

"I Participate, You Participate, We Participate ... They Profit,"

Notes on Revolutionary Educational Activism to Transcend Capital: The Rouge Forum

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Abstract

Ten years ago, the Rouge Forum initiated its work with this statement:

"The Rouge Forum is a group of educators, students, and parents seeking a democratic society. We are concerned about questions like these: How can we teach against racism, national chauvinism and sexism in an increasingly authoritarian and undemocratic society? How can we gain enough real power to keep our ideals and still teach--or learn? Whose interests shall school serve in a society that is ever more unequal? We are both research and action oriented. We want to learn about equality, democracy and social justice as we simultaneously struggle to bring into practice our present understanding of what that is. We seek to build a caring inclusive community which understands that an injury to one is an injury to all. At the same time, our caring community is going to need to deal decisively with an opposition that is sometimes ruthless."

This article briefly describes the theory and practice of the Rouge Forum's last decade. In practice, the Rouge Forum's activists led mass boycotts against high-stakes standardized exams in the U.S., helped lead sanctioned and wildcat teacher and student strikes and walk-outs against the tests and military recruitment, and operated effectively inside

professional groups as well as unions.

In theory, the Rouge Forum examined, often using a Marxist lens, questions like: "What value do school workers or students create? Why have school? How can educational workers and students keep their ideals and function inside their institutions? How do pedagogical methods influence substance?" In addition, Rouge Forum leaders published extensively in professional and popular journals, conducting serious research into both the social context of school, and daily life inside schools.

Rouge Forum has been challenged by many of the shipwreck questions of the left. Externally, Rouge Forum members faced the checks placed against any critical thinker/actor in an era when the encapsulation of thought is nearly complete. In addition, the Rouge Forum operated inside of a milieu of the left poisoned by a decade of opportunism and post-modernism, the whining of petit-bourgeoisie intellectuals who sought to disconnect the past, present, and future, in order to build self-serving atomized counter-movements.

Internally, the Rouge Forum sought to address parallel issues like the apparent contradiction between needing a serious organization prepared to fight a ruthless enemy with a centralized command, and the need to create an organization that offers people a rare chance to be truly creative and free. The Rouge Forum sought to fashion an integrated powerful movement, working against the stream of identity-based groupings operating without strategy, leaping from issue to issue, moment to moment.

How the Rouge Forum addressed these and other issues is the offering of this article.

"Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is, necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew" (Marx, *The German Ideology*).

What Is the Rouge Forum?

The Rouge River runs throughout the Detroit area. Once a beautiful river bounteous with fish and plant life, it supported wetlands throughout southeast Michigan. Before industrialization, it was one of three rivers running through what is now the metropolitan territory. Today the Rouge meanders through some of the most industrially polluted areas in the United States, past some of the poorest and most segregated areas of North America, with tributaries leading to one of the richest cities in the US - Birmingham, Michigan. The Rouge cares nothing for boundaries. The other two Detroit rivers were paved early in the life of the city, and now serve as enclosed running sewers. Of the three, the Rouge is the survivor.

The Ford Rouge Plant built before and during World War I was the world's largest industrial complex where everything that went into a Ford car was manufactured. Seeking to extend his control to every aspect of production including the worker's life, mind, and body, in the plant and out, Henry Ford instituted a code of silence, systematically divided workers along lines of national origin, sex, race, language groupings and set up segregated housing for the work force. He designed a, "sociology department," a group of social workers who demanded entry into workers' homes to ensure "appropriate" family relations and to see that they ate Ford-approved food (like soybeans), voted right, and went to church - the first social workers.

The Rouge Plant defined "Fordism." Fordism centers on conveyor production, single-purpose machines, mass consumption, mass marketing, relentless surveillance, and seeks to heighten productivity via technique. The processes are designed to strip workers of potentially valuable faculties, like their expertise, to speed production, expand markets, and drive down wages. Fordism sees workers as replaceable machines, but machines capable of consumption.

Henry Ford owned the Dearborn location of his plant, and its politicians. Ford was and is an international car-maker and a long-time practitioner of imperialism, the relentless battle for cheap labor, raw materials, markets, and social control that lies (against Lenin) within the origins of capital.

And, Henry Ford was a fascist. He contributed intellectually and materially to fascism and his anti-Semitic works compiled in his, "The International Jew," inspired Hitler. Ford accepted the German equivalent of the Medal of Honor from Hitler, and his factories continued to operate in Germany, untouched by allied bombs, throughout WWII.

At its height, more than 100,000 workers held jobs at the Rouge Plant. Nineteen trains ran on 85 miles of track, mostly in huge caverns under the plant. It was the nation's largest computer center, the third largest producer of glass. It was also its worst polluter. In 1970, the Environmental Protection agency charged the Rouge Plant with nearly 150 violations. When environmentalist volunteers tried to clean the Rouge River in June 1999, they were ordered out of the water. It was too polluted to clean. Today there are 9,000 workers at the Rouge Plant, most of them working in the now Japanese-owned iron foundry, though the great-grandson of Henry I promises to revitalize the plant, despite slipping behind Toyota as the number two automaker in 2007.

In 2006, Ford lost a record \$12.7 billion and promised to cut 30,000 jobs, to close 30 plants in the next six years. In early 2007 Ford announced that process would accelerate, further devastating Michigan and especially Detroit, where the name "Ford," graces expressways, a football stadium, a major hospital complex, an auditorium, indicating the power of naming.

Henry Ford I ruthlessly battled worker organizing at the Rouge Plant. His Dearborn cops and goon squad - recruited from Michigan prisons and led by the infamous Harry Bennet who toured Detroit in a Ford convertible in the thirties, with lions in his back seat - killed hunger marchers during the depression, leading to massive street demonstrations. In the May, 1937, "Battle of Overpass," Ford unleashed his armed goons on United Auto Workers union leaders, a maneuver which led to the battle for collective bargaining at Ford, and was the founding juncture to what was once the

largest UAW local in the world, Local 600, led for years by radical and communist organizers.

Later, Ford granted collective bargaining rights and mandatory dues check-off, recognizing that he became the union's banker and, later still, his grandson readily agreed to organize all new Ford plants for the UAW, rightly seeing the union leadership as a useful disciplinarian for Ford's workers. By 2007, the UAW, despite a one billion dollar bank account, was dead in the water, having lost one million members from its high water mark of about 1.5 million, and having done nothing at all to mobilize job actions for thirty years, other than to organize to defeat them (Gibson, 2006).

On February 1, 1999, the boilers at the aging Rouge Plant blew up, killing six workers. The plant, according to workers, had repeatedly failed safety inspections. The UAW local president made a statement saying how sorry he was for the families of the deceased - and for William Clay Ford, "who is having one of the worst days of his life." The media presented the workers' deaths as a tough day for the young Ford, who inherited the presidency of the company. The steam went out of Local 600 long ago and the leaders now refer to themselves as "UAW-FORD" - proof that they have inherited the views of the company founder.

"The Rouge" represents the interaction of people, nature, and work as humanity struggles in its great causes of production, reproduction, rational knowledge, and the battle for freedom: the crux of political economy.

