automotive repair, health care, tourism, and public safety (this is only a partial listing of opportunities), is often thought of as the blue collar side of New York City's educational offerings. These are not the high-performing high schools that graduate their students into Harvard or Yale, but rather community college and city jobs in the transportation and mechanic fields. Too often they are overlooked, and their value under-estimated. That is not the UFT's view, however, and its new President, Michael Mulgrew, taught in one of those schools and was a UFT Vice-President of the CTE schools.

Before becoming President, Mulgrew launched an effort to build a city-wide coalition of city workforce development agencies, women's and civil rights groups, educators, and building trades organizations to re-cast the CTE schools into major engines of economic development, targeting the city's 300,000 plus families that are part of the working poor. This was a difficult and amorphous group to co-ordinate, but Mulgrew learned a lot from the experience and tasked his new VP for the CTE schools, Sterling Roberson, with the responsibility to "get this thing going."

²³ In this litigation, the UFT again teamed up with the civil rights organization, NAACP, along with the Hispanic Federation, a service oriented, progressive community non-profit organization that encompasses 90 different Latino organizations in the Northeastern United States, and the non-partisan educational entities, Alliance for Quality Education and Class Size Matters.

Roberson, for now, has moved to the state-wide level, where the audience is friendlier to ways to strengthen both technical education and use the schools in an effort to promote workforce development. Roberson has maintained the relationships Mulgrew developed with the community groups, while deepening the UFT's credibility with the State Education Department leaders. At this point in time, the effort is not primarily one of coalition work and community organizing, but successful grants from the State could put the UFT in a very strong position with its historic workforce development partners to not only ensure CTE's critical role in training future NYC workers, but to also expand its role as an income elevating force in the communities of the working poor.

This vision is what drove Mulgrew and now his successor, and success can only be realized by taking into account the progress the UFT has made over the last decade in the city's communities. In a sense, the restructuring at Headquarters and in the Boroughs (the five counties that comprise New York City) where new, young, critical thinking, and organizing women and men, mostly of color, who have led these campaigns, has created a certain credibility that the UFT lacked earlier. It is this new "look," and "effort" that will, hopefully, cause the State Education Department to goal set and fund the union's CTE work in a manner that advances the lofty vision shared by President Mulgrew and Vice President of CTE, Sterling Roberson. And, should this even partially take place, it will remind public sector union observers that when important union players in the sector look to deepen their **real** ties to the communities they serve, some of the toxic bluster that passes for political debate in the US effaces.

Conclusion

This is a difficult and frightening time in America. Workers' strongest institutions, public sector unions, are maligned, ridiculed, and threatened, daily, simply because they are viable politically and maintain a public vigilance that thwarts the political Right's ambition to turn back to or "restore" what they imagine is America. For the most part, these unions are slow in responding to the attacks, in part because historic allies such as the Democratic Party and President Obama provide at best tepid support, and with regard to education, actually undermine the unions' efforts to fight back.

What we have shown here is that New York City's educational union has turned to community allies and developed political approaches to important issues that critically impact families of color and the union. Focusing upon these issues, expending considerable resources, and engaging in shared decision-making are changing the perception, gradually, of the UFT in the city's communities. Advancing these objectives on many fronts, and often having men and women of color leading the offensives, is a good start to building a different kind of political power where the educational workers and New York's citizens struggle to fight for the important issues that they have in common.

Knowing that the UFT truly cares about improving their children's well-being by professionalizing and improving the economic well-being of tens of thousands of child care workers is a significant development. So is pursuing high level negotiations with state officials in

Albany to expand workforce opportunities for the more than 300,000 New York City families who are the working poor. These reinforce a developing perception of change and long term UFT sincerity.

Gelöscht:

Although we stress this is but a beginning, it does mean that there is a significant part of the UFT dedicated to blunting the reactionary elements unleashed by this economic crisis by re-dedicating itself to doing real things and creating real power by building meaningful relationships with the citizens and the communities it serves. If this continues, and if it becomes contagious in the public sector labor movement in the US, the Right's attack on this part of the labor movement in the US will ring hollow and insincere.