

Unite Michigan teachers, students, workers to stop school cuts!

Statement Socialist Equality Party
23 October 2009

The following statement is being distributed to teachers, students and workers in Michigan. To download the statement in pdf format, click here.

Teachers, students, parents and workers must act now to oppose the cuts to public education agreed to by Michigan lawmakers.

On October 22, Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm ordered a \$212 million cut in school funding, or about \$127-per-pupil throughout the state. This comes on top of a \$165 per-pupil cut signed into law on October 19, as well as an additional \$51.5 million from 39 of the state's largest districts, mostly in Southeastern Michigan.

Total per-pupil funding has now been cut by nearly \$300 in all districts, with some suffering even more severe blows. More reductions can not be excluded.

The impact on the education of young people is incalculable. The reductions will translate into immediate layoffs, cuts to school services, and increased class sizes.

"Non-essential" education for high school students will be gutted—music, physical education, sports, art and history. There will be fewer textbooks and computers. Overworked and underpaid teachers will be unable to provide the same level of instruction. Bus routes will be cut. Schools will be shut down.

An overwhelming majority of the state's population opposes these cuts. But this opposition finds no expression in the political establishment—neither in Lansing, nor in Washington.

Reject all cuts! Expand funding for public education!

The Socialist Equality Party calls on teachers, students and the entire working class to reject these cuts entirely. We oppose the entire framework of the "debate" on the state budget. It is not a question of what social programs will be

cut, but what political strategy is necessary to ensure that there are *no cuts*.

The claim that "there is no money" for the schools is a lie. With bankers preparing to award themselves \$140 billion this year and the heads of bailed-out auto companies pocketing multi-million-dollar salaries, there are ample resources. The problem is that the political system and both parties, in Washington and in Lansing, are controlled by the financial parasites who brought the US and world economy to its knees.

The attack on public education is one way in which working people are being made to pay for their looting of the economy.

- Billions for public education!

The SEP demands that hundreds of billions of dollars be allocated to rebuild the schools, hire teachers at decent pay and provide the facilities—text books, computers, labs, art and music instruction, small class sizes—that are essential to provide quality education for all young people.

We call for an end to charter schools and for-profit schools, and the development of the public education system.

To start, we call for a progressive tax system that increases taxes for the richest 10 percent and lowers taxes for working families. We further call for the fortunes of bankers and speculators obtained through fraud and predatory loans to be seized and used to finance socially useful projects, including public education.

- Jobs at decent wages for all!

The SEP calls for a public works program to guarantee full-time employment for all those who need a job. Instead of using mass unemployment as an excuse to destroy public education, we demand the allocation of the necessary resources to put people to work building homes, schools, health care facilities and basic social infrastructure.

For an independent movement of the working class!

It is time to end the myth that the Democratic Party represents common people. There is a Democratic president, a Democratic Congress and a Democratic governor. But the bankers rule no less than they did under Bush.

Obama has overseen a vast transfer of social wealth to the same Wall Street firms that created the economic crisis. The trillions of dollars earmarked for the banks dwarfs the combined budget deficits of all fifty states.

The administration has done nothing to address the jobs or education crisis. On the contrary, it has fully supported the attack on the working class.

Obama forced through the bankruptcy of General Motors and Chrysler in order to impose unprecedented cuts in wages and benefits, along with the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs. The government “stimulus” program is a fraud. It has created less than 400 jobs in Michigan.

Obama has refused federal dollars to aid the states. The meager funds he has provided for education are tied to the introduction of right-wing measures such as merit pay for teachers and charter schools.

A fight to defend public education requires a political break with the Democratic and Republican Parties, the twin parties of big business.

For a united movement of Detroit and Michigan workers

An independent mobilization is required that unites all sections of the working class in Detroit and throughout the state in defense of public education. It is necessary to reject all attempts to divide working people along racial and ethnic lines, and pit the city of Detroit against the suburbs.

The entire region is suffering from Depression conditions. The latest cuts will most severely impact many of the suburban districts, while the Detroit city government has shut down dozens of schools on top of decades of budget cuts.

Nor is the attack on public education taking place only in Michigan. All over the country school budgets are being slashed, teachers laid off, and curriculum reduced. California, once “the Golden State,” has furloughed teachers and imposed increased class sizes. The state of Hawaii has gone so far as to close public schools on Fridays.

If the working people of Michigan take a stand, their efforts will receive broad support throughout the country and internationally.

For socialism and equality!

What kind of society is it that guarantees the multi-million-dollar bonuses of bank executives while starving the education system of resources? It is a society in which the accumulation of private wealth and profit is the basic principle, not the needs of the people. It is a society in which a wealthy elite controls every aspect of economic and political life. It is, in short, capitalism.

One year since the economic crisis, workers are confronting bitter truths about the nature of the capitalist system. If the interests of workers are to be defended and social disaster averted, it must be on the basis of a struggle for a new form of social organization, in which social need, not private profit, is the organizing principle of economic life, and in which the main levers of the economy are publicly owned and democratically controlled. The alternative to capitalism is socialism.

The Socialist Equality Party urges all students, teachers and workers to initiate mass resistance to the attack on education. We call for the organization of demonstrations and strikes, and the establishment of action committees among teachers and in the communities to fight for the broadest possible mobilization in defense of education.

The struggle must be guided by a new political strategy, based on a break with the Democrats and the two-party system and the building of a mass, independent political movement of the working class to fight for a workers’ government.

We urge all those who agree with these policies to join the SEP and help build the new socialist leadership of the working class.



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