

Report of Band of Rebels Strategy Committee

A core group of the Band of Rebels has been in a process of strategic planning for the past few months, in an effort to define attainable new goals and promising new strategies. The need for this process arose from a shared sense that our years protesting in front of major banks had become less meaningful to us, as our protests were clearly ineffective in changing bank practices. We recognized our successes in mobilizing for these regular protests as well as for support of other activist actions, but we recognized a need to reflect on the content and goals of our own actions into the future.

Review and Reflection

Our demonstrations of the past two years focused on the following issues.

- 1) The role of banks at the core of our economic system which we saw in the financial crisis, the low or zero taxation of banks, the foreclosures of mortgages, etc.
- 2) The neoliberal drive to cut public welfare spurred our defense of Social Security, Medicare & Medicaid.

We stood on the street in front of bank branches; we demonstrated with Rochester Take Back the Land in front of homes where families faced foreclosure and eviction; we stood in front of the Federal Building on State Street; and we handed out leaflets, issued press releases, wrote letters to the editor at the Democrat & Chronicle and City Newspaper.

We did these things because we are angry about these threats to our way of life. We wanted to raise our voices and be heard. Even if victories are hard to achieve there is a strong element of *bearing witness* in our activities.

At the same time there is evidence that this weekly cycle of demonstrations is running down. Some of us are feeling discouraged. Some of us are working on other issues and campaigns. Turnout at the Monday demos declined through the spring and summer of 2013. In the fall our group meetings failed to reach a consensus on a new strategy going forward. As a result the core group decided to take time to consider what we should do.

Strategic Planning

To this end, the core group held two strategic planning sessions, on Friday, January 24th, and Thursday, February 20th, with labor organizer and Band founding member Denise Young as facilitator. The first session was devoted to identifying our internal Strengths and Weaknesses, which was followed by our identifying external Opportunities and Threats. This process is known as a SWOT analysis. The results of our SWOT can be found as an appendix to this report.

The second session, building on our SWOT analysis, was devoted to identifying our core concern as well as a single issue to serve as focus of a yearlong campaign. The core concern distilled during this session was our outrage at the escalating CLASS WARFARE perpetrated at every level, by banks, politicians, school and health care policymaker, bloating an already unconscionable inequality gap. The result is a pattern of “intentional impoverishment” visited upon the neediest in American society, reflected in home evictions, food stamp cuts, unemployment insurance cutbacks, union busting, cuts in daycare, Head Start, etc. etc. This campaign of purposeful, “intentional impoverishment,” rather than simply the somehow unfortunate, intractable circumstance of poverty, is the class warfare the Band of Rebels was formed to confront.

After identifying this core concern, we explored a potential yearlong campaign that might meet with success while continuing the momentum of solidarity and collective outrage the Band of Rebels has built these past many Mondays confronting the big banks. We realized that to be effective we should focus and build upon a pressing LOCAL issue, one with state and federal implications, that has attracted media attention and emerging critical opposition.

One such issue is the imposition of a federally mandated curriculum and testing regime, the Common Core, on public schools across the country, including the Rochester City School District. While its promoters claim to be trying to improve and reform failing public schools, its origins stem not from educators but rather from corporate and foundation power brokers. Their agendas include the construction of a standardized “silver bullet” education policy favored by opportunist politicians, and a seamless national market for their technology-based educational products and their privatized ventures in school management.

The problems of the Rochester schools have received considerable media attention recently, but most analysts point to the concentrated poverty of Rochester’s children as its main cause, left unaddressed by the Common Core ”solution.” Meanwhile, the media have been filled with growing opposition to the Common Core itself, including problems with its inappropriate curriculum, its nonstop testing, and its flawed implementation.

The Common Core is a pressing local issue, with state and federal implications, whose promoters press forward with their purposeful economic and educational impoverishment of Rochester’s children, exactly as the big banks impose their greed and the politicians push their cuts in basic services. The one egregious difference, though, is that the banks and politicians never claim to be pursuing their draconian measures in order to benefit their victims. Common Core promoters, however, despite similar nefarious agendas, disguise their reforms as offering the greatest opportunity to benefit schools and school children.

There are already a growing number of Common Core critics inside the District as well as within several community groups, all of whom are calling for outside pressure from a mobilized citizenry prepared for organized resistance. The Band of Rebels, in answering this challenge, could maintain its emphasis on class war while offering effective activism to a critical local issue.

Our messaging could include the intentionality of impoverishment, the concern of grandparents for the future of their grandchildren, the assault on the public schools as another attack on the “commons,” and the Common Core vs. the common good.

We could pursue several tactics:

- We must educate ourselves and others about Common Core, using widely available critical research materials and available local presenters.
- We must build alliances with critics inside and outside the District, including such groups as the Coalition for Justice in Education, Metro Justice Education Committee, Rochester Parent to Parent, and Rochester Teachers Association.
- We must mobilize large contingents to attend and speak out at regularly scheduled School Board, City Council, and Country Legislature meetings.
- If necessary, we must organize rallies in the streets to “get people to their anger.”

To conclude:

For all the reasons stated above, the strategic planning core group hereby proposes that the Band of Rebels devote the coming year to mobilizing and supporting massive opposition to the Common Core.

Appendix: Results of SWOT Analysis.

	Helpful	Harmful
Internal	<p><i>Strengths</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are available, reliable • We do good research • We have respect from other groups • We are individually connected to other groups • We have wisdom, are responsible and responsive 	<p><i>Weaknesses</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of strategic plan • Unwilling to stand simply as witness • Lack clarion call (clear message) • Lack of organization • Need better communication and contact info (e.g. phone tree) • We're too homogeneous (white, old, etc.)
External	<p><i>Opportunities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivate media contacts 	<p><i>Threats</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overextension

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New faces in leadership positions (Mayor, County Leg., City Council, School Board) • Poverty is NOW the issue and offers us a focus (Poverty Report, Head Start, Day care, Pre-K, Food Stamps) • Current active campaigns (UNITE, CJE, ABC, MJ Retirement with Dignity, MJ Education Committee) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paralysis • Being ignored by media • Continuing attacks on every front (e.g. Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, women, poor) i.e., the 1%
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Conclusions of the SWOT Analysis Process

- 1) In general, the long-term issue we care most about is *inequality and unfairness*.
- 2) We should identify short-term specific issues to focus our activity for periods of six months to a year.
- 3) With respect to these short-term issues, we should follow a circular process of planning, doing, studying, and acting. We *plan* by picking the short-term goal, educating ourselves about the goal, and deciding what tactics we want to use relating to that goal. Putting that tactical plan into action is *doing*. While we are *doing*, we will constantly *study* by reviewing and evaluating our tactics and outcomes. This process of *studying* will, we hope, lead us better and more effective *action*.
- 4) To implement the *planning* and *studying* we will start small study groups on particular issues to read, research, and discuss these issues in order to prepare leaflets and reports that can form the basis for letters to the editors, press releases, etc.
- 5) As before, when groups such as Rochester Take Back the Land, Metro Justice Retirement with Dignity Committee, Metro Justice Education Committee, and others ask for our help we will join their actions or plan an action in support.
- 6) In the remaining months of 2014 our major focus will be on the corporate and neoliberal attempt to "reform" public education. In particular, the corporate led implementation of "common core" standards in NY schools will be our primary focus.

