

Teacher, Union and Human Rights: A Seminar on Global Solidarity In Memory of Mary Compton Event Report

In January 2018, the National Education Union – NUT Section UK lost one of its own, Mary Compton. Mary was a determined fighter for teacher, trades union, and human rights across the globe, working tirelessly to realise a better education and future for all.

In memory of Mary, the Union organised the event *Teacher, Union and Human Rights: A Seminar on Global Solidarity*. Taking place on Saturday, 7 July 2018 in London, this event commemorated Mary and sought to build upon her important legacy. International colleagues touched upon a number of the topics about which Mary was passionate.

The seminar began with an introduction covering Mary's work and legacy, led by her friend and Union treasurer Ian Murch. The global overview was then given by Hugh McLean, Director of the Education Support Program at the Open Society Foundations. Hugh covered the global education context, exploring the recent developments and trajectory of the current system.



Following Hugh's remarks, Global Teacher of the Year 2016 Hanan Al Hroub spoke passionately about the importance of education in Palestine. The National Union of Teachers, and now the NEU-NUT Section, has a long and proud history of supporting the rights of the Palestinian people. Education, as Hanan underlined, is key to the fight for freedom from occupation. **'Whatever difficulties life throws at us, we can overcome them if we give our children a safe and hopeful future,'** she said. This future is built through education. Our work continues to be important as we defend the rights of Palestinians, and in particular their right to education.

Hanan was followed by Professor Susan Robertson of the University of Cambridge, a close friend of Mary's and, indeed, her Master's thesis supervisor. Susan shared her work on the global governance of education, particularly exploring the new neo-liberal agenda. This is of importance as we continue to fight for free, high quality public education for all and free trade unionism across all countries.

Workshops for the seminar focused on four key themes; child rights in Palestine, the recent elections in Turkey, education and human rights in Latin America, and organising for impact. The sessions were led by activists, unionists and members. As the group shared reflections on the workshops, it became clear that the seminar had been valuable in its aim of catalysing Mary's passion for change. The reflections shared gave a clear mandate and steer for the Union's continued international solidarity work.

Dr Lois Weiner of New Jersey City University (USA) closed the seminar with a resounding call to action for attendees – **'Mary cannot be replaced. But we can continue the work she started, as long as we hold fast to the principles that informed her interventions.'** Lois spoke passionately, and persuasively, about the need for immediate and strong action against privatisation and violators of human rights. In both cases, she urged audience members to adopt a **'no excuses and no exceptions'** approach. She encouraged the Union to continue to work at every level, from the local (with International Solidarity Officers in



associations and divisions) to the international (with trade unionists from around the world).

Unions are built on solidarity; the national borders that divide our domestic education systems must not act as limits to our solidarity. The fight of one union is the fight of all unions, a message Mary Compton shared far and wide through her work. This event will hopefully have acted as an inspiration for attendees to not only remember Mary, but follow her example and take action for global solidarity.

Appendix I – Memorial Video

The video from Annual Conference in memory of Mary is available on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSKCss_VmUM.

Appendix II – Additional Photos







Appendix III – speaker notes and speeches

Hanan Al Hroub (Plenary)

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen It is an honour to speak to you today in one of the world's greatest institutions. Thanks for the invitation.

Firstly, I want to thank the NUT Section of the National Education Union for hosting this important event and for standing with the rightful and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and their rejection of all forms of racism, injustice and oppression and defending one of the most important human rights, the right to education.

We always remember majestic people who have left impressions that cannot be forgotten. Among these great ones, we recall today, Mary Compton, a defender of freedoms and workers, may her soul rest in peace.

Ladies and gentlemen, living under occupation, or living in conflict zones is very difficult and differs greatly from living in areas where natural disasters occur, despite the occurrence of trauma in both cases. However, natural disasters do prohibit freedom and the right to education, while living in conflict areas, you suffer daily, continuously and in different forms the loss of security, safety, and the denial of the most basic human rights, that is the right to live in peace, and there are those who forcibly confiscate the right to education.

The right to education is a necessity in all societies, but in Palestine, it is an urgent necessity. Education is our hope for a better future.

