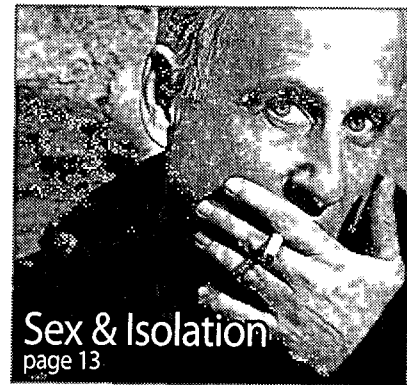


CUNY GRADUATE CENTER Advocate

March 2008

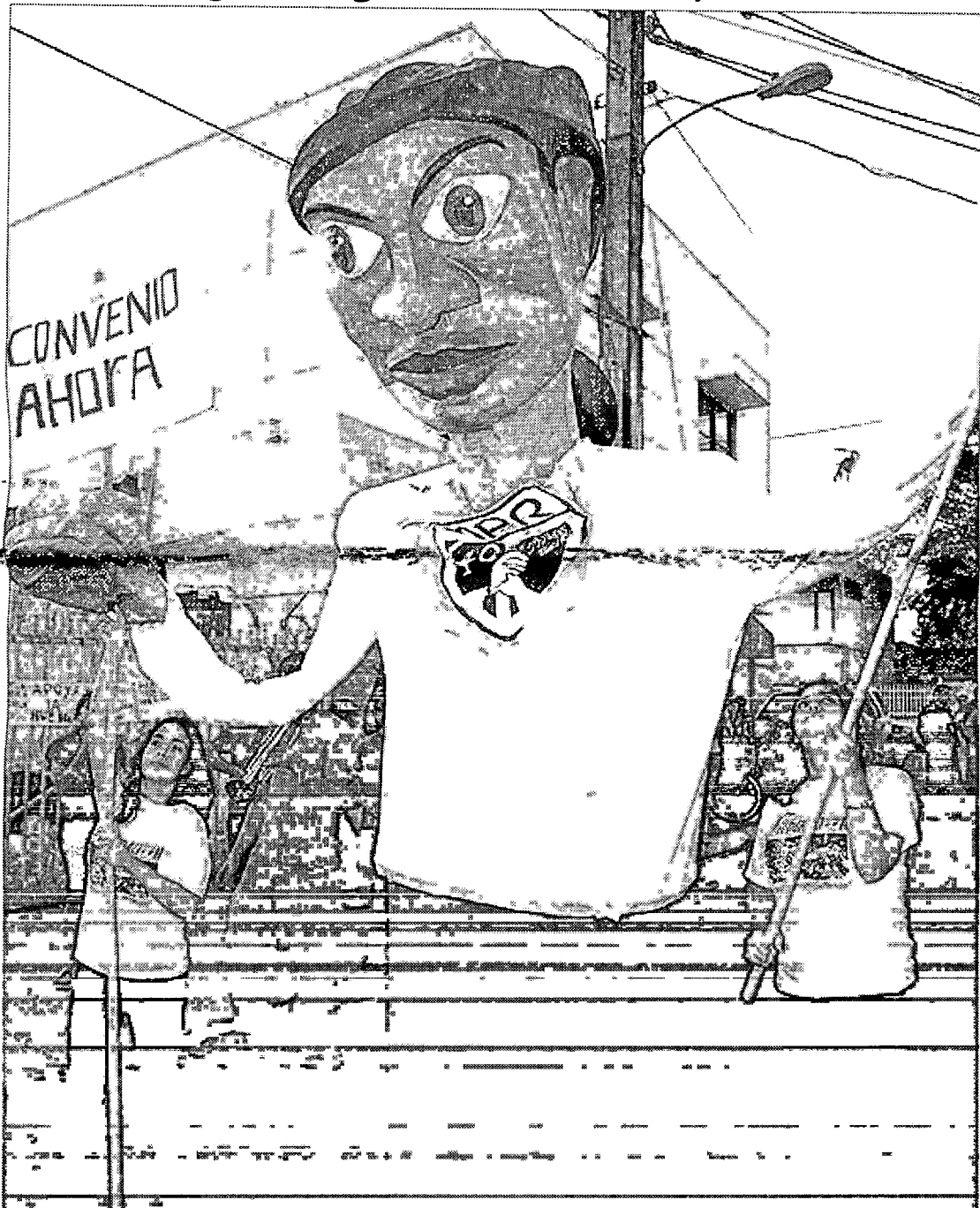
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Puerto Rico School Teachers Go on Strike

