

For a working class movement to defend education!

Statement of International Students for Social Equality

The International Students for Social Equality supports the demonstrations today in California and throughout the US against education cuts. These events must be made the starting point for a nationwide campaign against tuition increases, school shutdowns, the attack on teacher pay and benefits, and the destruction of public education as a whole.

Education is a vital necessity for all workers and young people. It is not a luxury that should be slashed to the bone to meet the budget-cutting demands of Sacramento or Washington. The ISSE insists: it is not a matter of what must be cut. Instead, it is a question of the necessary political strategy to oppose all cuts.

The big business politicians, from Schwarzenegger to Pelosi to Obama, all claim that there is no money for education and other basic services. This after the treasury has been emptied to bail out the banks and fund two criminal wars! There is always supposedly “no money” for pressing social needs that benefit millions of people, and yet there is always plenty of money to fund record bonuses for Wall Street investors who created the economic crisis in the first place.

This is unacceptable. The working class and youth are not responsible for the crisis of American capitalism or the economic meltdown produced by the recklessness of Wall Street. We must not pay for it.

Opposition to education cuts has found its strongest expression in California, where students throughout the state are planning walkouts in response to tuition hikes of up to 33 percent and the firing of thousands of staff. But this is a national and international struggle.

In New York, Michigan and other states, parents, teachers and students have organized protests to fight school closings and funding reductions. In Greece, Spain, Germany and other countries, there have been mass strikes and protests against cuts in social programs and other austerity measures. As the international scope of the economic crisis reveals, workers and young people in every country face the same struggle.

It is high time to fight back! The ISSE calls for these struggles to be integrated and for a fight for the international unity of the working class in defense of public education, jobs and decent living standards for all. We are advancing the following program:

1. No education cuts! Billions to rebuild schools! Free public education for all!

All tuition increases must be reversed. The ISSE calls for free, quality public education from kindergarten through the

university level. Funds must be poured into the public education system to hire teachers and provide good wages and benefits, build new schools and equip every building with the most up-to-date technology and learning tools.

It is intolerable that working class youth are confined to overcrowded schools, and teachers are forced to pay out of their own pockets to provide the most basic necessities. Many students today graduate drowning in debt due to exorbitant tuition. These debts must be immediately cancelled.

2. For an emergency public works program! Jobs for everyone who can work!

The ISSE calls for a multitrillion-dollar program of public works to hire the unemployed and guarantee good-paying jobs for all. There is no shortage of work to be done—including the rebuilding of our schools and communities.

It is impossible for young people to get a decent education when their parents are out of work, when they live in poverty and hunger. The fight to defend education must therefore be linked up with the struggle to defend jobs and living standards of all working people, including those of city workers in Los Angeles and San Francisco and auto workers at the NUMMI plant in Fremont.

3. Nationalize the banks and large corporations! For equality and the redistribution of wealth!

Students and workers must reject the claim that there is no money for education. There are resources; it is a question of who controls these resources and how they are distributed. The bonuses handed out to the top Wall Street firms last year could pay for the budget deficits of all 50 states in the US! The wealthy have no interest in educating workers destined for unemployment or menial jobs, and it is their interests that dictate government policy.

To break the economic and political grip of the financial elite over society, the banks and major corporations must be nationalized and placed under the democratic control of working people. The enormous sums accumulated by a tiny layer must be reclaimed to meet pressing social needs.

4. Withdraw all troops from Iraq and Afghanistan! For an end to militarism and war!

The US government spends hundreds of billions of dollars every year to send young people to their deaths. The ISSE calls for the immediate withdrawal of all troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. The US war machine must be dismantled,

and the vast sums squandered on the military used to meet pressing social needs, both in the US and in countries ravaged by American bombs.

5. Defend democratic rights!

The arrest of California students in response to protests in November shows what type of methods the government will use to suppress popular opposition. As part of a defense of democratic rights as a whole, the ISSE demands the dropping of all charges against student protesters, the ending of police repression on the campuses and neighborhoods, and an end to political censorship of socialist and left-wing views.

A socialist program for the working class

Some groups involved in the March 4 demonstrations have claimed tuition increases can be reversed and spending restored through appeals to the politicians in Sacramento and Washington. This is not the case. The precondition for a fight to defend education and other social programs is a complete and irrevocable break with the two parties of big business and the construction of a mass socialist party of the working class.

Barack Obama is now leading the attack on the right to public education. The president has used the economic crisis to blackmail bankrupt school districts into increasing the number of privately run charter schools and impose merit pay and other punitive “performance-based” schemes on teachers and school employees. The federal government has refused to bail out the states, insisting instead that they take measures to “restore their creditworthiness” (Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner).

In a speech Monday before the Chamber of Commerce—the association of US businesses—Obama praised Bush’s education policy while endorsing the decision of a Rhode Island school to fire all of its teachers and staff, blaming them for the crisis in education. Obama’s school “reforms” represent an expansion of the hated “No Child Left Behind” program. These policies will increase inequality by cutting

off funding for schools in poor neighborhoods and channeling resources to so-called priority schools, where a handful of young people will get an adequate education.

Many hoped the election of Obama would bring an end to Bush’s policies of war, attacks on democratic rights and handouts to the wealthy. The last year has demonstrated that it is impossible to enact serious change through the two-party system, which is dominated by the financial aristocracy.

Public education cannot be defended on the campuses alone; it requires a fight by the whole working class, in the US and internationally. This does not mean an alliance with the trade unions, some of which have endorsed the March 4 demonstrations. These organizations work to subordinate working class opposition to the Democratic Party and the capitalist two-party system. They work systematically to impose concessions on their memberships, accepting the lie that cuts are necessary to “balance the budget.”

These organizations can offer no way forward because they start from the defense of the capitalist system, a system in which every element of economic and political life is subordinate to the money-mad drive for personal wealth of a small minority, at the expense of the vast majority.

Public education is based on the fundamentally egalitarian principle that everyone should have access to quality education. As such, it is incompatible with an economic system whose fundamental premise is inequality.

The defense of education is therefore bound up with the socialist transformation of economic life. The forces of production must be publicly owned and democratically controlled, in the interest of social need, not private profit.

The ISSE and its parent organization, the Socialist Equality Party, are spearheading the fight for an international socialist movement of the working class. We urge all students and workers who agree with this program to join the ISSE and SEP. Take up the fight for socialism!

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An Emergency Conference on the
Social Crisis

& War The fight for
a socialist
alternative

April 17 - 18, 2010
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Saturday, April 17
Palmer Commons
Great Lakes Room - 4th floor

Sunday, April 18
Michigan League
Ballroom

For more information, visit www.socialequality.com/conference or write to sep@socialistequality.com

**To contact or find out how to join the International Students for Social Equality or Socialist Equality Party:
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