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C o M M e n t a t o r**
Commentary, analysis and investigations
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May 8, 2008 - Issue 276

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**Mom & 1968
The African World
By Bill Fletcher, Jr.**

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With the 40th anniversary of the events of 1968, one that will need in depth examination is the 1968 teacher's strike in New York City. My mother's role in that strike was pivotal...at least for me.

The NY teacher's strike was a reactionary strike against an effort in the African American and Puerto Rican communities towards what was called "community control of schools." The teacher's union - the United Federation of Teachers (an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers) - led by the late Albert Shanker, took the position that community control would undermine what the teacher's unions had won in the past and would threaten seniority. Neither Shanker nor anyone else in the UFT leadership were particularly concerned about the demand, arising from communities of color, for more teachers of color as well as curricula that spoke to the needs of our respective communities.

When the UFT called the strike my mother, an elementary school teacher in New York City, had a very profound choice to make. A staunch union supporter and member, my mother grew up with the understanding that one does not cross a union's picket line. At the same time, she vigorously supported the idea of community control of schools and vehemently disagreed with the position of her union's leadership.

My mother crossed the picket lines. With moral support from my father, she took a step that I would bet she had never anticipated taking. She crossed a line where friends and co-workers were on the other side, but she stood by her principles. She was not going to support a reactionary strike and she felt that this was just that.

My mother is very outgoing and very smart, but often pooh-poohs both what she knows as well as her own leadership. Yet she and my father are both strongly pro-social justice, a commitment and attitude that they instilled in both me and my sister. My mother is always outraged at the slightest injustice and is in constant fear for the future of humanity, always wanting to figure out how to do more that supports progressive causes.

The stand that she took in 1968 is impressed in my memory. She has never seen herself as a leader, though she attended union meetings and supported the work of the union, not to mention being at the center of a friendship circle going back a half century. But she has always had strong principles, and during that fall of 1968 her principles were challenged by the backward actions of her union's leadership, actions, by the way, that severely set back African American/Jewish relations.

On Mother's Day there are so many reasons for me to be grateful for my own mom. This one incident in 1968, however, taught me so much about her character and about something called courage.


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