

Defend public education against Sarkozy's cuts!

International Students for Social Equality
14 May 2008

The following statement will be distributed by the International Students for Social Equality at demonstrations throughout France on May 15. The teacher and student unions have called a one-day strike in opposition to government cuts in education.

The one-day strike of high school students and teachers on May 15 against President Sarkozy's cuts in education is the continuation of two months of demonstrations and protests. The attacks on students and teachers are part of an assault on the entire working class, including public service workers, pensioners, immigrants and undocumented workers.

This offensive against the working class is not simply a French question, but rather a European-wide and international issue. Throughout Europe, as in the US, public schools are being starved of funds as the financial elites move toward privatizing the schools and creating a two-tier system—quality education for the children of the wealthy and sub-standard schooling for everyone else.

When working class youth leave school, what do they face? The prospect of unemployment or low-wage jobs and the threat of being dragooned to fight and die in war.

The driving force behind the assault on young people is not simply the policies of one president or one government, but rather the objective crisis of the capitalist system itself. With the near-meltdown of the financial system—bloated by inflated values on the basis of which the top 1 percent enriched itself—the world once again is threatened with economic depression.

The failure of the capitalist system only intensifies the drive by the ruling classes to cut wages and squeeze more profit from the labour of workers, slash all social programs, and seize control of vital resources, markets and sources of cheap labour by means of colonial-style

wars such as those in Afghanistan and Iraq.

French and other European Union troops are being deployed in growing numbers in Afghanistan. Neither the French government nor the ostensibly “opposition” Socialist Party is opposed to the military occupation of Iraq. They both support threats against Iran.

Even the most elementary needs—such as food—are being denied to masses of people. The explosion of food costs, exacerbated by speculation and profit-gouging, is inflicting hunger on billions of people and threatening millions with starvation.

Sarkozy's budget cuts of €7 billion announced in April are just the beginning. As far as capitalism is concerned, the living standards of the working class must be driven down to levels not seen since the beginning of the 20th century.

The international crisis of capitalism poses questions that cannot be resolved by seeking to pressure bourgeois governments like that of Sarkozy from below. It raises revolutionary issues that can be addressed only by a program committed to fundamental changes in society and a struggle to bring down Sarkozy and replace him with a workers' government.

What is required is the development of an independent political movement of the working class fighting for social equality, an end to imperialist war, and the fullest extension of democratic rights—that is, for socialism. This is the perspective fought for by the International Students for Social Equality, the youth wing of the International Committee of the Fourth International, whose daily Internet publication is the *World Socialist Web Site*.

There has been no lack of strikes and protests over the last decade: 1995 saw the greatest strike movement since May-June 1968; in 2003 there was a mass movement in defence of public sector workers'

pensions and against the break-up of the national education service; 2006 witnessed months of strikes and demonstrations against the reactionary “Equal Opportunities Law.”

Yet all of these struggles were diverted and ultimately betrayed by the trade union leaderships and the parties of the official “left”—the Socialist Party and the Communist Party. These forces—with the backing of so-called “far left” organisations such as the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) and Lutte Ouvrière (LO)—rejected a struggle to bring down the government and instead insisted that the mass movement be limited to pressuring it.

The outcome of all these struggles involving millions of workers and youth has been the installation of the most right-wing government since World War II. Why? Because these struggles were guided by a false perspective—the illusion that by mass pressure the policies of the ruling elite can be substantially shifted.

In the current struggle, the perspective of the high school unions, the FIDL (Independent Democratic Federation of High School Students) and the UNL (National Union of High School Students) is that Sarkozy’s education cuts can be prevented by mass pressure and that his administration can be forced to act in the interests of the workers and youth. However, all that Education Minister Xavier Darcos has offered is 1,500 low-paid, untrained teaching assistants, not qualified teachers, in 200 of the worst under-achieving high schools. He has made no retreat on the 11,200 cuts in teaching posts.

The trade unions no longer defend even the most basic interests of the working class. They work with the bosses to impose concessions on the workers in order to boost the competitiveness and profitability of French corporations. The CGT (General Confederation of Labour) and its leader Bernard Thibault collaborate quite openly with Sarkozy. But the so-called “left” and “far left” parties work to keep workers tied to these bankrupt organizations.

The precondition for defending the rights and living standards of the youth and the working class as a whole is the development of an independent political movement based on a new perspective—the unification of youth and working people throughout Europe and around the world in a struggle to put an end to capitalism and establish a socialist society.

A socialist transformation of society would mean that the resources of the planet, taken into public ownership and placed under democratic control, could be used to satisfy human needs rather than serve the interests of the financial aristocracy.

A new revolutionary leadership must be built in the working class to fight for this perspective. The International Students for Social Equality calls on youth to join its ranks and carry out this fight.



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