

California budget cuts target education

Los Angeles students and teachers protest school cuts

A WSWWS reporting team
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The California state government, with the support of the Obama administration, is carrying out billions of dollars in cuts in public education. California, which once boasted one of the best education systems in the country, will soon measure last on such metrics as per-pupil funding and teacher-student ratios.

Statewide, the public education system is facing a new round of devastating cuts, on top of the \$11 billion already imposed this year. Under Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's current proposal to meet the state's \$24 billion budget shortfall, schools and community colleges will lose an additional \$1.6 billion for the school year that ends June 30 and \$4.5 billion next year.

The poorest districts will be the hardest hit by the new layoffs, as they have the highest concentration of new teachers. Some school districts in wealthier areas of the state are seeking to compensate declining state funding by increasing local taxes that their residents can afford. About 75 percent of education funding currently comes from the state government.

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) recently voted to lay off over 2,000 teachers and over 1,000 educational personnel, though 500 of these layoffs were subsequently rescinded. As teachers are laid off, class sizes are slated to increase and materials will be scarcer as well.

At the end of last month, LAUSD announced that it was canceling most of its summer school programs, forcing many working parents to find alternative means of childcare. In past years the state has enrolled an average of 225,000 students in summer classes. The cancelled classes come as unemployment for youth is

soaring.

The district is also planning \$17 million in cuts to its school bus program, forcing many students to walk or take longer bus rides. A program to provide special transport for those facing hazardous walking conditions will also be canceled, potentially endangering thousands of students.

On June 9, over 800 Los Angeles students, teachers and parents marched to protest deep budget cuts imposed by LAUSD.

The protestors included a group of LAUSD teachers who started fasting on May 26 in order to oppose the cuts. Several teachers pitched tents outside the LAUSD headquarters the day of the march in order to camp there in protest.

At the rally, a number of student and parent speakers made heartfelt denunciations of the board's decision. One student activist denounced the board for "balancing the budget on the backs of education" and noted that "instead of cutting the prison system, they cut the educational system." She then asked, "There are billions of dollars for war, but where is the money to send us to college?"

A local professor asked, "Where are our priorities? When will the wealthy corporations make concessions?"

Reporters for the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Ramón, a junior high school student who came to the rally with a bus of fellow high school students: "We want to save our schools. We want to save our teachers. Education is something that shouldn't be cut. Like my teacher said, it's a sacred right. It's our future."

Sonya, another high school student, told the WSWWS, "All the politicians are against us. I can't think of a

single one who's for the people. How come they don't take some money from the rich in this state? What's preventing them from doing so? People are hurting and now you tell me you can't touch those people's yachts?"

When WSWS reporters told a group of marching students that the real need is for socialism to end all inequality and cuts, several began chanting "end social inequality."

While many of those attending the event expressed a real desire to fight the assault on public education, the union representatives leading the event had nothing to offer teachers and students other than pleas to the very politicians who have imposed the current cuts.

United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) president A.J. Duffy closed his remarks at the event by demanding that board members Monica Garcia and Yolie Flores, who supported the current round of cuts, change their vote. "Change your vote! Change your vote!", he chanted.

Duffy attacked the school board at the event for not agreeing to spend more of the miserly stimulus funds received from Washington this year to ameliorate the effects of the budget crisis (the LAUSD is insisting on spreading the money out over two years). However, Duffy and the union have nothing to say about how to address the even larger cuts that will be imposed next year.

Furthermore, Duffy and leaders within the unions as a whole accept the basic premise advanced by Democrats and Republicans alike that working people must make sacrifices in order to bail out the state treasury, regardless of the fact that they had no role in creating the present problem and have already confronted years of budget cuts.

In a comment published in the *Los Angeles Times* the same day as the rally, AFL-CIO LA County Labor Federation chief Maria Elene Durazo called on the UTLA and teachers "to make financial sacrifices, such as forgoing pay hikes they are due (which could save the district about \$45 million) or agreeing to unpaid furloughs." Durazo went on, "Asking members to sacrifice is distasteful to any union leader, but this is an extraordinary moment, and it calls for a different kind of leadership."

In addition to attempting to steer the anger among

teachers and students over the budget cuts into the safe channel of demanding that the Democratic Party adopt different policies, many speakers at the protest also promoted identity politics, implying that the major issue in the budget crisis is its effects on minorities.

The emphasis on ethnicity obscures the fact that the economic crisis is destroying the living standards of the working class of all ethnic groups. Teachers, students, and parents should reject this idea that the major issue in the present budget meltdown is racism. The central issue is class and the fact that the entire political establishment, Democratic and Republican alike, is unified in their insistence that working people as a whole must pay for the breakdown of the capitalist system.



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