The Rouge never quit; it moves with the resiliency of nature itself. The river and the plant followed the path of industrial life throughout the world. The technological advances created at the Rouge, in some ways, led to better lives. In other ways, technology was used to forge the privilege of the few, at the expense of most - and the ecosystems which brought it to life. The Rouge simultaneously stripped people of humanity, yet united people in new ways, offering the possibility for a cooperative world. The Rouge seemed to be a good place to consider education and social action - to have Rouge Forums.

The Rouge Forum seeks to bring together educators, students, community activists, and parents seeking an equitable and democratic society; the former governing the latter, depending on concrete circumstances. We ask questions like these: How can we teach against racism, national chauvinism, and sexism in an increasingly authoritarian, inequitable, and undemocratic society? How can we gain enough real power to keep our ideals and still teach - or learn? Whose interests shall school serve in a society that is ever more unequal? What role can schools play in the transformation of an unjust society? What is it that people need to know, and how do we need to come to know it, in order to take the risks necessary to transform the system of capital into a reasonably caring society where each can exhibit their own creativity?

We in the Rouge Forum are both research and action oriented. We want to learn about equality, democracy and social justice as we simultaneously struggle to bring into practice our present understanding of what that is. We seek to build a caring inclusive community that understands an injury to one is an injury to all. We know, however, our caring community will need to deal decisively with an opposition that is sometimes ruthless and has a central command.

We followed Marx's call to, "criticize everything," bringing into question the viability of our initial call for democracy, reviewing its inter-sections with equality, the need for organizational discipline, and democracy's bourgeoisie foundations. At the same time, we have enough experience to recognize that we have all been wrong before and that friendship and mutual respect must arch above passionate criticism.

We hope to demonstrate that the power necessary to win greater equity/democracy will likely rise out of an organization that unites people in innovative ways - across union boundaries, across community lines, across the fences of race and sex/gender. Good humor and friendships are a vital part of building this kind of organization, as important as theoretical clarity. Friendships allow us to understand that action always reveals errors - the key way we learn. We initially chose Brer Rabbit as a symbol to underline the good cheer that rightfully guides the struggle for justice. Every part of the world is our briar patch, though as the promise for perpetual war poisoned the atmosphere, Brer Rabbit is replaced by other symbols.

Although the first official meeting of the Rouge Forum was held at Wayne State University in Detroit, June 1998, the impetus for this meeting stretches back to 1994 and anti-racist and free speech activism within the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS).

Origins of the Rouge Forum: National Council for the Social Studies, Phoenix 1994

At the 1994 meeting of NCSS in Phoenix, Arizona, two events galvanized a group of activists. First, Sam Diener from the Central Committee of Conscientious Objectors (CCCO) was arrested for leafleting at the conference; and secondly, the governing body of NCSS rejected a resolution condemning California Proposition 187 and calling for a boycott of California as a site for future meetings of the organization. These events fueled political activism the organization had rarely experienced and identified the need for organized action in support of free speech and anti-racist pedagogy. Moreover, these events highlighted the hostility of the largest professional organization for social studies educators in the United States to democracy within the organization and beyond.

The Arrest and Trials of Sam Diener 1

Sam Diener was arrested for third-degree trespass on Saturday November 19, 1994 at an NCSS sponsored concert of the US Marine Corps Band. Diener was a staff person for the CCCO and a registered exhibitor at the NCSS conference. Diener - whose work with the CCCO focused on countering the expansion of Jr. ROTC in schools - distributed small flyers, "Keep Guns Out of Our Schools!" The flyer criticized Jr. ROTC for its expense, discriminatory practices, and militarization of the schools. Diener was arrested. When Diener protested a security guard responded that he was acting on orders from the leadership of NCSS.

After his release, Diener began distributing a leaflet titled "Free Speech Censored at NCSS," lobbying NCSS leadership for an opportunity to present his case and have NCSS drop the charges. The President of NCSS, Bob Stahl, an Arizona State University professor, refused to allow Diener to address the organization's delegates.

A version of the events was given delegates; Diener portrayed as disrupting the concert. Members of the audience [social studies teachers with leadership positions] ridiculed Diener's leafleting, many portrayed leafleting as a major crime. Some suggested Diener should be jailed, "the key thrown away."

Stephen Fleury, a member of the House of Delegates presented Diener's version of events based on the free speech leaflet Diener had been distributing. Fleury described the scene:

As I began to read Diener's story, I felt momentary relief when the delegates began to laugh at what I perceived to be the absurdity and irony of Diener's arrest. Relief was quickly replaced with horror, however, when I realized the delegates' were amused that Diener (and others advocating for him) might believe that social activism was reasonable behavior at a social studies education conference ... When the final vote was taken, however, the appeal to exonerate Diener was soundly defeated. (Fleury, 1998, pp. 4-5)

David Hursh and E. Wayne Ross later worked with Diener to distribute the free speech leaflet at the convention center. The executive director of NCSS, Martharose Laffey, threatened Diener with a lawsuit if the leafleting continued. On Monday November 21, Diener was allowed to present his case to the NCSS Board of Directors, but the Board refused to assist Denier.

On November 22, Diener was arraigned and charged with trespassing. A series of trials ensued and in 1998 an appeals court reversed his conviction. After more than three years and four judicial hearings Diener prevailed.

Hursh (1998) says the Diener incident raises questions about whether the leading organization of civic educators in the US tolerates diverse views. As Judge Alice Wright ruled at the pretrial hearing, Diener was ordered to leave the Civic Plaza "solely because of the content of the leaflets." Additionally, actions of NCSS indicated that as an organization it supports the militarization of schools and society. Finally, Hursh argues that "the events surrounding Diener's arrest, the discussion in the NCSS House of Delegates, and the multiple appeals on the part of the prosecution, can only be interpreted as an effort to quash free speech."

CUFA, Proposition 187, and the Boycott of California

In November 1994 - the same month the Denier imbroglio began - California voters passed the "Save Our State" initiative, Proposition 187. Provisions of the measure denied health care, social services, and public education to immigrants without documentation. Under this law all city, county, and state officials in California (teachers, counselors, and social workers) would be required to report any "suspicious" persons to the US Immigration and Nationalization Service, nullifying sanctuary ordinances in many localities.

After Proposition 187 passed, the College and University Faculty Assembly of NCSS, (2) meeting in Phoenix, adopted a resolution condemning Proposition 187 and boycotting California as a future site for CUFA meetings. 3 A similar resolution presented to the NCSS House of Delegates in Phoenix was rejected by an overwhelming majority (Fleury, 1998). Ironically, the 1994 annual meeting of NCSS (and CUFA) was being held in Phoenix as a result of a NCSS boycott of Denver (its planned meeting site for 1994) in response to an amendment to the Colorado State Constitution that denied protection against discrimination based sexual orientation.

Following the Phoenix meeting, a small group of CUFA and NCSS members worked together as the Emergency Committee of Social Educators for Social Justice to publicize CUFA's decision to boycott California and encourage other organizations to do the same. 500 press releases announcing CUFA's actions were sent to media outlets. NCSS responded by attempting to suppress the Emergency's Committee's work; while the elected leadership of CUFA took no action to implement the resolution's provisions (Ross, 1997, 1998). The debate within CUFA regarding action (or non-action) on the boycott issue remained on low heat.