I just wonder ... does the world recognise this right?

Nevertheless, education in Palestine can be considered a model of education in conflict areas, because of the challenges that reflect the nature of the methodologies used. The memory is still full of dramatic events, whether the shelling of schools in Gaza Strip many times, or the closure of schools in Jerusalem and West Bank during the days of the first and second popular uprising (Al-Intfada), as a result of the curfew imposed for long periods. In addition to the demolition of schools with different justifications such as schools in the old town of Hebron. Then after the school was demolished hundreds of our students have to start the new academic year in the open ... Now the turn is on the AL Khan AL Ahmar school, and the series continues.

If we could talk about one of the human rights, then it is the right to education, which means that everyone has the right to a good education, a good teacher and a good school, safe educational environment, the most important thing.

Schools destroyed, students and teachers are in the circle of targeting, and a separation wall, that prevents students from reaching their schools, imagine that all of this happens in the 21st century, at a time when the entire world is talking about education in the light of the skills of the 21st century. Then what is the value of talking about skills when there is confiscation of freedoms, and how can those who lack the skill to communicate with their school, to acquire the skill of communication? This is the tip of the iceberg in terms of exposure to infrastructure in the educational system.

As for teachers and students it is more difficult. There are the occupation barriers, and the separation Wall. There are also night raids on houses; there are detention, unlimited violence and coldblooded killings.

Imagine that someone lost his way, or raised his hand in a spontaneous way or that someone does not hear or did not understand what the soldier said because he does not know the Hebrew language, will be shot immediately. The atmosphere in Palestine is not normal like classrooms here in the UK or around the world.

We see suffering in our students' eyes every day.

Here children either witness violence first hand or are exposed to it via news reports and social media .. This suffering gets into the classroom and leads to frustration.

Students and teachers face this daily reality. They may get hurt and may be imprisoned.

How will be the psychological state of both? Moreover, what reactions to all the violence perpetrated by the occupation against them. How can I explain a lesson and how will the student interact to the learning process?

How can I answer a student who says to me that at night the army broke into our house or the house of our neighbours, arrested my father, my brother or my colleague, or killed him ... The most painful thing losing one of my students in class and his place remains empty. Or another child injured, or one of my students come crying on, his games, pictures and all of his memories destroyed by the occupation.

Ladies and Gentlemen there is no doubt that these scenes generate reactions in students, and cause them different shocks ... This violence affects their behaviour ... and thus may be the reason to determine the course of their lives and their future.

As teachers our task is very complex, we have to deal with these difficult situations... In my class, I am a teacher and a social and psychological counsellor, and I have to be a source of trust and confidence for them. I have to have the strength and skills to cope with all of this, to provide them with a safe environment and to treat them from the trauma they have suffered. Listen to them, respect their minds and humanity. Giving them the opportunity to express themselves, their thoughts and feelings. Empty the anger and sadness inside them. Isolating them from all events surrounding them.

In my classroom, I have provided a different education and a safe environment, because safety, peace and joy are lost out of the classroom. Freeing them from the sanctification of the curriculum, and broadcasting life, spirit, love and joy. Using activities, games, drama, drawing, singing, music and all kinds of arts and sports. All that helps me in building a freethinker Human who governs his mind in all his life. I want to see a happy child.

I decided that teachers, like artists, must create an environment that frees the child and their imagination from their daily trauma and helps them shape it in a loving and beautiful way. It should be the first priority to provide a safe, attractive and fun educational environment. What I believe in teachers who take the next generation in their hands and shape them.

I succeeded from inside my home, with my children, who were subjected to violence during their return from school and from my very first day as a teacher, I embraced the “no to violence” slogan and developed the ‘play and learn’ approach that I started in my home. Which was not easy to raise in a violent environment and during daily violations.

Ladies and Gentlemen there is no doubt that the conditions imposed on us pushed the Ministry of Education to adopt qualitative steps to meet these challenges:

1. Adopting an emergency plan that is being circulated and developed according to the latest developments.
2. Disseminate curriculum electronically / jervoselliem. It is an education that is struggling to survive from occupation.

