

Defend education! Defend jobs! Defend the youth!

Stop the shutdown of Detroit!

An open letter from the Socialist Equality Party
27 May 2009

The SEP distributed this statement to Detroit public school teachers on Tuesday.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The proposals being put forward by the Detroit Public School Board and “emergency financial manager” Robert Bobb, backed by the Obama administration, will have devastating consequences for public education in our city. Teachers must take a stand against the latest round of school closings and budget cuts.

Nearly 1,000 jobs will be cut immediately, along with the closure of 29 more schools. By the time this latest round of closures is over, nearly a quarter of existing schools will be shut down—coming on top of decades of budget cuts. Bobb is pushing through the reorganization of many more schools to put in place principals who will support his right-wing proposals, including increased testing and merit pay for teachers.

This means the virtual destruction of public education for tens of thousands of youth in Detroit.

The attack on education follows a massive restructuring of the auto industry, including the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs, the closing of factories and dealerships, and the driving down of wages and benefits. The corporate and financial elite sees the economic crisis as an opportunity to carry out a wholesale attack on jobs and living standards, to increase exploitation and boost profits.

The claim that there is no money to provide decent jobs and education for everyone must be rejected with contempt. The \$300 million budget deficit faced by Detroit schools is a tiny fraction of the money handed out to Wall Street, by Bush and Obama alike, with no strings attached. When it is a matter of saving the banks and hedge funds, of covering the gambling debts of the wealthy, literally *trillions of dollars* are found. Where

is this money when it comes to saving our schools?

Every gain workers have achieved has been won through struggle. As you meet today and discuss the future of your schools, we urge you to consider the following basis for a program of opposition:

1. Reject all concessions and school closures! The entire framework of the discussion as it is presented by the DFT and the AFT, Bobb and the DPS, the city government and Obama administration, must be categorically rejected. *It is not a question of what concessions teachers will accept or what schools will be shut down, but the necessary strategy to oppose all cuts.*

2. Stop the shutdown of Detroit! For the unity of all workers! Teachers can make a powerful appeal to students, parents, and workers throughout the city and across the country. The different struggles of workers are in fact one struggle. The defense of education must be linked to a united movement of the working class in defense of jobs and social services.

3. For independent rank-and-file committees! The DFT and AFT are collaborating with the city administration. Today’s workshop is aimed at creating a climate for thoroughly retrograde changes in how teachers are evaluated, paid, and retained as employees. These so-called “trade unions” are no different from the UAW, which is working actively to impose concessions on auto workers. The outcome of the collaboration will be the same as well: more concessions, closures and job cuts.

The SEP calls on teachers to form an independent committee for the defense of education. These committees will establish the closest bonds of unity of all teachers with students, parents and the broader Detroit-area community.

4. For the preparation of mass resistance and a

general strike! Teachers must declare: any attempt by the city to implement these cuts will be met with mass resistance. The period between now and September must be used to educate and mobilize all sections of workers, parents, and students in preparation for a general strike against school closures in the fall.

Detroit teachers, do not underestimate your strength! Determined resistance will win mass support throughout the country and internationally. The same conditions you face are also faced by workers throughout the world. You will not be alone if you resist these attacks, but you must take decisive action.

The SEP encourages all teachers who are looking for a way to fight to contact us and come to our public meeting on Thursday.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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