



Update

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From The Desk of Rosanne Mamo

POLITICAL ACTION STARTS AT HOME

“First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out —
because I was not a communist;
Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out —
because I was not a socialist;
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out —
because I was not a trade unionist;
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out —
because I was not a Jew;
Then they came for me —
and there was no one left to speak out for me.”

Martin Niemöller (1892-1984) was a prominent Protestant pastor who emerged as an outspoken public foe of Adolf Hitler and spent the last seven years of Nazi rule in concentration camps. Though by no means am I comparing situations, but there is a timely lesson in Niemöller's words which is applicable to our professional lives today. We are all in this together; and standing idly by while others are mistreated, disrespected and undervalued will no doubt come back to haunt us down the line.

As some of you may be aware, our brothers and sisters in Carle Place have now entered their third school year without a settled contract. We had heard very little of their predicament during the first two years, as the Union there made every effort to pursue negotiations quietly and directly, advocating for its members by promoting only the positive aspects of the profession and stating its case in a dedicated and affirmative manner. However, after two years, the Carle Place Union finds that it must now change its approach and take a stronger stance.

I am not privy to – nor would I be prudent in sharing – details of their negotiations. There are likely several difficult issues; but what I can relay is the epic sticking point which has been shared with me: a proposed two-tiered salary schedule with one tier for current members and a second lower tier for new hires. This would create tremendous disparity between salaries for current and future members. For example, under this system, a new teacher reaching MA+60 would earn \$30,000 less per year than a current member on this step. The enormous collegial issues created by such a situation should not require any explanation.

Our brothers and sisters in Carle Place are holding firm and will continue to forego a settled contract as long as this ridiculous demand is on the table. Carle Place is protecting itself and its current and future members, yes; but in doing so, they are also representing and standing up for every one of our Unions in New York State. We must not let them stand alone. Set aside one hour next Thursday, September 26, 2013 to join fellow SFT and other NYSUT members in a supportive march through Carle Place. The rally is set to begin at 7:00 pm and will include appearances by Dick Ianuzzi and Randi Weingarten.

It is true, perhaps, that the kind of activism, member support and involvement needed today has been lacking for the past few decades. I chalk this up to human nature as “complacency when times are good.” Certainly, there are many issues and challenges in our careers as educators, both individually and collectively; but here in New York State, ours has become over the years a desirable and fairly-compensated vocation. But this is true only because of the many hard-fought battles, difficult negotiations and forward thinking sacrifices made by our predecessors.

Today, however – and looking into the near future – we teachers face new and even more powerful challenges and threats to our livelihood and to our craft. If we insist on keeping our heads in the sand, allowing just one of our fellow locals to be abused, to stand by and watch as, one by one, all of their employment protections, work conditions, terms of compensation and benefits – fairly negotiated over decades of responsible Union representation – are picked apart and dismantled, we will have only ourselves to blame when the wolf comes knocking at our door.

It is imperative that we join and stand with our colleagues across the State, and certainly in our own backyard of Long Island, in a display of solidarity. I understand that we all have our own personal worlds – job, family, charity, recreation – which fill our lives. I am simply stating the case that all of us are or will be impacted every time the contract of a New York local and its members is threatened. If we all bear that in mind – and remember to ask what small things we can do to assist our brothers and sisters in difficult times – we will be serving ourselves as well by protecting and honoring our profession and the gains which our Union leaders have made for us over these many long and wonderful years.

*In Unity,
Ro*

See you at the Carle Place Rally on the 26th!

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