

San Diego school district launches new attacks on teachers

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A special meeting of the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD), the second largest district in California, approved a proposal that represents another round in the attacks against the working class in the state. Every March for the past four years, a new and perverse ritual sees school boards throughout the state issue layoff notices to teachers and workers in anticipation for the latest round of budget cuts to be voted upon at the state level in the summer.

This year, the issue is complicated by the fact that the budget proposed by Governor Jerry Brown, which represents a frontal assault against the working class in the educational field as in all essential services, is contingent on a series of regressive tax proposals to be introduced in June in the form of a special ballot measure to be approved by the voters.

Nearly 1,600 SDUSD school workers, 885 of them teachers, are now on track to receive layoff notices in anticipation of Brown's austerity budget, which could cut between \$12.5 and \$24.5 billion. The SDUSD Board of Education, facing a budget shortfall between \$60 and \$114 million, insists that by issuing the pink slips to workers \$100 million could be saved. However, the range of cuts, both at the state and SDUSD level, is wholly contingent upon the regressive tax extensions that are to be placed on the June special election ballot. Without its passage, the "worst case scenario" of \$114 million in cuts at SDUSD will be actualized.

In the classroom and schoolyards, the cuts will translate to increased class sizes from kindergarten to third grade, a 20 percent reduction in the transportation budget—which will disproportionately affect the most vulnerable families—and as much as a \$349 per-student funding reduction, all in addition to the teacher and

worker layoffs.

A rally to protest these cuts was held in San Diego before the board meeting. The rally was attended by hundreds of teachers, workers, as well as students.

Speaking at the rally, Bill Freeman, president of the San Diego Education Association (SDEA), offered a false and yet revealing presentation of the situation and the political issues confronting teachers, workers, and students in the district. Freeman explained that the cuts are merely a function of the fact that the district's budgetary calculations are incorrect: "Their numbers are off, they do not add up." He stated that if Republican candidate Meg Whitman had been elected as governor of California, "We would be in the same situation they have in Wisconsin." He then added that they "are coming after unions because they do not want middle class Americans to have a voice."

Teachers in San Diego and California, as a matter of fact, do confront the same massive attacks against their living standards that are being carried out in Wisconsin. These cuts represent a deliberate attempt to place the burden of the economic crisis squarely on the backs of working people. In California, moreover, these cuts are being carried out by the same Democratic governor that was supported by all the major unions in the state. These facts, however, do not seem to register with the trade union bureaucracy, because they are primarily concerned with their own ability to collect dues from their members. Only from this standpoint can the ongoing ruthless attack against teachers in California be presented, as Freeman did, as some sort of misunderstanding or an accounting error.

In reality, in San Diego as in Wisconsin, the unions continue to play a treacherous role. The rally and the

perfunctory opposition to the cuts in San Diego in the final analysis are a way to allow the teachers and workers to harmlessly vent their frustrations while savage cuts are carried out. At the board meeting, dozens of workers expressed their outrage and discontent in their testimony, only to be told that nothing can be done.

The unions tell their members to be thankful that a Wisconsin-style attack against collective bargaining rights is not under way in California. But this a hollow and demagogic claim, since in practice they have long ago abandoned any substantive defense of their members' jobs and wages.

A reporting team from the *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed students, teachers, and workers that gathered outside the SDUSD Board of Education meeting on Thursday, where the vote was carried through.

Tineke Housr, a special education worker at Miller Elementary for 25 years, is one of the nearly 600 "nonteaching" employees whose job is threatened by this vote. "As classified employees we are just as important as teachers. We work directly with the students. We are librarians, cafeteria workers, school bus drivers, janitors, and special education workers," she said.

When asked about the role of Democrats and Governor Jerry Brown, Tineke stated, "There is a massive disconnect between politicians and the students and teachers out here today. [The Democrats] just don't relate."

Elementary school teacher and union leader at Hickman Elementary, Gary Strobel spoke about his frustration in having to repeatedly deal with budget cuts year in and year out. "Over the last three years I have seen my salary cut, and this year the board is at it again," he said. "Only this time we are expected to take a cut while having witnessed the bailout of the banks and Wall Street."

Strobel spoke of the large rally as "turning point" for teachers and students, but it is "just the beginning."

Alicia, one of many high school students who participated in Thursday's rally, said, "We are here to protest and support our teachers, who more and more feel less valued." Another student, Enrique, added,

"We are also here to make a statement; to say that we care about our education."

Frustrated by this latest round of cuts, Ricardo, who had also came to the rally from his high school, insisted, "If they cut more money, and lay off more teachers, that will mean more students in the classroom, and all of this equals less attention on students and less education for us all."

On the events unfolding in Wisconsin, and the attempts to stop the cuts there, Alicia stated, "It will be a model for us all."



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