The story in Palestine has chapters of suffering, which are almost endless because they are associated with continuous occupation. Education in a secure and stable environment seems far-fetched.

So, supporting education in Palestine is not a charity act but a RIGHT and also an action of solidarity.

Ladies and gentlemen, winning the global teacher prize made my voice and my message heard all over the world.

So, I do have a message for every politician – wherever they are in the world. Education is the key to solving every issue – creating peace, creating the jobs of the future, fighting disease, fighting poverty. Without education we will not solve the rest of the world's problems. Education is the key for justice.

Education must be outside the scope of conflict.

We want our children to live and learn by love and peace just as other children around the world are able to do.

Whatever difficulties life throws at us we can overcome them if we give our children a safe and hopeful future.

Laurence Rose, co-chair of NEU London Young Teachers' Network (*Organising to win: connecting struggles and learning from others workshop*)

Why the workplace so important-

- Unionising relies on high quality communication- face to face interaction most likely to achieve this.
- Poor open rate of electronic communication- 11% industry average for email, less than 1% click rate for links within the email.
- Workplace meetings the best environment to build a collective identity- people know each other in their workplaces and can unite around common issues.
- Teachers getting less political/union education during training (TeachFirst/Schools Direct) and so workplace might be their introduction to this.

Barriers to workplace organising-

- Rep density- without a rep workplace activity is minimal.
- Phantom reps- even if there is an elected rep they may be doing minimal organising in the workplace and even preventing others from doing so.
- School architecture- many new schools are built in a way that silos departments (i.e no school-wide staff room) meaning that it is difficult to get staff around a school to work together.
- Fragmentation- proliferation of academies means that there are few common standards across education so exploited staff may not be aware of how bad their situation is.
- High staff turnover- constant renewal is required making it difficult to build on success or even get beyond laying foundations.

Recent experiences of workplace organising-

- Group of young teachers in London came together in 2016 with the aim of improving workplace organisation (NUT London Young Teachers Network).

- We hold termly London-Wide meetings to encourage young teachers to become reps if their school doesn't have one.
- We also set up electronic Networks (Whatsapp/Facebook) to provide support and advice across the Network.
- Resources (PowerPoint presentations/leaflets) created to set up and deliver workplace meetings to encourage staff to take action on workload.
- More enthusiastic members of the Network have used these to set up workload meetings in neighbouring schools.
- This has resulted in new reps being elected in schools.
- It is hoped that over the next academic year we can build on this to help schools deliver action in their schools to improve their workload or any other issue they feel to be important.

Howard Stevenson, University of Nottingham

Our discussion focused around lessons from unions internationally about the development of workplace organisation - which is a common theme/experience in many other contexts. This is particularly the case where unions experience significant challenges/ attacks. The need to (re-)connect with members 'on the ground' was seen as an imperative - and there is much to learn from the experience of others elsewhere.

We identified the role of International Solidarity Officers as having considerable potential in terms of engaging members (not all of whom may want to engage with more 'traditional' union activity) but also helping the process of mutual learning across countries. The people in the workshop were unanimous in seeing the ISO role as very important and having considerable potential. It was suggested that ISOs might be supported to develop more direct and horizontal forms of working with grassroots members of unions in other countries - digital communication opens up fascinating possibilities here. Twinning union branches is an example of what might be possible (when I worked with the KNUT they the local branch I visited in the Masai was keen to do this).

Julia Simpkins, International Solidarity Officer, Bolton (*Access all areas? Child rights in Palestine workshop*)

Sadly the skype with Wallah in Hebron did not work. Louise read out a message from her which painted a clear picture of life in Hebron.

She stated that in the last year 10 children have been shot at check points, mostly because they did not understand the soldier who was speaking in Hebrew.

For 5 years the NUT have sent at least 2 delegations per year to Palestine. Where ever you are there will probably be a delegate living near you who will come and give a talk.

People have started to do more than just give talks. Julia talked about bringing a group of children from Askar refugee camp to Bolton Lancashire for 10 days. Helena talked about the film she made of the February 2018 delegation which should be on the NEU website soon.