In the spring of 1997 - three and a half years after the initiative was passed by California voters - the NCSS Board of Directors condemned California Proposition 187 (as well as the anti-affirmative action Proposition 209) and planned to provide a forum at the 1998 NCSS Annual Conference in Anaheim "to educate the social studies community and the public about the significant issues involved" in these measures. In addition, the NCSS Board decided to boycott California as a meeting site while Propositions 187 and 209 were in effect. The NCSS Board of Directors barely

managed to pass this resolution (the vote was 9 to 8 with 3 abstentions), even though nearly every other leading education organization in the US had taken similar stands.

In November 1997, at annual meetings of NCSS and CUFA in Cincinnati, both groups retreated from previous decisions on the California boycott. The NCSS Board of Directors made a sudden behind-closed-doors about-face rescinding their spring decision, apparently under pressure from leaders of the California Council for the Social Studies.

The Executive Director of NCSS - who had previously threatened the lawsuit against leafleteer Denier - was invited by CUFA leaders to speak at their business meeting in Cincinnati. In her speech, Martharose Laffey advocated rescinding the original CUFA resolution, stating that the organization should not be "sidetracked by seductive but not so important issues" of racism and national chauvinism as represented in California Propositions 187 and 209. Following Laffey's comments and further debate, CUFA members voted by a 2 to 1 margin to reverse the 1994 boycott resolution and hold its 1998 meeting in Anaheim. (CUFA members, however, did vote to boycott California as a site for future meetings, as long as Proposition 187 was in effect.)

The CUFA reversal had a dramatic and immediate effect. Several leading members of the organization passionately condemned the move and resigned from the organization, including two African American board members - one of whom described the directions of CUFA and NCSS as in conflict with "deeply held convictions about social justice, equity, and democracy" (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In addition, the NCSS African American Educators of Social Studies special interest group decided it would not convene in Anaheim.

A small group of CUFA members (who became the founding members of the Rouge Forum) argued that it turned reality on its head to suggest that taking action against racism and national chauvinism was a diversion. They argued that the battle against irrationalism is exactly what should be taken up by the intellectuals of CUFA. Many CUFA members believed that the primary issue was the unity and solidarity of the two organizations (CUFA and NCSS). In a speech from the floor of the CUFA membership meeting in Cincinnati, Rich Gibson argued that unity and solidarity were

indeed important, however the questions were: "Solidarity with whom? Around what purposes? Toward what end?"

Despite its reversal on the boycott, prior to the end of the Cincinnati meeting CUFA members voted that the 1998 Anaheim program should focus on analysis of the impact of racism and national chauvinism in educational institutions. Subsequently, a Diversity and Social Justice Committee was formed, with marginal impact.

The origins of the Rouge Forum trace right back to anti-racist, anti-imperialist, anti-chauvinist actions like those above. This set the tone.

Seven months later, an informal group was organized by Rich Gibson, Wayne Ross, Michael Peterson, and others, and held its first meeting in Detroit. The meeting of perhaps 300 education activists was described by one participant as a, "72 hour conversation without end." People came and went, the agenda flowed with the ideas of attendees. Most found it a refreshing change from the routine of reading papers to each other. One important advantage was having access to a venue that was open 24 hours a day, offering a large room for plenaries and small breakout rooms - at no cost; testimony to the working class roots of Wayne State University.

Toward the close of the meeting, we chose the name, Rouge Forum, after the nearby Rouge plant, and all of its implications, and our dedication to open investigations of the world. We have never been troubled with the relationship to the French, "red," but that was not on the minds of the locals to whom Rouge means a river, and a huge factory in death throes, and the possibility to overcome. Since, we have been accused of being nothing but reds (hardly true, liberal democrats, libertarians, four US troops in Iraq, socialists, anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists, and many others belong to the Rouge Forum.) One vehement critic came up with the stretch, "You people named yourself deliberately after the Khmer Rouge." We've stuck with the name for a decade and the reds inside the Rouge Forum seem comfortable with the action-oriented liberals, and vice versa. Friendship, sacrifice for the common good (solidarity), all remain ethics of the Rouge Forum.

Continued activism within CUFA and NCSS remained a major topic of discussion at this meeting - issues included: continuing the dialogue on overt political action by

both CUFA and NCSS; the social and political responsibilities of educators; the role of researchers and research findings in ameliorating social ills; and the unique position of social studies curriculum and teaching as a force against racism and fascism. The ideas and actions of these social studies educators and their actions at the NCSS conferences during this period illustrate the activist roots of the Rouge Forum.

The following section explains a key operative principle for the actions of the Rouge Forum - the idea that schools hold a key position in North American society and educators play a critical role in the creation of a more democratic egalitarian society, or one that increases inequality and authoritarianism. At issue for the Rouge Forum, as Gibson and Ross succinctly put it in a 2007 article in Counterpunch, "school workers do not need to be missionaries for capitalism, and schools its missions...." (Gibson, Ross, Counterpunch, February, 2007). The metaphor is nearly perfect.

The Centripetal Position of Schools in North American Society 4

Schools hold a centripetal and centrifugal positions in North American society. One in four people in the US are directly connected to schools: school workers, students, parents. Many others are linked in indirect ways. Schools are the pivotal organizing point for most people's lives, in part, because of the de-industrialization and, in part, the absence of serious struggle emanating from the industrial working class (and its corrupt unions) despite its historical civilizing influence.

School is not merely school, but the point of origin for health care, food, and daytime shelter and safety for many people. Schools are also huge markets (consider the bus purchases, architectural and building costs, salaries, and potential for corruption), as well as bases for technological instruction and skill training. Schools warehouse children, serving as an important tax supported day care system for companies whose increasingly poorly paid workers come from dual income family who see their children an average of 20 hours less a week than they did in 1979. The beginning point in understanding the role teachers play as major actors in a centripetally positioned organization is to understand the value teachers create within capitalist societies. This is what Marx had to say:

The only worker who is productive is one who produces surplus value for the capitalist, or in other words contributes to the self-valorization of capital. If we

may take an example from outside the sphere of material production, a schoolmaster is a productive worker when, in addition to belaboring the heads of his pupils, he works himself into the ground to enrich the owner of the school. That the latter has laid out his capital in a teaching factory, instead of a sausage factory, makes no difference to the relation. The concept of a productive worker therefore implies, not merely a relation between the activity of work and its useful effect, between the worker and the product of the work, but also a specific social relation of production, a relation with a means of valorization. To be a productive worker is therefore not a piece of luck, but a misfortune. (Marx, 1977, p. 644)

How do teachers create surplus value, adding to the self-valorization of capital?

Teachers are both commodities and commodifiers. They train skills, promote ideologies, make possible institutional profiteering (remember milk or cola sales, architects, textbooks, bus makers, etc.) and above all teachers fashion hope, real or false. When schools fail in their role of fabricating hope, rebellion routinely follows, as France, 1968, demonstrated.

