

New York and New Jersey workers face unprecedented cutbacks

Socialist Equality Party
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The attacks on teachers and other public employees in the states of New York and New Jersey are part of an unprecedented assault on jobs, pensions, wages, benefits and seniority rights being mounted by both Democrats and Republicans in the name of balancing state budgets.

In New Jersey, Republican Governor Chris Christie has called teachers “greedy,” cynically telling homeowners facing incessant increases in local property taxes that the teachers are to blame. While refusing to even consider any increase in taxes for his wealthy backers, Christie has campaigned against local school budgets and slashed the state’s education budget by nearly a billion dollars. Layoff notices have already been sent to thousands of teachers across the state. The governor has sought a general wage freeze and introduced legislation that will call into question civil service protections, including seniority, and raise the retirement age for public employees to 65.

Christie’s plans will affect every section of the working class. He will cut budgets for public higher education and for adult education programs. Libraries will lose 74 percent of their funding. The New Jersey Transit Authority has had to substantially raise fares because of budget shortfalls.

In the neighboring state of New York, the governor is a Democrat, but the policies are nearly identical. David Paterson says that 15,000 teachers must lose their jobs in order to close a \$9 billion budget deficit. Paterson has sought to impose a unilateral furlough for all state employees that will amount to a 20 percent pay cut.

In New York City, which has the nation’s largest school district, billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg has announced a budget plan that would mean the layoffs of 4,419 teachers and a meager 2 percent pay raise for those who remain. The budget proposal would also eliminate 400 firefighters’ jobs, close dozens of senior centers and daycare centers, and drastically slash spending for libraries and arts programs.

The city’s Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) has threatened to eliminate the longstanding subsidized subway and bus transportation for nearly 500,000 students, the vast majority from poor and working class families. The MTA has begun to lay off 1,150 unionized transit workers and 600 MTA administrative workers.

The attacks on public service workers are taking place in every part of the US and are bipartisan in nature. Both the New York and New Jersey governors openly boast of their collaboration with the Obama Administration, which, through its “Race to the Top” program, is continuing and deepening the Bush administration’s attacks on public education.

There is no money for schools, for mass transit or any other social

need, but of course there were trillions of dollars to bail out the bankers and ensure that they earned record bonuses even as millions of working people were losing their jobs and homes. This reveals more than anything the class nature of the budget cuts. Both Democrats and Republicans do the bidding of Wall Street and the giant corporations, and workers have no political weapons of their own.

The ruling elite could not impose its austerity program without the close collaboration of the trade unions, whose role has been to squelch the anger of their members and to impose the cuts. Even when they mouth occasional phrases of opposition, behind the scenes they meet with the big business politicians to gut seniority rights, accept job cuts and privatize education.

Earlier this month, the New York State United Teachers and New York City’s United Federation of teachers agreed to allow teacher evaluation to be tied to student test performance.

New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) leaders recently met with Education Commissioner Bret Schundler to discuss the state’s application for \$400 million in funds of Federal Race to the Top money. Leaders of the Newark Teachers Union have openly supported the Department of Education’s calls for merit pay.

Tens of thousands of students walked out of their classrooms in New Jersey on April 27 to protest teacher layoffs and the cutting of sports and arts programs. They attempted to do what the unions will not—to begin a mass movement in defense of the right to an education. The NJEA, fearful of just such a struggle, announced that the students should accept punishment for taking a stand.

The cause of all of the attacks is the crisis of the capitalist system. Working people will find that they cannot defend themselves with half-measures. They need to go on the offensive against the whole profit system and replace it with the democratic planning of the economy for human need—that is, with socialism.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the following program to defend teachers, public workers, social programs, and education in New Jersey and New York:

Stop all budget cuts and layoffs! Stops the attacks on seniority!

Billions must be allocated to ensure quality public education and social services for everyone. Schools must be rebuilt and equipped with new supplies, textbooks, and technology. Higher education must be made free of cost and open to everyone.

The SEP opposes the attempt to destroy public education and divide working people through the use of charter schools. The answer to the attacks on education is not the development of private schools for a small minority, but uniting teachers, parents and students in a fully-funded public system that recognizes education as a basic right and not the privilege of a few. Teacher pay should be raised to reflect the importance of their work, and hiring must be increased to reduce class sizes and make individualized attention available to all. The resources exist to provide this kind of education to all, but under the profit system they are available only to the wealthy.

Create a public works program to rebuild schools and provide quality jobs for all!

It is impossible for students to get a decent education when they are homeless and hungry. Official unemployment is nearly 9 percent in New York State, 10 percent in New York City and over 10 percent in New Jersey. Real unemployment is much higher. Nationwide, mass unemployment persists, and millions face the loss of their homes and the shutoff of basic utilities.

A massive public works program is required to guarantee good-paying jobs for all. There is no shortage of work to be done—including the rebuilding of our schools and communities.

Nationalize the banks and large corporations!

The question of who controls society's wealth lies at the heart of the crisis in education and all public services. The wealthy dictate public policy, and they have no interest in educating workers destined for unemployment, menial jobs or war. The drumbeat of demagogic attacks on the public schools is designed to divert attention from this fact. Taxes on the wealthy must be sharply increased to provide resources to rebuild social infrastructure in the US and internationally. The banks and major corporations must be placed under public ownership and the democratic control of working people in order to break the economic and political grip of the financial elite over society.

Form action committees against budget cuts and layoffs!

To fight for this program, workers must build new organizations of struggle. The role of the unions is to prevent a political struggle, to isolate teachers and other public workers and above all to prevent a united struggle by teachers, parents, retirees and students.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the formation of action committees of teachers and other public employees, independent of the unions, to organize opposition. An immediate appeal must be made to students, public workers, and the entire working class—every section of which is confronting an unrelenting attack on jobs and wages—for a unified fight. This should include preparations for a

general strike throughout the country to defend public education.

Fight for the political independence of the working class!

The experience of the Obama administration demonstrates that the Democrats, no less than the Republicans, are the bitter enemies of workers and students. The precondition for a fight to defend education and other social programs is a complete and irrevocable break with the two parties of big business and the construction of a mass socialist party of the working class.

The attack on public education and other services throughout the country is part of an international campaign to make the working class pay for the economic crisis—from Greece and Portugal, to Germany, Britain, and the United States. After guaranteeing the wealth of the rich, the governments and the media now demand austerity and cost cutting from those who are already suffering the most.

Any attempt to satisfy the basic needs of the population, including high-quality public education, immediately confronts an enormous obstacle: the fact that economic and political life is entirely subordinated to the frantic drive for the personal wealth of a small minority at the expense of the vast majority.

Unite the working class internationally!

The struggle against layoffs and budget cuts requires an international perspective. The attacks on the rights and jobs of public workers and on education are global in character: Britain, Greece, Portugal, and Spain will all see massive cuts in public spending in the coming months. A successful struggle against capitalism requires the mobilization and the resources of the working class across national borders.

The Socialist Equality Party encourages all teachers, students and workers in New Jersey and New York to study our program and perspectives, read the *World Socialist Web Site*, and make the decision to join the Socialist Equality Party.

To contact or join the SEP, click here.

To join the International Students for Social Equality click here.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact