

Help bring children out **FROM THE DUMPS**

Social justice, always an essential part of union work, continues to flourish at NYSUT. Much of our social justice work is directly related to schools and curriculum. In fact, at our Representative Assembly in April, we will showcase four

SOCIAL JUSTICE



Lee Cutler

model programs that raise awareness of students and channel that awareness into action. Even during these tough economic times, NYSUT remains committed to fighting for those denied basic human rights, both within U.S. borders and internationally. To graduate a generation of students with their only concerns being their GPA and class rank would be a shame, and I feel encouraged by the many educators statewide who regularly weave the themes of justice, courage and action into their daily curriculum.

I am just returning from a weeklong trip to Nicaragua with the state Labor-Religion Coalition. Nicaragua is a perfect showcase of how corporate greed and American foreign policy work together to keep people in poverty.

I was impressed with the optimism and hope of the Nicaraguan people, which is captured in this quote by Ruben Dario: “*Si la patria es pequeña uno grande la sueña*” — “for a country as small as Nicaragua, its hopes are quite large.”

In Nicaragua, we visited coffee cooperatives and communities benefiting from Fair Trade, where that hope is certainly alive.

We stayed with farm families for a few days to better appreciate their simple, primitive and fulfilling way of life and how Fair Trade coffee is improving their lives.

This hope was brought into sharp contrast as we entered the Managua dump where many Nicaraguan children and adults live in complete squalor. Among the dead animals, rubbish fires,



BRIAN O'SHAUGHNESSY PHOTOS

horrific smells and drug-addicted people, we saw young children and babies rummaging through the garbage for their next meal or for supplies for their homes, which are little more than structures of plastic and mud.

Some in our group felt as if we had just entered hell. When we reached our destination, the School of Hope, inside the dump, we were greeted by children, some who had waited all day for our arrival, ready and eager to play and receive our attention.

Sexual abuse and violence against children are quite common in the lawless cesspool, but at least during the school day, the children can feel safe.

Inside the walls of the school, through the foul smell of garbage and pungent smoke, we played soccer, basketball, drew pictures, told stories and for a good hour forgot where we were. Many tears were shed by the children as we departed.

No child should have to live in this world; we were so tempted to rescue them as we drove off in our secure bus, windows closed

to keep out the smell and the crime.

It will be a continued goal of NYSUT to support Fair Trade. When asked what difference would be made in the lives of Nicaraguans if 600,000 of our members purchased only Fair Trade Coffee, Juan Miguel of the Regional Office of the CECO-CAFEN Coffee Cooperative, said such support would show tangible results.

We are responsible for the conditions at the Managua Dump and the many other “hells” throughout the world when we ignore how our purchasing decisions impact the lives of others.

Every human being has the right to make a decent wage and provide for their families. Just as Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* was unaware of the power of her slippers, so are we and the children we teach, ignorant of the power we hold through our purchasing decisions.

Just as we will continue to speak out against child labor in the production of cocoa, NYSUT will double its efforts to get you,



NYSUT's Lee Cutler, above, gives a book to a Nicaraguan boy during a recent visit by a delegation of NYSUT members and staff and the New York State Labor-Religion Coalition. At left, Cutler and Alex Marks, a Bethlehem High School student, play soccer with boys from the School of Hope, a haven for the children who live in a dump in Managua.

Trip participants

NYSUT members who attended the Nicaragua trip:
Evelyn DeJesus, NYSUT Board member, UFT;
Mike Emmi, president, East Solvay Teachers Association;
Martha Bilsback, Wappingers Congress of Teachers;
Lori Megivern, president, Cortland TA; and,
Jackie Almonte, Nanuet TA
 Also in attendance: two sophomores from the Voorheesville School District, one sophomore from the Bethlehem schools, three high school students from the Oakwood Friends School in Poughkeepsie, and Aaron Bifaro and Elizabeth Schuster, NYSUT staff. **Maureen Casey** and **Brian O'Shaughnessy** from the Labor-Religion Coalition were the leaders.



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■ For more information on Fair Trade and to order Fair Trade coffee and other items, visit www.nysut.org, click on Social Justice and Labor Center, and look for the Fair Trade link.

■ Also check out www.nysut.org for more photos of the Nicaragua trip.

our members, to loudly support Fair Trade by purchasing only Fair Trade coffee and other products.

We must continue to shine the light on corporations that exploit their workers, and one way to do this is to support Fair Trade.

Lee Cutler is NYSUT's secretary-treasurer.