



TEACHERS FOR A  
JUST CONTRACT  
*Not just an opposition, an alternative.*

www.teachersforajustcontract.org

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## ATR “victory” paves the way for firing ATRs

Weingarten and her Unity caucus were dragged, screaming and kicking, into calling a rally at Tweed for ATRs on November 24 by a campaign of pressure from the grassroots. This campaign was launched by the ATR Ad Hoc committee. Groups like Teachers for a Just Contract (TJC), the Independent Community of Educators (ICE), and Teachers Advocacy Group (TAG) helped build it. Even then, the union leadership tried to downgrade the action by turning it into a mournful “candle light vigil,” and not making a single leaflet to advertise it.

Under pressure from this rank and file upsurge, Weingarten negotiated what she has hyped as new assurances that ATRs will get regular positions. Only time will tell how many people get jobs thanks to these mild reforms. But the school closing juggernaut will continue to produce ATRs faster than they can be hired. Weingarten and Unity used these minimal improvements in the desperate situation of ATRs as one more method of sabotaging the November 24 rally. They advertised that the hour before the rally there would be an “information session” at the UFT headquarters, after which there would be a march to Tweed for the rally. Then they turned the “information session” into a stalling tactic, even serving wine and cheese. As a result, only a several dozen of the hundreds who came to the information session ever made it down to Tweed.

But Weingarten had a worse betrayal in store for the ATRs. A *New York Times* editorial praised the agreement on Friday, November 28, concluding, “If all goes as planned, principals will seek out the best teachers from the reserve pool, no matter how high their salaries. That still leaves a crucial question unanswered: what to do with reserve teachers whose records of poor performance make it unlikely that they will be hired. Within a year or so, the city should know which teachers were passed over for salary reasons and which ones have languished in the reserve pool because of poor performance. Once the data is in, the city and the union will need to negotiate a plan for ushering the inadequate teachers out of the system.”

Such a plan already exists: a provision for a “voluntary severance package” for ATRs in the 2006 contract. The *Times* editorial signals that this provision will be used, perhaps with the threat that next time, it will be involuntary, with or without severance pay.

Weingarten claimed this agreement meant that Klein was recanting his claim that the ATRs are bad teachers. The *Times* editorial reveals how Klein will bolster this bogus claim in the future. However, the savvy know cost is not the main reason many principals prefer brand-new teachers: they are untenured, don’t know their rights, and are easy to push around and overwork.

Our contract expires in October 2009. The UFT must fight for a contract provision that bars the D.o.E. from hiring anyone in a license or title until there are no ATRs in that license or title, and reject any provisions for severance. These are the only ways to protect ATRs.

This contract campaign poses great challenges. Weingarten has let the union's muscles go flabby, putting all her faith in the "next mayor." We have less than a year to get back on our feet and there's no time to waste. We need a strategy that can win gains no matter who is mayor, from no matter what party. We need to get members out in the streets around their schools and in their boroughs, with honor pickets and marches, like in spring 2005. We need the entire union energized and demonstrating our power by marching through the busiest streets.

The UFT leadership will not initiate this militant strategy. The way they resisted and undermined the November 24 rally proves it. But they can be forced into it by organized pressure from us, the rank and file. Even when we succeed in pushing our union leaders into action, we will face an uphill battle. The City, State and Fed will cry poverty. But the billion dollar bailouts of the rich and powerful show that the money is there for what they think is important. Transportation, housing, tuition and food prices are all soaring. We must get raises to maintain our standard of living.

A lot of what we need is more professional control and fairness, not dollar items. Along with rights for ATRs, we need to get back the right to grieve when unfair and inaccurate letters or observation reports are put in our files, more rights for members who are the targets of accusations and allegations and are removed from the classroom, and for probationary members.

We need contractual protections for teachers against anti-student, anti-education test-mania: no use of test data for tenure decisions, observations or letters in the file, and stronger anti-harassment protections for teachers being pressured to "pass more kids." No publicizing of teacher test data. Paraprofessionals' rights and protections - such as sick leave use and due process rights - should be brought up to the level of those enjoyed by teachers. Labor Day weekend should be made part of our summer vacation again, without making extra school days in June.

None of those things would cost the government a dime. And they would mean reinvigorated, and even better prepared and organized, teachers and paraprofessionals in every classroom.

*If this sounds good to you, please contact us. We are Teachers for a Just Contract. We are a caucus in the UFT started in 1992, and we have been fighting for better contracts and a more militant, democratic UFT since then. For more information, visit our website at [www. Teachers for a Just Contract. org](http://www.TeachersforaJustContract.org). You can email us at [JustContract @ nyc.rr.com](mailto:JustContract@nyc.rr.com), contact us by telephone at 212-831-3408, or send the coupon below to Teachers for a Just Contract, POB 1346, Bronx, NY 10471.*

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