It follows that teachers create terrific value, not only in passing along what is known, but how it comes to be known; not just facts, or even dubious facts, but world views. Schools are battlegrounds in the combat for what is true - against the eradication of imagination. If the elites conceal the vital battle-fronts (like the very existence of exploitation), others (school workers) can reveal them, in work, knowledge, love, and the struggle for freedom--- and by holding the schools to their contradictory claims: schools for democratic citizenry or schools for capitalism. In schools the possible questions are: Can we understand the world? Can we change it?

While there is struggle on any job, in schools the struggle represents every aspect of social life, from the struggle over what is true, to the struggle for or against the military and war (of the 49 million youth in U.S. schools in 2005, ½ of them would be draft eligible in the following four years), to the struggle over wages, hours and working conditions, the struggle for hope itself - as before, when hope vanishes, uprisings often follow - and the fight for freedom, that being the foundation of learning anything important.

However, schools embedded within a capitalist nation, especially capital's most favored nation, are capitalist schools, **their** schools, not **ours**, until such time social

upheavals or civil strife are at such a stage that schooling is either dramatically upended, or freedom schools operating outside capital's school supercede them.

There is a pervasive myth about the public nature of tax-funded schools. There is, after all, no single public U.S. school system, but perhaps six or seven different (inequitably collected) tax-paid systems, each teaching different substance, with educators using differing methods. For example, some schools in Detroit are pre-prison schools and pre-Walmart schools. As one heads into the Detroit suburbs, one encounters pre-teacher schools, and toward the upper end, pre-doctor or lawyer schools. The ruling classes rarely send their children to public schools. Rather, they choose privates, like Michigan's Cranbrook, seated on acres of rolling green lawns in Bloomfield Hills. Or, they use private foundations to subsidize their segregated public schools, as in Lajolla, California where students have swimming pools and science labs while their black and brown counterparts to the south often do not have chairs.

A paradox of school is that the freedom to struggle for the methods to gain and test truth is often greatest in the richest and poorest schools where, in the former, parents and administrators seem to think that the lures of reading Marx will be overwhelmed by the Lexus waiting in the parking lot, and in the former, few people care what is taught, administrators focusing solely on test scores. However, too many youth learn that the construction of rational knowledge is a waste of time, undesirable; the crowing success of capitalist schooling. Even so, teaching against the destruction of reason is possible in US public schools though the nooses of standardization and testing tighten each day.

The Rouge Forum took the lead in North America in re-establishing the role of Marxism and class struggle in education during a period when the "left," in education was reigned by postmodernist opportunists of all stripes, and the right sought to silence any form of dissent.

Given that the crisis of the present age is not merely a crisis of material scarcity, but also crisis of consciousness - that is, the abundance that is necessary for a democratic and egalitarian society is at hand, what is missing is the decision to gain it - the role of educators in creating critical, class, consciousness is even more vital. A base of solidarity, structured with an understanding of the collective value school workers of

all kinds create, and the subsequent struggle to control value in the workplace and community makes defense possible.

The processes of school can, done well, go beyond demonstrating the well-springs of social change and justice, but those processes must leap beyond merely involving people in even critical construction of daily life. The counter-current to the democratic abolition of thought (quite possible in the emergence of fascism) is not solely to be found in the contradictory interests of production, but in the inexorable struggle for what is true. Ideas are key now.

Intellectual and practical work, the social praxis of school, are bases for the necessary envisioning of a better world and how to live in it. Clearly, it is not material conditions alone that challenge capital as the mother of inequality and injustice. Even crises do not overturn capital, Rather they feed it. But, a profound understanding of how things are, how they change, and how we might live in better ways - in solidarity and creativity - that makes social change possible, and lasting.

In this context, in de-industrialized North America, where there is little reason to believe the industrial working class will be an initiator for democratic change for some time to come, school workers are positioned to assemble ideas which can take on an international import, and to assist in practices to challenge injustice. Social change can emanate out from schools, if it cannot be completed by school workers and students.

The Rouge Forum seeks answers to "what is up?" "what is to be done?" and "why do it?" and takes these questions of social justice as life and death issues - in schools and out. Being both research and action oriented, the Rouge Forum seeks to critique and engage in a reasoned struggle against standards-based education and high-stakes tests - lynchpins in the continued corporate hegemony of school. And the Rouge Forum identified and acted on a second choke point in schools, the military, especially military recruiters but also the Reserve Officer Training Corps.

In regard to the latter, Rouge Forum members have played supportive roles in city coalitions focused on driving recruiters and ROTC off k12 campuses, on the grounds that the lies of imperialist war have nothing to do with gaining and testing knowledge

in a relatively free atmosphere: the project of schooling. However, there has been debate in the Rouge Forum about the wisdom of urging all youth out of the military (four Rouge Forum members are in the U.S. military in Iraq), when if social change is to be taken seriously, some youth will need to be urged in to the service, and in addition, for some youth the military service might be safer than home, just as school frequently is. Work against the military is connected to Rouge Forum action against what are called, "The Big Tests."

Why Standards-Based Educational Reforms & High-Stakes Testing are Key Rouge Forum Issues 5

There is no place in the world that is growing more equitable and more democratic. To the contrary, commonly color-coded gaps of wealth and income expand across continents and within national populations. Carrot and stick, divide and conquer politics prevail behind a mask of globalism and prosperity. Total quality management, worker-to-worker campaigns, cooperative learning in schools, mystify realities of exploitation and alienation. Talk of community is silenced by institutionalized pure selfishness, the hubris of power and privilege: arrogant warfare for markets, cheap labor, and raw materials. Freedom of choice becomes a pretence for a declining number of meaningful options, consumption.

Elites do not want citizens to understand how to unravel the roots of power. Moreover, elites do not want power, a corollary of fear, noticed. Instead, privilege wants to rule under flags of democracy, tradition, patriotism, respectability, reasonableness, and perhaps above all, habit. This sums up to a numbing assault on human creativity and sensuality on one hand, and a razor-sharp hierarchical ordering, a grinding down made possible by largesse and a ferocious willingness to use terror and violence, on another.

The system of capital, grown by the war of all on all, requires profits, but is as deeply concerned with ideas, the consciousness necessary to make people instruments of their own oppression. No society reliant solely on technological might and the lures of covetousness - a society that cannot trust its citizens - can last. The injustice requisite within the birthrights of the capital system is permanent, however, standardized

curriculum and high-stakes tests are not and reasoned struggle against them offers ways to come to better understand routes to challenge injustice.

Regulating Education and the Economy 6

What has truly set the Rouge Forum apart from other schools-based groups in North America is the limited courage it took to link the system of capital to imperialism, to endless war, to racism, to the necessity of regimented curricula and high-stakes exams, a spiral of events that cannot be disconnected. Only the Rouge Forum has made these connections. And only the Rouge Forum organized.

Without a crystal ball nor the cursed prescience of Cassandra, Rouge Forum leaders began to warn middle school teachers, in 1998, "you are looking at the soldiers in the next oil war," and warned that the Big Tests were a pipeline to the military and meaningless, imperialist-based homeland jobs.

