

Oppose school closures! Stop the shut down of Detroit!

A socialist response to the crisis in education

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The decision taken by students at Kettering High School and other schools in Detroit to demonstrate in opposition to school cuts and restructuring is a welcome step, one that should be supported by all students, teachers and working people throughout Detroit.

In their actions, the students are expressing a basic truth: If we are to oppose the destruction of our city, our communities, and our livelihoods, we must take matters into our own hands. It is time for the working class and student youth to unite and fight back!

Detroit—already devastated by decades of spending cuts and job destruction—is being turned into an economic wasteland. The auto companies are laying off tens of thousands of workers in order to satisfy the demands of Wall Street. Wages are being cut. Social services are starved of funding and the city's infrastructure is crumbling.

Now, the Detroit Public School District, under the leadership of the “Emergency Financial Manager” Robert Bobb, is planning to close 29 more schools this year, and another 20 next year. Bobb, who is paid some \$260,000 a year for his services, is firing principals if he determines they will be insufficiently aggressive in carrying out his right-wing demands. On Tuesday, he declared that 900 teacher and staff jobs will be eliminated.

The Obama administration and the Democratic Party are spearheading this latest round of cuts. This past week, Obama's education secretary, Arne Duncan, visited Detroit to demand “an absolutely fundamental overhaul” in the education system, by which he means: closing schools, laying off teachers and staff, and implementing a series of right-wing measures previously demanded by the Bush administration. These include the expansion of charter schools, increased testing, and the introduction of merit pay for teachers.

The Obama administration is demanding that the school district carry out these cuts and reform proposals in order to qualify for further funds from the federal stimulus package. Detroit's new mayor—right-wing Democratic businessmen David Bing—will be given control of the city's schools in order to oversee the cuts.

A political program to oppose education cuts

If we are to defend our communities and our livelihoods, workers must strike back through class struggle, including demonstrations, occupations, and strikes. Everything workers have ever gained they have gained through struggle.

In fighting for its interests, workers and youth can place no confidence in the trade unions, including the Detroit Federation of Teachers. The DFT—which has sought to tie teachers and other workers to the Democratic Party for decades—has demonstrated its bankruptcy in defending education and the interests of teachers and students alike. The DFT is already preparing to push through concessions on teachers to meet the demands of Obama and Bobb.

To carry out these struggles, workers require their own organizations. I urge Detroit students, teachers and residents to form neighborhood committees to discuss and plan opposition to these cuts in education.

If the struggles of workers and youth are to be successful, they require a political program. I am running as the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for mayor of Detroit in the elections this summer. The purpose of my campaign is fundamentally different from all the corrupt Democratic politicians like Bing and his cohorts. My campaign will aim to spearhead and provide political leadership to the mass mobilization of workers in Detroit, across the country, and internationally. As the basis for a struggle to defend education I propose the following:

Halt all school closures! Expand education funding!

Billions of dollars should be spent to rebuild Detroit schools, purchase education materials, modernize technology, lower class sizes, expand school curricula, and fund after-school and cultural activities. Our teachers, who perform some of the most difficult jobs, should be paid a much higher salary, with benefits and job security.

The school district is drastically underfunded. Many schools in Detroit are crumbling, suffering from decades of neglect. There are not sufficient funds for books and other basic necessities for education, with teachers often making up the difference out of their own pockets. School infrastructure for science and the arts is

often nonexistent or obsolete. These conditions are unacceptable.

Stop the shutdown of Detroit! Rebuild our city!

There is no solution to the crisis of education that does not address the broader social crisis. The city of Detroit has been devastated by the dismantling of manufacturing and the destruction of jobs to meet the profit interests of a tiny corporate and financial elite. The city has become the poorest large city in the country, with an official unemployment rate of 24 percent.

Students cannot get a decent education when they are hungry, homeless or sick. The defense of education must be linked to a public works program to guarantee employment and decent living conditions for everyone.

Spending for schools, not bank bailouts and war!

The claim that there is no money for expanding education and social programs is a lie. The school cuts are being carried out to address the district's \$300 million budget deficit. However, *trillions* are handed out with no strings attached to bail out the banks. Hundreds of billions—more than a thousand times the Detroit school deficit—are spent every year on the military in order to prosecute criminal wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The vast sums directed at lining the pockets of the wealthy and financing global plunder must be used to meet pressing social needs.

For the unity of the working class!

The ruling class is using the economic crisis that has engulfed world capitalism—the product of its own reckless speculation—as an occasion to restructure class relations in the United States. Anything that takes away from the profit interests of CEOs and big investors is a target: from workers' wages, to health care and other benefits, to education and social services.

To fight for its interests, including the defense and expansion of public education, workers throughout the city, across the country and around the world must unite on the basis of their independent class interests. In every country, workers face the same conditions: economic decline, the destruction of jobs and social program, war and the attack on democratic rights. Only through coordinated action and united struggle can workers combat the power of the wealthy elite.

Break with the Democrats and Republicans!

It is time to break decisively with the Democratic Party, which has overseen the decay of Detroit for decades. The city has been ruled by one corrupt administration after the other, governments that serve the interests of a parasitic corporate elite.

While many workers and young people looked to the Obama administration as a source of change, these hopes are being quickly shattered. The Obama administration's attack on education is of a piece with its entire policy, which is based on defending the interests of the rich.

For equality and socialism!

To workers who ask "Why is it necessary to adopt a socialist program?" we answer: Because the capitalist system has failed! It has failed in Detroit as it has failed throughout the country and around the world. Capitalism is a social system whose fundamental premise is the accumulation of profit by the wealthy and the accumulation of poverty by the working class. Such a system is incapable of providing for the needs of workers and youth.

The alternative to capitalism is socialism. Socialism means that decisions about how the wealth of society is utilized are arrived at rationally and democratically by working people. This requires the nationalization of the banks and large corporations and their transformation into public utilities under the democratic control of the working class. Through the democratic ownership of the foundations of the world economy, working people can direct the resources of society to the satisfaction of social need, not private profit.

This is the perspective of the Socialist Equality Party. I urge all workers, teachers and students who agree with this program to support my campaign for mayor and join the Socialist Equality Party.



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