

# **The Impact of Privatization and Globalization on Public Education: A Preliminary Resource Guide**

**By Dan Kaplan**

Executive Secretary of the San Mateo Federation of Teachers, Local 1493

There is a growing trend in this country and around the world that wants to transform public education systems into market-based operations, with as little public control and government regulation as possible. In response to this “neoliberal” push towards the privatization of education, a fledgling movement is attempting to defend public education by publicizing the attacks on it and analyzing the arguments. The movement has been spearheaded by a number of faculty-initiated conferences held around the country over the last few years. This article will report on a few of these conferences and will provide a brief overview of web and print resources related to the privatization and globalization of public education.

## Conferences

On March 3, 2001, a one-day regional conference was held at the University of Missouri, Kansas City. The title of the Conference was “Education for Democracy: Fighting the Corporate Takeover.” The event was sponsored by the UMKC chapter of the AAUP, and attracted 130 presenters and attendees. As conference organizer David Brodsky reported: “Twenty-six speakers—faculty and students from six different institutions of higher education as well as community activists—informed the audience about a broad range of problems besetting academia, outlined their visions for democratic education, and offered strategies for fighting corporate aggression.” For more on this conference see the conference website at <http://www.louisville.edu/journal/workplace/wp42.html>.

More recently, on October 26, 2002, the Professional Staff Congress, the AFT higher education local in New York City, sponsored a one-day conference at the Borough of Manhattan Community College. “Globalization, Privatization, War: In Defense of Public Education in the Americas” addressed “the impact of privatization and corporatization on public education,

contingent labor organizing, academic freedom, racism and access to higher education, health and safety internationally, migration in the Americas, education in a time of war, gendered dimensions of the crisis, intellectual property and distance learning in the Americas and public education unions in a globalized environment.” Materials concerning the conference can be found at the PSC website <[www.psc-cuny.org](http://www.psc-cuny.org)> While at this site, you might want to read an outstanding article entitled “Essay: Globalization and Education As A Commodity” by Professor William Tabb.

Participating in the PSC conference was the Civil Society Network for Public Education in the Americas. This hemispheric group brings together South, Central, and North American workers in education. Many interesting articles can be found on this group’s web page, located on the website of the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation. Let me mention a few: “Keep Public Education Out of Trade Agreements” by Larry Kuehn, the Director of Research and Technology for the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation of Canada, “The World Trade Organization and Post-Secondary Education: Implications for the Public System” by Professor Marjorie Griffin Cohen of Simon Fraser University, and “Responding to Globalization of Education in the Americas—Strategies to Support Public Education,” also by Larry Kuehn. See: <[www.bctf.bc.ca/social/globalization](http://www.bctf.bc.ca/social/globalization)>.

The website of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) is well worth a look. Let me mention one article: “The General Agreement on Trade in Services: What’s at Stake for Post-Secondary Education?” The CAUT site is <[www.caut.ca](http://www.caut.ca)>.

There have also been several international labor conferences over the last few years that dealt with related issues, organized by the Open World Conference (OWC), an international labor solidarity network. In 1997, there was a Western Hemisphere Workers' Conference Against NAFTA and Privatization that was held in San Francisco, and endorsed by the San Francisco Labor Council. In 2000 there was an Open World Conference in Defense of Trade Union Independence and Democratic Rights, also held in San Francisco and endorsed by the SF Labor Council. And in February, 2002 there was an International Conference Against Deregulation and For Labor Rights For All held in Berlin, Germany .

Out of the Berlin Conference came a proposal to convene an international labor conference in defense of public education to be held in Paris, France, in June 2003. Please take a look at the new component of the OWC website that has just been put together to help organize this conference in defense of public education. While there you can also review in more detail the history of the various international labor conferences I have referred to. The address is <[www.owcinfo.org](http://www.owcinfo.org)>. Once there, click on Public Education Conference 2003.

Finally, the next CFT Convention, to be held in San Francisco, March 21-23, 2003, will include a workshop on international labor issues.

### We Still Read Books, Too

No discussion of available resources would be complete without mentioning at a few of the many good books that have been published recently on education issues. Let me note only four of what I think are among the best recent analyses. First, there is the work edited by Cary Nelson, Will Teach For Food: Academic Labor in Crisis, (1997). The following year Chalk Lines: The Politics of Work in the Managed University was published, edited by Randy Martin. I especially recommend the article "Adjuncts and More Adjuncts: Labor Segmentation and the Transformation of Higher Education" by Vincent Tirelli in this volume. Another outstanding collection of essays is to be found in Campus, Inc.: Corporate Power in the Ivory Tower, edited by Geoffrey D. White with Flannery C. Hauck, published in 2000. Finally, I want to recommend the just published revised edition of Education, Inc: Turning Learning into a Business, edited by Alfie Kohn and Patrick Shannon.

The resources that I have provided here can serve as an entree into some of the most serious issues confronting public education here and around the world today. As William Tabb wrote in an article cited above: "It is easy to understand the race to the bottom that results as factory workers in one place face more intense competition from lower-cost labor on the other side of the world. College teachers would do well, however, to include their own future prospects as they consider the impact of globalization over the coming years. The university will be a very different place in another decade or two, and what it will look like depends to a large degree on what version of globalization wins out."

AFT Local 1493 has put links to all of the sites mentioned in this article on its website at:  
<<http://aft1493.org/links.html#global>>.

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