The Rouge Forum stood alone in developing a strategic and tactical analysis of existing conditions, well before 2001. This outlook was summed up by Rich Gibson in a keynote speech at the Rouge Forum conference in 2007:

Our current context is this:

An international war of the rich on the poor, within that national wars based on inter-imperialist rivalry, within that appeals to nationalism, uniting people against false claims of united national interests when the very real divide is social class,

Within that, rising irrationalism, like religious mysticism, and rising racism, often born from religion, segregation to the point of incarcerating 2.1 million,

Rising inequality as the rich grow much richer, the working classes get laid off and poorer,

A media and cultural concentration on spectacles, like Anna Nicole, football, Judge Judy, while the question, "what war?" can be easily asked as war is on page five of USA Today,

Constant surveillance into every aspect of life,

The eradication of what were once limited liberties won by the industrial and earlier, even pre-industrial working classes, like the end of habeas corpus,

"I Participate, You Participate, We Participate ... They Profit,"

Massive indebtedness within the US, and between the US and, especially, China,

Nearly shocking imperial overstretch, with 739 permanent bases around the world and a secret military budget,

A military fully exposed as weak, incompetent, and cowardly, but stretched so thin that a draft is surely on the horizon,

Rising imperial rivals like Russia and China who also desperately need that oil, the cheap labor, and markets, of the world and especially the Caspian and Middle-East regions,

A government fully exposed as an executive committee, and weapon of violence, of the rich,

And, as before, we are at a pivotal point in history, with financial and military crises at hand - handmaidens to the emergence of fascism.

Gibson went on to emphasize that resistance will take place as people are positioned in ways they must fight back; they have no choice, like the wildcat strikers who led Detroit teachers in two illegal job actions, the California Grocery strikers, and the massive immigrant-worker general strike in the U.S. on Mayday, 2006. At issue, however, is whether people can make sense of their circumstances, take charge of their collective lives, organize with ethical foundations, and fight for fundamental change in a manner that can sustain whatever is won, that is, to build a class conscious movement.

The Big Tests are designed to obliterate such a movement. The primary justification for the imposition of standardized curricula and/or the seizure of local schools by the state/corporate alliances has been poor test scores and high dropout rates, even though both of these measures are less a reflection of student ability or achievement than a measure of parental income. And, elites have argued that standardized curricula and high-stakes exams are a method of equalizing education, making the U.S. a greater meritocracy.

Since these same elites in the Carter, Reagan, Bush I, Clinton, and Bush II regime are the people who demolished the social safety net in the U.S., who now lobby hard to maintain a health care system that denies about 1/4 of the children in the U.S. health care, and who do nothing about the massive homeless problem (setting aside their efforts outside the empire's homeland, like the hundreds of thousands of deaths of

Iraqi children during the pre-war sanction period), we dismiss that claim about equity out of hand. Instead, we choose to treat the question of the tests.

Research over two decades indicates test-based educational reforms do not lead to better educational policies and practices. Indeed, such testing often leads to educationally unjust consequences and unsound practices. These include increased drop-out rates, teacher and administrator de-professionalization, loss of curricular integrity, outright corruption, increased cultural insensitivity, and disproportionate allocation of educational resources into testing programs, and not into hiring qualified teachers and providing enriching sound educational programs (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Haney, 2000).

It is clear that scores on high-stakes standardized tests as well as drop-out rates are directly related to poverty, and none of the powers demanding school standardization is prepared to address inequality. The Rouge Forum has consistently maintained that the origins of the standards-based education reform are a direct result of increased inequality and authoritarianism - and war preparations. In fact, high-stakes tests are used to rationalize inequality and authoritarianism to promote the loyalty and obedience that are at the heart of nationalism, and slavishness.

States have increasingly sought to punish low-scoring (less wealthy) schools and districts by cutting funding that might help raise test scores making them more "like" (via smaller classes, greater resources, increased staffing, modernized facilities) wealthier (read high-scoring) schools. Although the pro-standardization position has been hit with criticism - notably both from the Right, which sees standards-based reform as contradicting local school district autonomy, and from the Left, which sees it as racist, sexist, and classist - one feature of the consensus view remains willingness to take such criticism seriously yet maintain it can satisfactorily be accommodated the prevailing framework. Thus while particular positions may differ marginally on the specifics (the devil is in the details), the demand for standards-based reform itself - the standardization imperative - goes unchallenged, at least among the alliance of conservative and liberal politicians, corporate elites, chief school officers, and teacher union executives.

Inside this alliance is an insidious move on the part of elite stakeholders toward the corporate/state regulation of knowledge, a move that enables what Noam Chomsky calls "systems of unaccountable power" to make self-interested decisions ostensibly on behalf of the public when, in fact, most members of the public have no meaningful say in what or how decisions are made or in what can count as legitimate knowledge. This is purposeful. It involves the coordinated control of such pedagogical processes as goal-setting, curriculum development, testing, and teacher education/ evaluation, the management of which works to restrict not only what and who can claim the status of "real" knowledge, but also who ultimately has access to it (Mathison & Ross, 2002).

Consensus elites are among the same powerful few who make decisions about and promote such neoliberal (imperialist) policies and institutions as GATT, NAFTA, and the WTO as good for the American public. This is a power-laden connection between the regulation of knowledge on the one hand and the regulation of the economy on the other, a joint effort by the politically, culturally, and economically powerful (nominally on behalf of the public) designed to stifle community while simultaneously enhancing the profits of multinational corporations and the ultra-rich. It is a reproductive and circular system, a power-knowledge-economics regime in which the financial gains of a few are reinforced by what can count as school (thus social) knowledge, and in which what can count as knowledge is determined so as to support the financial greed of corporations.

A conspicuous example is the social studies curriculum where, as John Marciano (1997) in *Civic Illiteracy and Education* argues, "students are ethically quarantined from the truth about what the U.S. has done in their name." This is particularly true with regard to US perpetrated and sponsored aggression abroad, which is most often represented to students as unfortunate or accidental by-products of essentially humane policies that serve the "national interests," while what constitutes the latter remains unexamined. Those who administer the economy in their own self-interests are those who regulate the production and dissemination of knowledge and vice versa, all the while working superficially in the public interest but intentionally excluding any authentic public involvement. The leper's shroud of nationalism, "we are all in the same boat," overwhelms the reality of class struggle in official schooling.

In 2007, Gibson and Ross summarized the Rouge Forum position on liberal reformers like U.S. teacher union leaders who sought, not to abolish, but improve, the NCLB:

We support the rising tide of education worker resistance to the high-stakes exams, as well as student and educator boycotts. We are sharply opposed to those false-flag reformers who seek to do anything but abolish the NCLB, its tests, and its developing national curriculum.

Liberal reformers on this bent simply lend credence to a government that stands fully exposed as a weapon of violence for the rich, they disconnect the clear class and race domination in not-so public schooling from the empire's wars, and they mislead people into believing the dishonest motives of prime NCLB proponents. Above all, through their clear opposition to direct action versus the big tests... they simultaneously seek to destroy the leadership of a movement that could actually succeed, build support for laws and a state solely in service to capitalism, and they once again try to teach people that others, usually elites, will solve our problems, a vile diversion from the fact that no one is going to save us but the united action of us (Gibson/Ross 2007).