We discussed how to increase awareness of the situation in Palestine. How to change the narrative. Support for Jeremy Corbyn who has said he will declare Palestine a state in its own right as one of his first actions on becoming prime minister.

The Walk for Freedom has got Gaza into the news. If you have any opportunity to get something into the media, talking about people losing their rights to water, electricity a home and the treatment of children who are arrested by the Israeli army are supported by information from Israel as well as Palestine and quickly show people who know nothing about the situation how unfair it is.

Walaa Abumonshar (Access all areas? Child rights in Palestine workshop)

Good afternoon. My name is Walaa Abumonshar.

I live in Hebron, Palestine. I am a trained psychologist and therapist.

For a number of years after graduation from university, I worked for the Hebron School for the Blind, working with students and their families.

Now, I work for Safe Environment for Schools, an organization funded by the Norwegian people. I'm going to talk to you today only about the situation for students and teachers in the West Bank where I live and work. I am not going to talk about the situation in Gaza, which is much worse than in the West Bank because of the Israeli blockade.

The West Bank has been occupied by the Israeli army since 1967. At Safe Environment for Schools, we work in 21 schools in the West Bank. We work in some of the most dangerous schools in the West Bank.

Some of the schools we work in are schools in refugee camps. The refugee camps have existed since 1948 when people fled what is now Israel for the West Bank. The children in the camps are the third generation to live in the camps.

When you try to imagine a refugee camp, I'm sure you think of rows of tents or other temporary shelters. You might imagine a place where people live for a short time before they can return to their homes. However, after 70 years, a refugee camp looks very different than that.

The people have built more permanent homes and buildings. But, because the camp can't grow like a city would, everything is built right next to the other buildings. Refugee camps are very crowded. There are no parks or green spaces in a refugee camp, just buildings jammed up next to each other. There are not many services like you would have in a city or even a village. There are not many jobs in a refugee camp.

We also work in many schools in areas where Israeli settlers have come and built settlements. When the settlers come and build a settlement, even more soldiers come and they begin limiting the rights of Palestinians even more. For example, there is a school where we work in Hebron near a settlement. Israeli settlers came into Hebron and took all of the surrounding homes for a settlement.

They were not allowed to take the school. But, because the area around the school is now a settlement, Palestinians are not allowed to drive or walk on the streets. Students and teachers can reach the school only by two ways. They may walk through a cemetery, the only land next to the school that the settlers couldn't take. Or, they must go through an Israeli army check point and submit to searches of their persons and bags for any metal object, not just weapons. Going through the checkpoint takes one hour each time.

Let describe an army checkpoint to you. Israeli soldiers stationed on the West Bank tend to be very young, 18 or 19 years old. They have been drafted into the army. Many of them never met a Palestinian before going into the army and have been told in training that they should be afraid of all

us, even the children. They are heavily armed with assault rifles. They always wear flak jackets. Most soldiers speak very little or no Arabic. They point their rifles at the people coming through the checkpoint and are always shouting. Because the soldiers speak so little Arabic and most Palestinians living on the West Bank speak little or no Hebrew, you are always afraid that you will misunderstand a soldier's command, do the wrong thing and frighten the soldier, and get shot. In the past year, 10 children have been shot at checkpoints. It is extremely stressful for the kids and the teachers. Children, teachers, and even therapists like me go to the school each day not knowing if they will come home alive. One teacher told me that she cooks the meals for the day before she leaves for school because she is not sure that she will live to return to her family.

Students must finish their school day by 12 o'clock each day, because the army is active and patrols the streets in the afternoon.

If people protest the occupation or just gather together, the army will fire tear gas indiscriminately, sometimes at the schools. Some days, the army fires tear gas at the school for no reason other than to disrupt the school day.

The army also regularly arrests children, claiming that a child has been involved in a protest. They will arrest him or her on the way to school. Sometimes the heavily armed soldiers come into the school to arrest children. There is little that teachers can do to stop the soldiers. Teachers still try to stop the soldiers sometimes. But then the teachers may be beaten by the soldiers or tear gassed. Teachers who intervene are also punished in other ways, for example they may be denied permits to travel to Jerusalem or other parts of the West Bank.

