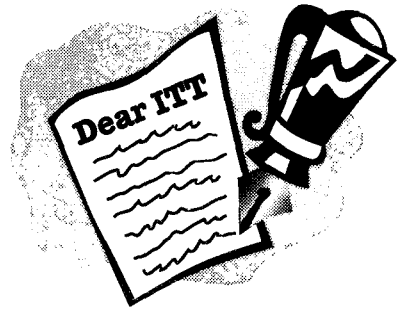


Letters



Classroom Cheerleader

I was stunned by Silja J. A. Talvi's unabashed cheerleading in support of the San Francisco quota system for class reading ("Required Reading," May 3). The inflammatory move was to propose a quota system for literature on the untested theory that a school system whose African-Americans have a D average shouldn't teach them differently, just assign more books by people of color. And so what if Latinos demand Latino writers? Should they be given comic books or MTV if they demand that? Education isn't about pandering to the consumerist whims of students. Those black writers who'll be assigned—Morrison, Baldwin, Ellison—grew up reading Shakespeare, Keats and Dickens. Maybe that accounts for the quality of their prose, perish the thought!

Despite Talvi's propaganda, this issue has more to do with trendy educators and political correctness than any realistic hopes of boosting reading skills. It's insulting to the students themselves to claim—absent any real change in pedagogy—that a quota system for literature can raise SATs. And it's insulting to *In These Times* readers that Talvi reports only one side of such a national-

ly debated issue, while relegating those of us who call ourselves progressives but don't favor quotas for literature to outer darkness. As a novelist and playwright, I believe that good writing can touch everyone with an IQ above room temperature, no matter what skin color. Plenty of other lefties—black, Latino, Asian and white—agree, but you'd never know it from what Talvi wrote.

Lawrence Richette
Philadelphia

MOXed In

Joel Bleifuss' recommendation that extremely valuable plutonium be vitrified and buried in salt domes is a good one ("A MOX on Both Our Houses," April 19). In fact, that was the plan originally proposed to dispose of expended fuel rod assemblies from civilian atomic power plants. But it has been stalled for almost 50 years by the oil industry as a means of killing nuclear power plants.

The irony is that after years of delay, warhead plutonium suddenly appears, and it becomes very easy to find a storage site for spent fuel rods. Do I smell a rat?

A. Dutky
Omaha, Neb.

Corrections

Due to a copy editing mistake, not an error on the part of the author, *In These Times* incorrectly reported in "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (May 17) that Washington Post writer Walter Pincus had not covered Central Intelligence Agency Inspector General Frederick Hitz's admission that the CIA once had an agreement with the Justice Department that allowed the agency to ignore drug trafficking by CIA assets, agents and contractors. In fact, Pincus was one of the few mainstream journalists to report Hitz's testimony.

In "Too Hot to Handle," in the same issue, the name of the Pearson corporation was misspelled.

In *In These Times* regrets both errors.

Please send letters to:

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Please keep them short and include your address and daytime phone number.

Nicole Hollander
Sylvia
www.suba.com/~sylvia

Hi, Folks, this is your pilot speaking. I'D LIKE TO APPLAUD the F.D.A.'s Decision to APPROVE the IRRADIATION OF MEAT. SOON MAJOR FOOD-borne Diseases WILL BE A THING OF THE PAST. NOW ALL YOU HAVE to WORRY ABOUT is the DAMAGE this RECYCLED AIR is CAUSING to YOUR UPPER respiratory tract, AND WHETHER I've BEEN Getting MY proper rest.

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Labor Aims for the New York Ballot

BY DOUG IRELAND

Progressive union leaders in New York—representing a combined membership of nearly half a million workers statewide—are trying to launch an independent, labor-based ballot line for the November elections. The as-yet-unnamed, union-led effort will endorse a candidate for governor in June, and if the candidate garners at least 50,000 votes this fall, the new line will achieve permanent ballot status—the first step toward creation of a full-fledged labor party for the Empire State.

New York is one of only 10 states that allows candidates to appear on more than one ballot line. These cross-endorsements have allowed alternative parties to play a key role in the state's history. The Liberal Party, founded in the '40s to support Franklin Roosevelt's re-election, played a pivotal role in re-electing mayors Robert Wagner and John Lindsay, as well as Sen. Jacob Javits. But since its heyday, the Liberals' union base in the needle trades has withered away, and the party has become a Potemkin Village of patronage-seekers. The party is now run by Ray Harding, a lawyer-lobbyist who sells endorsements to the highest bidder. Still, the Liberals' endorsement last year of Rudy Giuliani for mayor gave him a fusion fig-leaf that was crucial to his election.