Demand higher wages, smaller classes, better facilities



Puerto Rican public school teachers demonstrate for better wages and conditions in February

On Feb. 21, after more than 30 months of stalled contract negotiations between the Puerto Rico Teachers' Union and the central government, many thousands of Puerto Rico's 42,000 public school teachers went on strike, closing down schools across the small island territory and sparking violence in some cities.

Although Puerto Rican teachers make a starting

salary of only \$19,200, or approximately one third of the average salary for public school teachers in mainland USA, the lack of any real salary increases was only one of many reasons why teachers went on strike. In addition to higher wages, striking teachers say they are primarily fighting for greater control over their working conditions, including defending the School

Organization Committee, which has given teachers in Puerto Rico, unlike many teachers on the mainland, some limited control over the curriculum and organization of the schools where they work. The state and the education department have threatened to liquidate the School Organization Committee in the current contract negotiations.

Continued page 6

NP on the Way?

Student Affairs says new nurse practitioner could be on campus by mid-April

According to Sharon Lerner, the Director of Student Affairs, the long saga of finding and hiring a new nurse practitioner for the student Health Services Center may finally be at an end. The Health Services Center, located on the sixth floor of the graduate Center, has been without a nurse since the former director of Health Services, Mary Clancy retired July 30, 2007. Since then the Office of Student Affairs has been working with mixed success to find a replacement for Clancy.

Ms. Lerner said that the long and often complicated contract process, which requires state approval, has made finding a replacement for Clancy difficult. Despite the difficulties, however, Lerner said she is confident that the process is quickly reaching its end and that, if all goes as planned, there should be an onsite nurse practitioner in training sometime in mid-April. If this is true it will be welcome news for the many uninsured and increasingly under-insured Graduate Center students, many of whom rely upon the health care provided by the Health Services Center.

Unfortunately this is not the first time that the Office of Student Affairs has made these kinds of optimistic predictions. In September 2007, Matthew Schoengood, the Vice President for Student Affairs, told the *GC Advocate* that he hoped a nurse practitioner would be in place by the end of the fall semester; and in November, Sharon Lerner optimistically told the paper that the GC would have a replacement for Mary Clancy by January, 2008. It has now been more than seven months since Clancy's retirement and nearly a full academic year that the school has been

without a nurse practitioner. Although Student Affairs is clearly optimistic, if their track record is any indication, there is no guarantee that the hiring process will be completed before the end of the spring semester. It is possible that GC Students may have to wait until the summer before the Health Services Center is back on track.

In the meantime, the Doctoral Students' Council is debating how best to spend or invest the \$96,000 in student fees that have gone to help fund the nurse practitioner. Sources in the DSC say that one of the many ideas being considered includes offering to purchase any needed or new equipment for the Health Services Center.

As a temporary solution to this problem, the DSC and the Office of Student Affairs are continuing to work directly with the Urban Family Health Clinics of New York to provide temporary care to GC students who need to see a nurse. Students interested in visiting one of the many clinics available to GC students throughout the city (see list below), should see the Administrative Coordinator of the Wellness Center, Ms. Annabella Bernard (Room 6422) for more details.