The other group of schools that we work with are poor, rural schools in the desert. The students in these schools often live 5 kilometers from the school and have to walk or, if they are lucky, ride a donkey to school. Although the Israeli government has built roads and highways through these areas to connect settlements to Israel, Palestinians are not allowed to use those roads. The children come from poor farming families and must work on their families' farms before and after school. Because of the occupation, there are very limited opportunities for people in Palestine and Palestine remains a very poor country without the resources to help these people.

The children we see have many problems. They sense that the adults in their lives, parents and teachers, often seem powerless to protect them. The children are often traumatized and stressed by just coming to school. They need someone to let them know that they are safe, loved, capable of doing wonderful things, and worthy of better life. We work with the children to also teach them ways to respond to the violence in their lives with something other than more violence. We try to teach them to calm themselves so that they make thoughtful decisions and not just react. For example this year, we brought in a mindfulness group from Europe to teach meditation. The students and teachers all loved mindfulness meditation.

Finally, I want to speak about what you can do to help. The British people can help us in many ways.

1. Pay attention to what is going on in Palestine. Help keep us in your news. Too many people do not know what is going on.
2. Pressure your government to pressure the Israeli government to end the occupation, remove the settlements and take down the border wall.
3. Support the non-governmental organizations working in the West Bank and Gaza. So long as the occupation continues, we need those foreign organizations to help us provide needed services to our people. For example, the Norwegian government ended the funding for Safe

- Environment for Schools at the end of the school year. We need a new sponsor. And, there are many others groups that need your support.
4. Finally, come to Palestine and see the occupation, but also see the warm and welcoming culture and the wonderful things we are doing. We love visitors. And then, you can go home and tell all your families and friends what you saw.

Thank you.

Lois Weiner, Ed.D., Director of the Urban Education and Teacher Unionism Policy Project, New Jersey City University (Conclusions and looking forward)

My personal thanks the staff and officers of the NUT who have helped to organize this meeting honoring the work Mary Compton did by continuing it with a conference. Thanks too for inviting and hosting me.

Our work today should be located in the chilling rise of authoritarianism globally, marked by the violent suppression of human rights and democracy and racist, homophobic, misogynist, xenophobic policies. Our response needs to be grounded in the understanding that the explosion of bigotry and hatred we are seeing is a misguided, ignorant rage against capitalism's victory in destroying economic gains so hard won by generations that preceded us.

Because the horrors are so apparent, it's essential to look for and at resistance taking new, exciting forms. Therefore, I'm going to preface my comments about the conference them with a short discussion of what has been called the "education spring" in the U.S. which I analyze at length in my upcoming article in New Politics magazine. Like the "Arab Spring," the U.S. "education Spring," was an explosive wave of protests. State-wide teacher walkouts last days and weeks, in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and Arizona, seemed to arise out of nowhere, organized in Facebook groups, with demands for increased school funding and political voice for teachers. Though the walkouts confounded national media, which had little idea how to explain or report on these movements, for parent and teacher activists who have been organizing against reforms in public education in the past four decades, the protests were both unexpected and understandable. What was surprising was their breadth of support (state-wide), their organizing strategy (Facebook), and their breathtakingly rapid spread.

The walkouts were a response to the lavishly funded global propaganda campaign orchestrated by powerful elites, attacking teachers as being individually and collectively responsible for a huge range of social and educational problems over which they have no control. As an invited observer on the Facebook pages, I saw frustration and anger about low wages and poor conditions in school buildings, but also fury at policies that have transformed schools and teachers' work. Oklahoma's "teacher of the year," one of the fifty teachers given this award and invited to meet privately with Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, told DeVos her "choice policies," meaning charter schools and private schools receiving vouchers, were draining traditional public schools of resources in his state. When DeVos suggested students were fleeing low-performing schools, the Oklahoma music teacher, who had voted for Trump, responded that government policies "taking all the kids that can afford to get out and leaving the kids who can't behind" is what "created the bad schools." The Montana and California teachers of the year expressed dismay after the meeting at DeVos' comments opposing teacher strikes. "She basically said that teachers should be teaching and we should be able to solve our problems not at the expense of children ... For her to say at the 'expense of children' was a very profound moment and one I'll remember forever because that is so far from what is happening."