The first Rouge Forum in Detroit, was guided by the assumption that educators are centripetally positioned in our society; that they need, for their own good, to take clear and decisive stands on the side of the vast majority of citizens who are objectively hurt by racism and national chauvinism. From this initial assumption the Rouge Forum began its work within social studies professional organizations, but also built alliances with educators in the fields of special education and literacy as well as parents and students; and worked within the two major teacher unions.

Reaching Out: Building Connections and Grassroots Organizing 7

These are times that test the core of every educator. In the context of an international war of the rich on the poor intensified and thrown into hyper-speed by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, economic collapse, harsh political repression, and in schools the necessarily related rise of standardized high-stakes exams, school takeovers, vouchers, discrete phonics instruction, merit pay, militarization, and the corporatization of schools under the guise of national unity - all combine to call into question what we are and what we stand for.

Collaboration of teachers' unions executives (whose high salaries - \$450,000 for the National Education Associations Reg Weaver - are directly tied to the fruits of imperialism as demonstrated by the ties of the NEA, the American Federation of

Teachers, and the CIA- sponsored National Endowment for Democracy) and many professional organizations in these international trends has raised many concerns. How can honest people organize?

The underlying complex processes of intensifying nationalism, racism, sexism, authoritarianism, irrationalism and forms of oppression, self-imposed or not, often seem overpowering, a series of small bullets coming in fast unison, so fast that it feels as if ducking one creates dozens of wounds from others. How shall we keep our ideals and still teach and learn?

In recent years, the impact of being a common target caused several members of distinct educational movements to come together for joint projects. Some groups are more seriously considering the power of interdependence in seeking reason and social justice. As a result, advocates of the whole language approach to literacy education, inclusion, and critical pedagogy are engaging in more dialogue and have begun to work together, to re-discover their natural unity - -and seeing serious differences at the same time. The crux of those differences seems to revolve around the question: Can capitalism be reformed, tamed, made gentler, or not and, if not, then what? What comes of educational activism that does not address the system of capital?

A Natural Unity?: Whole Language, Inclusion and Critical Pedagogy

Rouge Forum members have sought to work closely with, and sometimes played leadership roles in, school reform movements like the Whole Schooling Consortium initiated by Michael Peterson and Rich Gibson, the Whole Language movement (well established before the Rouge Forum) and the Inclusive Education movement. This has met limited success.

For a time, many people within the U.S. whole language movement saw their outlook as simply a teaching philosophy, a method, one that stood outside politics. The inclusive education movement likewise was viewed less politically. The idea of special education inclusion, however, has challenged ideologies and career paths. At the same time, the purportedly political critical pedagogy movement became so divorced from daily life, so steeped in the idealist befogged religious language of postmodernism, it lost sight of ways social change can be activated.

Perhaps born in the same well-springs, the three movements diverged so completely they lost sight of one another. A few individuals from each camp stay in touch, seeking to demonstrate the inseparability of political work, whole language, and critical teaching. Among this group at the university level, Patrick Shannon, Susan Ohanian, Carol Edelsky, Gerry Oglan, Steve Fleury, and Michael Peterson, John Marciano, and Richard Brosio, stand out.

The Rouge Forum argues that, the key question facing the world now - What is it that people need to know and how do they need to come to know it in order to arrange society in ways so they can be free, democratic, and creative? - is no longer just a question of industrial production, but rather it is a *pedagogical* one.

Critical pedagogy advocates have sometimes failed to acknowledge the elitist roots of their theory in Hegel's Phenomenology of the Mind, as in Paulo Freire's heavy borrowing from Hegel's chapter eight in Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Gibson, 1994). Typically, critical pedagogy has served the interests of new elites (and self-promoting educators) rather than the interests of social democracy and economic equality, as in the ease with which banks and corporations took over Freire's claim to a critical method and used it in training programs. Critical pedagogy has, for the most part, served the selfish and ahistorical desires of postmodernism, not revolution. Freire, always protesting too much that he was becoming a marketed icon, was a revolutionary wherever he wasn't (Grenada) and a reformer where he was (Brazil). Trapped between subjective idealism (postmodernism), and mechanical materialism (old-time socialism), critical pedagogy danced too blithely around the vital tests of organization and ethics, key to the struggles ahead (Ross and Gibson 2007, Neoliberalism and Education Reform).

Critical pedagogy, as represented by Freire, failed the test of material equality and class consciousness. Too often, critical pedagogy located the source of oppression in the minds of people, rather than in a relationship of mind, matter, and motion: ideas linked to the understanding of alienated labor and class struggle, internalized oppression and authoritarian sexual relationships, and the fear of freedom and change (see Hill, McLaren, Cole & Rikowski, 2002; McLaren, 2000). A truly exploratory, investigative pedagogy holds everything open to critique - but when it abandons reason, history, and social practice as the test of knowledge, it becomes a system of

oppression - an apostle for capitalism in new garb, speaking in obtuse tongues. But there is more to critical pedagogy than Freire.

The message of Whole Language is centered on the totality, the wholeness, inter-relatedness of knowledge. The focus of the inclusion movement has been the unity of people, all people. The heart of critical pedagogy is, or should be, that we can understand and transform the world - in the interest of masses of people - a clearer partisan view.

Whole Language, however, accepts uncritically the mental/manual division of labor that is academia, and a further division, form and substance. Most whole language leaders believe it is simply good that people read, ignoring what people read, toward what end? Slaves, and wage slaves, read. 1930's Germany and Japan were among the most literate societies in the world at the time; a problem in that the nations' peoples so quickly became fascists. Moreover, in ignoring the system of capital that surrounds all education activity, most whole language leaders seem to be partial to creating segmented people who at best want to simply reason their way beyond what is really still a Master/Slave relationship.

Absent an analysis of capital, they seek to rely on its government to solve problems, to replace bad phonics based programs with good whole language programs. Even so, the freedom (especially freedom of time to build close human ties) that has to stand as a beginning point for whole language, inclusive education, and critical pedagogy, means that there is at least a limited insurgent foundation for each movement and a point of unity.

Justice Demands Organization: Expanding the Rouge Forum Issues

The Rouge Forum moved to a leading role in school-based resistance. As the only group in North America that has connected imperialism, war, and the regulation of schooling, "The Rouge Forum No Blood For Oil" web page became a focus of activity, both for researchers interested in a chronology of material related to the current and future oil wars, and for activists. Using a network developed over ten years of organizing in colleges of education and in K12 schools, the Rouge Forum, for example, initiated calls for school strikes, teach-ins, and freedom schools, which were

adopted and carried out by school workers, students, and parents all over the US at the outset of Iraq invasion in 2003. The calls for action swept well beyond the Rouge Forum's limited online base, cyberspace serving as a new outlet for organizing action.

Because Rouge Forum leadership shifted focus from opposing standardized tests to opposing a war *and* the tests, and because the organization sharpened its open criticism of capitalism, 374 people asked to leave the member-subscriber base by the end November 2001. They were replaced, though, by nearly 1,000. By 2007, the subscriber base was at 4400, though it had remained so for three years, showing no quantitative growth.