Sidney Hillman Family Practice: 16 East 16th Street, New York, NY 10003

East 13th St. Family Practice: 113 East 13th St. New York, NY 10003

Amsterdam Center: 690 Amsterdam Avenue (at 94th St.) New York, NY 10025

Walton Family Health Center: 1894 Walton Avenue Bronx, NY 10453

Mt. Hope Family Practice: 130 West Tremont Avenue Bronx, NY 10453

Parkchester Family Practice: 1597 Unionport Road Bronx, NY 10462

What Nader's Bid Really Means

"If liberty and equality, as is thought by some, are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be best attained when all persons alike share in government to the utmost." —Aristotle

By the time this goes to press, I am sure we will have all heard the chorus of doom and gloom voices from the moderate left bewailing Ralph Nader's recently announced Green Party bid for President of the United States. There will be the usual pundits saying things such as: "he was a great consumer advocate, but has no business being in politics" or "now is not the time;" and, of course, there will be plenty of arguments about Nader's naive idealism, the inefficacy of third parties, and the paranoid-fueled fear of a Nader driven Republican win in 2008, but there will be little talk about the real implications of his campaign. Indeed the media coverage of Nader has always focused on him as a spoiler and very rarely as a real candidate with real issues. I can still hear, for instance, somewhere in the back of my brain the revered *Nation* columnist Eric Alterman's whiny, petulant, schoolboy voice complaining how Nader cost the Democrats the 2000 election.

"Thank you, Ralph, for the Iraq war. Thank you, Ralph, for the tax cuts. Thank you, Ralph, for the destruction of the environment. Thank you, Ralph, for the destruction of the Constitution."

Of course, Nader could not possibly be responsible for any of these things, and to suggest that he might be is the worst kind of intellectual dishonesty. If Nader had even half of the power embittered Democrats like Alterman think he does, the Democratic Party would have courted him long ago — at least offering to take up some of his positions — rather than demonizing him. As everyone who wasn't living under a rock knows, the Democrats did not lose the 2000 election; the 2000 election was stolen! The Democrats were defeated because the president's brother was the governor of Florida, not because Ralph Nader took away Al Gore's vote. The Democrats were defeated because after the election Al Gore cared more about political stability and the reputation of his party than taking on the Bush campaign, and rolled over precisely when he should have been mobilizing street demonstrations and demanding a thorough recount. The Democrats lost not only because Al Gore lost Florida, but because he failed to win a solid majority of states outside of Florida, which would have protected him against the fraud perpetrated there. And lastly, the Democrats were defeated because they courted members of the Republican Party and "swing voters" and completely failed to energize their base and speak to their real constituency, many of whom stayed home. So thank you Al Gore for losing; thank you Al Gore for the tax cuts; thank you Al Gore for the Iraq War; and, uh, thank you Al Gore, for the impotent, utterly demoralized, and ineffectual party that you left in your wake. And this brings us to the real issue at hand; there is no better reason to support a Nader campaign than the current Democratically controlled congress, which, despite all of its rhetoric, has done nothing to end the War in Iraq, absolutely nothing at all to move toward a real national health care plan — neither Hillary nor Obama are currently offering anything like the kind of national health care plan our country so desperately needs — and very little to repeal the Bush tax cuts or the Patriot Act.

FROM THE editor's desk

Like in 2000, there are still few significant and substantive differences between the two parties. Sure, McCain supports continuing the war if necessary and Obama at least says that he supports bringing the troops home within a year, but Clinton's position on the war is as muddled as most of her fellow Democrats, and any final decisions, regardless of who is elected, will be based on the realities on the ground in Iraq in January and have little to do with campaign promises. The political consequences of a real withdrawal are too much for either of the two big parties to handle. What we do know, however, is that Obama, Clinton, and McCain are all pretty hawkish on US foreign policy, (Obama, for instance, has argued for increasing the military budget and bombing Pakistan if necessary) and all see a continued PNAC style role for the U.S. in controlling and manipulating international affairs. Likewise, Clinton and McCain have little or no interest in repealing or voting against trade pacts like NAFTA and other economically liberal trade policies that destroy local economies, cultures, and workers' rights. Although Obama has very recently paid lip service to criticizing NAFTA, he has also said that not re-negotiating the current trade agreements could lead to what he called "protectionist rhetoric" from the right and the left.