Teacher anger at being held responsible for student learning while facing policies that undercut their ability to do their jobs is clearly not limited to the U.S. “red states.” A negative solidarity of frustration, anger, and hurt exists among teachers throughout the world. The challenge is how to organize and unite teachers and their unions, changing that demoralization and channeling that rage to create a global resistance needed to defeat the global project wealthy elites have successfully imposed on us.

Many in this room knew Mary much better than I did through work in the national union, well before she and I began our collaboration in 2005. Still, I think she and I worked closely enough on what has become known as the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) that I can say with confidence how she would frame issues raised by today’s conference. Many times she would write or call to discuss an issue, always starting with “I think...” then laying out an incisive, well-informed analysis, and always ending with a tentative “Does that sound right to you?” It always did.

Researchers in the social sciences are trained to say they “address” questions, not “answer” them, but today I adopt the activist perspective that informed Mary’s work. As her stellar MA thesis shows, a comparative study of teaching in the UK and India, (posted on the www.teachersolidarity.com research menu), done with the support of Susan Robertson, who gave one of today’s opening speeches, Mary mastered academic discourse, though never found it satisfying. She had a deep commitment to find and act on problems and questions, not only explore them.

Looking then, for answers, I ask today how the NUT and the NEU, emerging from the merger should understand and organize its international work, taking as its goal the conference call: the need for, and power of, global solidarity in education around the world, especially in the face of privatisation, oppressive regimes, and the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM).

WHAT DOES “GLOBAL SOLIDARITY” MEAN IN PRACTICE?

First, let’s clarify what “global solidarity” of teachers and teachers unions means in practice? I think the NUT has already figured this out, so I will articulate what I think has been the implicit theoretical underpinning of your work. One meaning of “solidarity” among teachers unions is supporting and creating alliances between the organizational apparatus of national unions, such as occurred in the fine project exposing Pearson Publishing undertaken with the AFT (American Federation of Teachers) and the AEU (Australian Education Union). Another is the campaign exposing Bridge Academies’ exploitation of children in Africa, an international collaboration organized by the EI (Education International), headed by Angelo Gavrielatos. This project grew out of principles Mary consistently fought for, a point of view with which the EI was not comfortable – a complete, uncompromising opposition to privatization of education.

What a principled opposition to privatization means, operationally, is that teachers unions cannot “sit at the table” to discuss what kinds of “non-governmental funding” for education should be considered or to participate in studies about whether privatization is positive, or to try to persuade wealthy elites that their reforms will damage their profits. Our aim as trade unionists and teachers is to educate the public that not one penny of public money should go to profits; and that wealthy elites, the foundations they support, and the world financial institutions they control, have no right to substitute for freely-elected governments in determining educational policy, anywhere. This principle applies to the most right-wing and most progressive sounding elites, from Gates, Soros, Walton, and Broad, to the Ford Foundation, the Open Society Institute, and the American Enterprise Institute.

Though these entities controlled and funded by capitalist elites may support some good work and involve well-intentioned individuals, they advance a project that is antithetical to our professional ideals as teachers and to schools – supporting children’s full human potential rather than educating them as a future workforce. An example of the “collaborations” that Mary opposed from the start was the “Learning Metrics Taskforce” established by UNESCO and the Brookings Institute to “improve learning outcomes for children and youth worldwide.” As Mary explained in “Red Pepper” magazine, this taskforce, co-chaired by Sir Michael Barber, chief education adviser to Pearson, focused on “collection of ‘big data’ so that schools, teachers and teaching can be standardised, judged, compared and if found wanting sacked or closed down...For companies such as Pearson, it is a win/win situation: they profit from the software systems to collect such data, and they rubbish public schooling and justify replacing it with profit-making private schools. They also have control over the curriculum to ensure that children are taught to be the kind of flexible and quiescent workers that corporations require.