There are serious limitations to the Rouge Forum work. Internally, the egalitarian and democratic outlook of its leaders has not been matched by a structure reflecting their mind set, or such was the case until the March 2007 Detroit Rouge Forum conference where the participants set up a steering committee with regional coordinators, easily identified chapters, so that anyone walking into the Rouge Forum could see where they might best exhibit their talents, yet remain as public or non-public as they choose, or, in Rich Gibson's words, "We want to be easy to see, but hard to catch."

However, publication remains an issue. For example, leadership in editing the flagship of the Rouge Forum, its newspaper [<http://www.rougeforum.org>], shifted from founding professors to K12 teachers, Greg Queen and Amber Goslee, a significant step forward. But the two unpaid volunteers, working full time jobs, without any external funding, were unable to carry the newspaper beyond a remarkable four year stint. Members at the 2007 Detroit conference chose to continue the online publication of the Rouge Forum News, but to shift many articles to *Substance News*, published from Chicago by test-resister George Schmidt and his wife, Sharon.

The Rouge Forum influenced other labor groups like the California Grocery strikers in 2004 through research, publications, and solidarity work. The organization has not, however, been able to successfully conduct the hoped-for kinds of freedom schooling that might help transcend resistance out of necessity, to revolutionary conscious action. Gibson noted that as a serious weakness in the Detroit 2007 conference (Emery, 2006).

Rouge Forum leaders conducted study groups, usually focused on the processes of dialectical materialism, the philosophical/practical foundation of marxism, and led informal social film discussion groups, sometimes centered on more political films like, "Sir No Sir," on GI resistance during the Vietnam wars, on the history of teacher resistance with films like Charles Laughton's, "This Land is Mine," or the quasi-fictional "Blue Collar," but both the social and political groups have not been able to consistently sustain themselves over the years, some groups dissolving, others witnessing a passing parade of participants.

Over the course of six years, members of the Rouge Forum, Whole Schooling Consortium, and Whole Language Umbrella continued a friendly and productive association based on their clear commonalities. However, direct organizational ties are not firm. It is uncertain whether or not any of the organizations could withstand what could be political repression in the not too distant future.

Significantly, while the Rouge Forum fought racism and sexism perhaps harder than any other North American education-based group, it remains that the Rouge Forum has not fully bridged the race and sex/gender gaps that form the educator population the Rouge Forum draws from. Amber Goslee, the Rouge Forum webmaster, noted in the 2007 conference, that the organization would need to be transformed in practical ways, more inclusive, more dedicated to fighting internal forms of these Achilles' heel, if it would hope to have a lasting impact.

Grassroots Organizing

The Rouge Forum focused much of its work on grassroots organizing rooted in establishing close personal ties, friendships, with people. Working within as well as on the margins of various organizations we have had a number of successes. What follows is a brief description of many of the organizing strategies and tactics we have found useful.

Meetings, interactive conferences and teach: Rouge Forum members made presentations at a variety of professional organizations including the American Educational Research Association, National Council for the Social Studies, The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps (TASH), the International Social

Studies Conference, Michigan Council for the Social Studies, and the Socialist Scholars Conference and have held a number of meetings and interactive conferences in Detroit, Albany, Binghamton, Rochester, Orlando, Calgary and Louisville. The united groups have also sponsored exhibitor booths at many of these conferences. Articles about the Whole Schooling Consortium and Rouge Forum have appeared in *Theory and Research in Social Education*, *Wisconsin School Board Journal*, *Substance*, *Counterpunch*, *the Nation*, and *Z Magazine* among others.

England's Dave Hill, Susan Ohanian, Patrick Shannon, Ross, Vinson, Gibson, and many other Rouge Forum members have published extensively, pointing to the system of capital as the key problem in schools, and out. The sterling academic reputation won by, for example, E. Wayne Ross (former editor of the social studies journal, *Theory and Research in Social Education* and the editor of a series of books on public education) coupled with his activist stance have made it possible to inspire a new, younger generation of scholars and graduate students who appear poised to take leadership, not only in their own academic fields, but in the Rouge Forum. Like them, younger k12 teachers now move into leadership roles of the group, as older members seem willing to step aside.

Rouge Forum members joined, and assumed leadership in, community coalitions organized against the war, usually coalitions involving labor, leftists, grassroots collectives, and religious groups aimed at ending the war, but frequently involved in school organizing as well, such as the San Diego Coalition for Peace and Justice. As in other coalitions, Rouge Forum members assisted in developing strategies and tactics drawn from a careful analysis of the specific community linked to the workings of capital, identifying choke points similar to the Big Tests, as in the road to the airport in tourism-base San Diego (Gibson, 2007a).

In 2006 and 2007, four young Rouge Forum members traveled to Oaxaca, Mexico, the location of a mass community uprising, sometimes called the Oaxaca Commune, initiated by educators. There they joined in demonstrations against the regime which would cut off all of the Commune's hard-won communications systems, like the radio station, helped set up and defend barricades against troops, and engaged in the daily struggles about the goals and tactics of the movement. From their reports, Rouge Forum members published material in English in the US, urging support from school

workers in solidarity with the direct action efforts of the Oaxacans, and warning Oaxacans of the Trojan Horse union leaders who planned to arrive from the U.S., a plan that was halted when Oaxacans became aware of the nature of the visits (Gibson, 2007b).

Rouge Forum members joined the editorial board of the journals, *Cultural Logic*, and the *Journal of Critical Education Policy Studies* (U.K.), creating new and respectable venues for newer radical scholars to find places for publication, voice and recognition. At the other end of the spectrum, some Rouge Forum members found it quite productive to participate in the many online educator discussion groups, like the California Resisters moderated by life-long education activist Susan Harman, where, over time, distant friendships were built which became close ties when job and community actions began.

In cooperation with the Whole Schooling Consortium and the Whole Language Umbrella, we co-sponsored the 2000 International Education Summit for a Democratic Society. It convened progressive educators, teachers, parents, and community members locally and throughout the country. The Summit was an event designed to promote learning and skill development, dialogue, connecting urban, rural, and suburban schools, and organizing to strengthen progressive education for an inclusive and democratic society. It linked art, music, drama, celebrations with ideas, organizing, relationship building. It was an interactive, action-oriented conference propelled by the belief that learning is both personal and social and that classrooms and other educational settings must be learning communities.

Our work in professional conferences brings the ire of reactionary scholars and bureaucrats. In 2004 at an NCSS conference, the audience shouted down a state bureaucrat, a test supporter, when he tried to aggressively wreck a workshop. And, in response, Rouge Forum members have targeted workshops by what are called *standardistos* with good humored guerilla theatre, like MEAP-SCHMEAP bingo, a bingo card distributed to the audience filled with common buzzwords, like "rigorous." The first to complete a card howls, "MEAP-SCHMEAP." MEAP is Michigan's state exam.

At conferences, we place flyers throughout the conference center, and we distribute flyers at social justice events, grocery stores, universities and schools. Flyers develop connections with potential allies and, importantly, provide an entre for face-to-face discussion. Our flyers serve as introductory notes and reminders when Rouge Forum members walk door to door in communities asking, for example, "what would a great school look like, what does your school look like, and what is between one and the other?"