This kind of fear mongering is typical neo-liberal rhetoric and is hardly the position of someone sincerely interested in real trade reform, but rather reflects the position of a true moderate, interested in ameliorating some of the negative impacts of trade agreements like NAFTA but not repealing or significantly changing them. Indeed, "amelioration" is exactly the term that Clinton used in the last debate to describe her response to NAFTA. Of course there are issues where the two parties actually differ significantly (abortion, guns, immigration, gay marriage), but on the big issues, there is simply too much common ground. Who is to say whether Al Gore and the Democrats, for instance, would have invaded Iraq after 9/11 (the Clinton administration, after all, had no qualms about killing innocent Iraqis with its sanctions)? Who can guess whether or not he would have instituted even more draconian surveillance legislation after the attacks? Or whether he would have closed down or expanded Guantanamo? Lastly, who is to say whether or not Gore and his party would have been capable of implementing any of the environmental policies that he ran on in 2000? It is more likely that the Republican run congress would have bullied Gore into a stalemate on probably all of these issues, pushing him into Iraq, stonewalling his environmental policies (or placating him on one or two), and limiting his executive power, just as they expanded the executive power of Bush. George Bush may have been the one in charge for the last eight years, but the groundwork for all of our recent foreign and domestic disasters were laid by both parties — let us never forget the cowardly bi-partisan congressional vote to authorize the use of force against Iraq. As Jonathan Edwards, a Democrat himself, was fond of reminding voters:

This system is corrupt. And it's rigged. And it's rigged against you, and we can say 'As long as we get Democrats in, everything's going to be OK.' It's a lie. It's not the truth. Do you really believe if we replace a crowd of corporate Republicans with a crowd of Democrats that anything meaningful is going to change? This has to stop. It's that simple.

It is really no coincidence then that Nader announced his exploratory committee on exactly the same day that Edwards chose to drop out of the Democratic race. Without Edwards and Kucinich running, the Democratic Party nomination has been handed back to the politicians, corporatists, centrists, and moderates of the Clinton era. Like Edwards, Nader recognizes that the real problems facing our nation are not al-Qaida or Iran, but are largely internal and domestic. Nader's campaign, and the Green Party's platform, unlike Obama's or Hillary's, has always been about change; it is about fundamentally changing the nature and structure of our democracy. It's about changing the constitution and moving away from a winner take all two-party system of entrenched interests, toward a more real, more representative, more inclusive, more dynamic, and more diverse democracy, where votes are never wasted, and people's voices are heard. Let us not forget the Green Party either, whose candidacy Nader is seeking, and whose progressive platform of reform would seek to implement such necessary and common sense changes as living wage laws; real national health care, cooperative ownership of enterprise, a steady-state economy, and global disarmament of nuclear weapons, not to mention a dedication to actually doing something about global warming and environmental destruction now rather than later. While Obama and Hillary compete to see who can offer the flimsiest multi-payer health care system, the Green Party supports "a universal, comprehensive, national single-payer health insurance program." This alone should be enough to convince anyone who actually cares about the coming health care crisis to vote for the Green Party.

But it's not just about voting for Ralph Nader or the Green Party. Vote for whomever you like — including Cynthia McKinney, should she win the Green Party nomination — but whatever you do, leave the Democratic Party; join the Green Party or the Socialist Party USA or whatever party tickles your fancy; volunteer to help out in a local campaign; and donate what you can. Nader's presidential bids have obviously never been about winning, but, like all third party campaigns, have always been about gaining support for the movements, the parties, and the platforms that really matter, and raising awareness about the real options and possibilities that are available. Although Nader will not win in 2008, he, once again, has the opportunity to challenge the status quo, force himself into the conversation — and maybe even the debates — garner support for the causes that really matter, and force the Democrats against the wall on the real issues facing our country. The pundits will say what they always say: "Nader is a spoiler;" "it's not time;" "this would be fine if we had a parliamentary democracy," etc. But this is exactly what they've said all along from 1996, to 2000, to 2004. Ask yourself, when will it be time? And how long can we stand to wait before we realize our time has passed? ■

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