She cautioned her UK audience “Most of us are aware of the struggles of teachers and communities in the UK and US against cuts, testing, performance-related pay and the whole playlist of corporate education ‘reform’. What fewer people are conscious of is that the same struggle is being waged by teachers and their unions in even harsher conditions all over the global South.” Mary’s case against Pearson and the Learning Metrics Taskforce was eventually accepted, and the Education International withdrew.

Foundations and world organizations need to be told we cannot participate in their projects and conferences unless their work explicitly rejects privatization and fee for service education in poor countries as well as the global north. While this course of action may seem, in the short run, to isolate the union, it is essential to hold firm. For example, when a foundation announces it aims to “convene education actors, often with divergent views, such as community organizations, unions, international organizations, government ministries, private education providers, and enable an informed and purposeful debate” they are using the unions, not vice-versa. The unions’ collaboration with these foundations that refuse to break with the assumptions of global finance and political organizations undercuts national campaigns against conditions that our members want us to resist and reverse. The collaboration also sabotages the most vulnerable nations and unions, which are not permitted to speak for themselves.

The NUT has also operationalized a second form of “global solidarity,” that of “solidarity from below.” It has done this most importantly in having forged a direct relationship with the democratic reform movement of teachers in Mexico, la CNTE. In contrast, the Education International, controlled by the two US teachers unions, the AFT and NEA, the EI’s largest constituent members, has embraced el SNTE, the government–endorsed union, as the official representative for Mexico’s teachers. Though el SNTE has been complicit in suppression of union rights and even the assassinations of activists, the EI has elevated it to the executive committee of the international organization. In doing so, the EI has put the wishes of the U.S. government above the desires, needs, and rights of Mexico’s teachers and students. The NUT’s relations with la CNTE are a courageous enactment of principled solidarity “from below,” one that has inspired Mexico’s teachers to continue their resistance.

The third way the NUT has enacted “global solidarity” is through the union’s commitment to supporting international solidarity officers in its branches. Global solidarity from below depends on what is described in the NUT as commitment to a “lay-led” union, an idea the Chicago Teachers Union terms being “member-driven” union, and I call “democratic.” A democratic union is the best defender of global solidarity from below because it draws on the ideas, wisdom, and energy of its members. Teachers who are activists in international human rights struggles are often not union

activists. Teaching is more than full-time job and social justice activity can be as time-consuming as a second job, so it is understandable they do not also take on union work. For this reason, the union needs to reach out to them, providing space and encouragement for them to organize on their international concerns within the union, in the international solidarity committees. While union staff and officers will need to educate members about the broader political and economic context of privatization, we should encourage branches to bring their work to the national union. In particular I look here to teachers who are immigrants. They are often an untapped resource in global solidarity work. They bring local understandings, contacts, and knowledge of events that are irreplaceable.

WHAT HUMAN RIGHTS DO WE DEFEND?

Decisions about how to defend human rights should be guided by principles we apply consistently. For example, conscription of children to be soldiers, training them to kill, is wrong everywhere it is done, whether by rebels of authoritarian governments or the governments themselves. We need to denounce violence against civilians, the killing of children, whether it is done in Chechnya, Yemen, Pakistan, or Syria. Governmental violence against peaceful protest and suppression of union rights is unacceptable to us as teachers and trade unionists whether committed in Nicaragua, Saudi Arabia, the U.S., Russia, or Israel. The enemies of our enemies are not our friends when they violate human rights. As with privatization, the principle we should uphold is “no excuses and no exceptions.”

In closing I encourage the NUT/NEU to support exchange of ideas and information about struggles to defend education globally, with special attention to struggles and conditions in the global South. A collective now maintains the website Mary started, and we encourage and welcome your contributions. Contact information is on the site.

Mary cannot be replaced. But we can continue the work she started, as long as we hold fast to the principles that informed her interventions. The NUT/NEU has a special responsibility and challenge in doing this. I am at your service to help. Please call on me.