In the planning of the many public activities like the demonstrations and teach-ins, we make contacts to local media and subsequently see our events reported through them, sometimes with a positive report, and sometimes not.

Many members also write op-ed articles or letters to the editor in local papers. We participate in radio and television interviews, usually focusing on the social context of educational reform, standards-based education and high-stakes testing, which often result from press coverage of our meetings or opinion pieces in newspapers and magazines.

The website, www.RougeForum.org not only informs folks of future Rouge Forum events but provides thousands of connections to information that facilitates a theoretical and practical understanding to achieve a more equal and democratic world. Beyond the baseline subscribers, nearly 200,000 people visited the Rouge Forum web page in 2002, and, in early 2003, 4,000 people visited the web page each week. By 2007, about 32,000 people a month visited the web site, from all over the world, enough visitors to shut down the site toward the end of each month. The Rouge Forum News is archived on the Rouge Forum web site as are video records of speeches at Rouge Forum conferences.

Demonstrations and other "events: The Rouge Forum sponsored or co-sponsored numerous demonstrations in New York, Michigan, and California. In Michigan, we sponsored rallies to "GET RID OF THE MEAP." Our goals were to provide a place where people could comfortably take a public stand and to gain additional people with whom we could work. We had an "open mike" session and more than a dozen people spoke for 2 to 3 minutes each about their reasons for opposing high stakes testing, specifically the MEAP. Following the march we met for refreshments and talk and

made plans for continuing our work to educate others about high-stakes testing and what they can do about it.

We participate in community debates. In one such debate, in January 2005, the leader of the Michigan Chamber of Commerce and the executive director of merit awards (the department responsible for distributing the bribes that the State of Michigan pays out to primarily suburbanites for "passing" the state tests) presented opposing viewpoints, supporting standards-based education and high-stakes testing.

Early on we worked collaboratively with some Michigan state legislators to challenge other policy makers to take the tests that they expect students to take. Most of the legislators were no-shows. We encouraged parents, teachers and students to follow the example set by policy makers by boycotting the tests. Some Rouge Forum members feared that by bringing attention to the tests, it would legitimize them. We found two solutions to the problem. First, a participant was immediately handed a form to sign that would opt him/herself out of the tests. Secondly, when policy-makers were finished taking the tests, their scores were determined by the average income level of the district they represent. The best predictor of a school district's test scores is the average income of the parents. However, many Rouge Forum leaders felt strongly that electoral work is merely a direct route into deepened alienation, a process that looks for external saviors, when, "nobody is going to save us but us." That debate continues.

Members of the Rouge Forum brought two key resolutions to the National Council for the Social Studies conference in San Antonio on November 18, 2000. The two resolutions, reproduced in addressed open access and free tuition to universities, and opposition to high-stakes tests. The motions were first presented to the members of the College and University Faculty Association (CUFA), composed of professors, the evening before the House of Delegates meeting of NCSS.

The motion on Open Access was defeated, about two-to-one, due at least in part to the opposition of multi-culturalist poverty hustlers and nationalists like counterfeit scholar Professor James Banks, who spoke fervently, worrying that free tuition might cut professors' salaries. The resolution opposing High-Stakes Tests, however, passed unanimously, a surprise for even the most optimistic of Rouge Forum members. The language of the CUFA resolution in opposition to high-stakes exams is the sharpest to

come out of any of the professional organizations or the two education-worker unions. The NCSS House of Delegates voted down CUFA's high-Stakes resolution, after very brief debate during which the members were warned that if the high-stakes were abolished, social studies teachers might lose their jobs. Meanwhile, related groups that oppose high-stakes exams began to circulate the resolution around the US on email listservs, urging contact people to bring the proposal to union locals, PTA groups, and administrator organizations. The resolutions influenced other professional groups that have developed statements on the deleterious effects of high-stakes testing (e.g., American Evaluation Association).

In 2004 and 2006, the Rouge Forum brought resolutions to NCSS that can be summed up by, "The US should get out of Iraq now." While CUFA passed these motions overwhelmingly, the members also virtually refused to discuss them and, in 2006, followed the CUFA chairperson's advice that, "we should pass this quickly and get on to the hors dwarves."

Summary

The Rouge Forum exists because rank and file intellectuals and activists consistently made connections, not only between capitalism, imperialism, war, and the regimentation of schooling, but between one another, persevering over years of practical resistance to authoritarian intrusions into their lives, and intellectual explorations into the struggle to not merely resist exploitation and alienation, but to transform it, now and in the future. The close personal ties, humility, dedication to equality, risk-taking, sacrifice for the common good, internationalism, anti-racism, anti-sexism, commitment to the celebration of aesthetics and creativity (fun), all forge an ethic that assisted Rouge Forum members to keep their ideals and stay afloat in a world that promotes a war of all on all. Those ethics helped bridge the gap between reformers and revolutionaries inside the Rouge Forum.

Today's educational practices are guided by educational policies, such as No Child Left Behind Act, that reflect the same obstacles to achieving education for democracy and social justice as identified by John Dewey early in 20th century - namely the powerful alliance of class privilege with philosophies of education that sharply divide

mind and body, theory and practice, culture and utility: unacceptable disconnections. Our struggle is not new.

There is no "one best system" for organizing people to act for positive change, The Rouge Forum is one among many groups of committed activists who are contributing to the construction of a K-16 movement for progressive change in education and society, but the only one that takes on the system of capital, publicly and that stresses: Justice demands organization and sacrifice. It is our hope that by sharing our experiences in building a grassroots organization that our comrades in this struggle might learn something that advances the movement as a whole and that we might, in turn, learn from them.

Notes

1. The basis of this section is David Hursh's detailed account of Sam Diener's arrest in "The First Amendment and free speech at the National Council for the Social Studies: The arrest and trials of leafleteer Sam Diener," and Stephen C. Fleury's "A Sunday Afternoon in the House of Delegates." Both papers were presented to the College and University Faculty Assembly of the National Council for the Social Studies as part of the symposium "The journey from Phoenix to Anaheim: Institutional identities and political engagements of CUFA and NCSS, 1994-1998," Anaheim, California, November 19, 1998.
2. The College and University Faculty Assembly (CUFA) is an "associated group" of National Council for the Social Studies and operates as an autonomous organization within the larger structure of NCSS.
3. The CUFA Resolution on Proposition 187 was written and sponsored by Perry Marker, Stephen C. Fleury, and E. Wayne Ross. The text of the resolution can be found in Ross (1997).
4. This section draws on Rich Gibson's "Outfoxing the Destruction of Reason and the Introduction," which appeared in *Theory and Research in Social Education*, Spring 2001 from a special issue of *Cultural Logic*, 4(1), <http://www.eserver.org/clogic>
5. This section draws from Rich Gibson's "Outfoxing the Destruction of Reason."

6. This section is drawn from E. Wayne Ross and Kevin Vinson's *What We Can Know and When We Can Know It: Education Reform, Testing and the Standardization Craze*, *Z Magazine*, March 2001.

7. This section is drawn on "Whole Schooling: Implementing progressive school reform" in *The Social Studies Curriculum*, E. W. Ross (Ed.), Albany: NY: State University of New York Press, 2001.

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