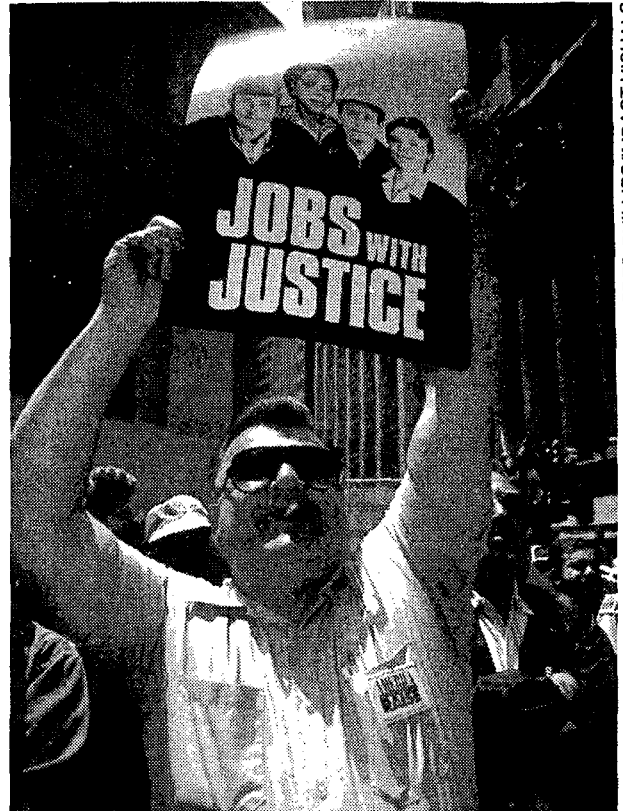
The state's Conservative Party has played a similarly decisive role in disciplining the GOP, by running or threatening to run its own candidates. In New York, blackmail politics works.

So, why shouldn't it work for labor? As Bob Master of the Communication Workers of America—the point-man for the new labor ballot line—puts it: "The political perspective of labor and working people has no voice in state politics, especially since the Democratic Party

has moved to the right. Our people look at Harding and the Liberals, see a guy with no organization and no troops yet with tremendous political clout, and ask, why aren't we doing this? Why don't we have this kind of clout for our politics? Why not create a political vehicle that puts our kind of populist economic politics forcefully into the political debate?"

So, Master and the politically potent New York region of the Communication Workers are spearheading the petition drive for the new ballot line. Also involved in planning the effort are the New York regions of the United Food and Commercial Workers, the United Auto Workers and the International Association of Machinists; the Civil Service Employees Association, the Buffalo Teachers Federation and the Syracuse Central Labor Council; as well as various locals of Teamsters, Service Employees, Transit Workers and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees. In addition, the effort is being supported by Citizen Action, ACORN and the fledgling New York chapters of the New Party.

State election law requires the collection of just 15,000 signatures to get a new line on the ballot. But with the help of Union Summer volunteers, the labor group plans to collect at least 100,000 signatures—which should be enough to withstand any legal challenges from the established parties—in a six-week petition drive that kicks off in July.



FRED PHILLIPS/IMPACT VISUALS

New York unions are planning to make their voices heard at the polls in November.

While there is some sentiment for endorsing one of the five Democratic candidates in the race for governor, none are considered populists, and all are weak and largely unknown. It's more likely that the new ballot-line group will field its own candidate. In any case, Republican Gov. George Pataki is virtually assured re-election (in recent polls he's capturing 40 percent of the Democratic vote). This means the labor-led coalition can run an independent candidate without being accused of bringing down the Democrats. Among the possible candidates are former Brooklyn City Councilman Sal Albanese, who ran a populist campaign for mayor last year, and former Mayor David Dinkins. Some insist the candidate should come from labor's own ranks.

Regardless of who gets the nod, the greater focus is on getting the 50,000 votes needed to win a permanent spot on the ballot. If they succeed, it will shake up New York politics in a way that's long overdue. ■