

Fireworks in both US teachers unions

Both US teachers unions, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), held their national conventions in July. For the first time in decades the conventions were marked by challenges to union leaders on educational policies, including union approval of the Common Core and union leader's unwillingness to take on the Obama administration and Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education. Debate has been fierce and though there have been important victories in pushing the unions to be more aggressive in their defense of social justice and public education, a new generation of activists is learning that those who hold power are not going to relinquish it without a fight. At the same time, during their speeches, NEA and AFT officials adopted the rhetoric of the challengers and even ceded on some policies. Debate is ferocious in online forums and lists, as well as social media. Activists realize that we are in a race against time, that teacher unions have to be transformed quickly if teaching is going to be more than contract labor controlled by powerful elites who direct what and how children learn.

The Summer 2014 issue of New Politics carries an article in which I analyze the state of teacher unionism, including many of the issues the conventions debated. So that my article may be of use while these topics are live ones, I've asked New Politics to fast-forward posting my article on our website. In the meantime, you can follow me on twitter and Facebook.