

Unite all Detroit area workers to defend public education and defeat the attack on jobs and living standards!

Socialist Equality Party
25 August 2009

The Socialist Equality Party calls on all teachers and school employees to fight for a unified struggle, alongside workers throughout the city and state, to defeat the demand for wage and benefit concessions, layoffs and the gutting of public education and other basic services by big business and the Democrats and Republicans.

Both Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm and Detroit Mayor David Bing, along with their hireling, Detroit Public Schools financial czar Robert Bobb, are spearheading a drive to destroy the living conditions of the working class in order to further boost the profits of the corporate and financial elite.

The Obama administration, acting on behalf of Wall Street, is using the economic crisis as an opportunity to permanently reduce living standards of the working class and destroy the gains won over decades of struggle. This began with the forced bankruptcies of GM and Chrysler by the White House and the decision to wipe out tens of thousands of jobs and strip auto workers of decent wages, retiree health care benefits and pensions.

Citing the “automotive model” as his guide for the “reform” of the Detroit schools, Robert Bobb has announced the closing of dozens of schools, the layoff of thousands of teachers and has unveiled his demands for draconian rollbacks in wages, benefits and working conditions.

These concessions include:

- An across-the-board 10 percent pay cut
- A 10 percent increase in out-of-pocket health care costs, including dental and optical coverage
- Forcing teachers to rely on workers’ compensation instead of accumulated sick days to pay for extended medical leave.
- A freeze in all pay steps
- Elimination of reimbursed sick days for prospective retirees
- Elimination of extended maternity leave, longevity

bonuses, oversized class compensation and lost prep compensation

If implemented, these measures would drive many teachers, especially those with families, into poverty. It would, as well, force many younger teachers out of the profession, and discourage young people from becoming educators.

It is likely that Bobb has made these provocative demands in order to force a strike so he can victimize workers under Michigan’s reactionary law prohibiting strikes by state employees, or initiate another takeover of the schools, perhaps by Mayor Bing.

Bobb is not acting alone. His reactionary demands are the direct result of the Obama administration’s education policy. Not only is Obama seamlessly carrying out the policies initiated by the Bush administration’s No Child Left Behind initiative passed by Congress in 2001, he is, in fact, expanding its scope and reach.

Merit pay, private for-profit education management companies, standardized testing, charter schools and even vouchers are being advanced by Obama and his education secretary Arne Duncan. Nothing is off the table, except free, high quality public education for the vast majority of urban and working class youth and decent pay, benefits and working conditions for teachers.

Bobb claims his “reforms” are needed to clean up the corruption that has long plagued the Detroit schools. Two things must be said about this. First, corruption is not unique to the Detroit school board—it is endemic throughout the Democratic Party machine that has run Detroit for decades.

Second, and most important, the primary cause of the decline of the Detroit schools is not graft, but the decades-long de-industrialization of the city by big business and the tax abatements granted by the Democrats to the corporations. This calamity has starved the schools of funding and led to years of cost-cutting, layoffs, declining enrollment and school closures.

General strike

To combat these attacks teachers should launch strike action to defend their jobs and living standards. But they cannot fight this battle alone. A campaign must be initiated to launch a general strike of all Detroit area workers—auto workers, bus drivers, city workers—to oppose school and factory closures, layoffs and wage and benefit cuts.

The Detroit Federation of Teachers is opposed to any such mobilization. For months, the DFT sowed the illusion that Bobb was amenable to an equitable negotiated settlement. For decades, the DFT, just like the United Auto Workers, has functioned as an accomplice of the corporate interests that run Detroit and the Democratic Party and has sought to suppress every form of resistance by the working class to the attack on jobs and living standards.

The prerequisite for any serious fight is a break from these so-called “unions” and the formation of new organizations of struggle based on rank-and-file committees in the schools, other workplaces and neighborhoods.

Political independence of the working class

Such a struggle, however, must be guided by a new political perspective, which takes as its starting point the need to defend the independent interests of the working class against the capitalist profit system and the two corporate-backed parties.

Teachers no more than auto workers or any other section of the working class are responsible for the economic crisis, and they must not pay for it. The claim that “there is no money” for decent living standards and public education is a lie!

In addition to squandering vast financial and human resources on the criminal wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Obama administration has handed trillions in public funds to the Wall Street bankers and financial speculators who are responsible for the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. They have used this money—not to provide relief to struggling homeowners, or lower the debt burden on working families—but to boost their profits and reward themselves with multi-million dollar bonuses.

Many workers thought that Obama would bring “change.” In reality this is a government of the financial oligarchy,

which intends to permanently reduce the living standards of the working class by gutting such bedrock programs as public education, Medicare and Medicaid, in order to pay for the bailout of the banks, now estimated to cost somewhere in the neighborhood of \$23 trillion.

A socialist perspective is needed

It has never been possible to establish a decent and equitable system of public education within the framework of the capitalist profit system. This truth was articulated nearly a century ago by the great educator John Dewey, who recognized the inequalities inherent in a system that subordinates everything to the accumulation of private profit.

If this was true when American capitalism was still on the rise, it is doubly true today after three decades of economic decline and the supplanting of US industrial power by the most grotesque forms of financial speculation.

The present ruling elite, within which there is little constituency for basic democratic rights and institutions, including public education, will not tolerate any infringement on its “God-given” right to accumulate vast levels of personal wealth.

The capitalist system is bankrupt and beyond reform. It must be replaced by socialism, i.e., a society based on public ownership of the vast productive capacity of mankind, where society’s wealth is allocated based on what is needed by the many rather than the private enrichment of the few.

Teachers and school employees are locked in a *political struggle* that cannot be waged successfully within the confines of a trade union outlook and support for the profit system and the Democratic Party. The Socialist Equality Party calls on workers to initiate the mass resistance to the concessions and layoffs, and to seriously consider joining the SEP as the new revolutionary leadership of the working class.



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