

# Education is a social right! Unite teachers, students and workers against all cuts!

Socialist, International Students for Social Equality  
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*This statement will be distributed by supporters of the SEP and ISSE at rallies of teachers Friday in California to oppose attacks on public education. To download this statement in pdf form, click here. For a version that includes a meeting announcement in Los Angeles, click here.*

Public education is under attack in California and throughout the country. As a result of budget cuts, primary schools are being shut down in district after district and state after state. Class sizes are soaring, teachers are being laid off and key programs eliminated.

Teachers, who perform one of society's most important functions, are being victimized for the crisis created by chronic underfunding. Politicians from both parties and the media denounce teachers for being overpaid and responsible for "failing schools." Los Angeles is a model for new methods that supposedly evaluate performance, but, in fact, are aimed at scapegoating teachers for a crisis they did not create.

At the community college, college, and university levels, budget cuts are leading to falling enrollment, cancelled classes and soaring tuition. Students are graduating burdened with thousands of dollars of debt, only to face a life of unemployment or low-wage work. Last year, for the first time in history, student debt surpassed credit card debt nationwide.

These conditions must end! It is time for teachers, students, and the working class as a whole to join together in a common fight to defend and greatly improve public education. A quality education is a social right that must be guaranteed to all!

Teachers and their supporters participating in the demonstrations throughout California today are looking for a way to prevent further attacks on their students, their schools, and their own jobs.

However, the perspective of the trade unions that have called the weeklong "state of emergency" actions offers no way forward. By channeling opposition behind a campaign to pressure Democrats and Republicans in the state legislature, the unions are blocking any serious struggle and delivering workers into the hands of the same big business politicians that are attacking public education.

Both the Democrats and the Republicans are seeking to exploit the economic crisis, created by the financial and corporate elite, to destroy public education and other social

programs, loot pensions and sell off public assets to private corporate interests.

Far from reversing Bush's No Child Left Behind agenda, the Obama administration has fully embraced the anti-teacher agenda long associated with the Republican right—charter schools, merit pay, the destruction of tenure and the firing so-called bad teachers.

The Obama administration and Democratic and Republican Congressional leaders are now negotiating even greater austerity measures, including trillions of dollars in cuts, in order to make the working class pay for the bailout of the Wall Street swindlers, the extension of the Bush era tax cuts for the rich and the ongoing wars.

In California, New York, Illinois and other states Democrats are imposing attacks just as savage as their Republican counterparts. Governor Brown has expanded budget cuts to all social programs, while both parties in Sacramento have approved another \$8 billion in cuts, escalating Schwarzenegger's attack on the working class. Brown is threatening an additional \$12 billion in cuts, including cuts to K-12 education, if his tax proposal is not approved. Along with the Republicans, he is demanding changes in pensions for state workers to force them to pay more for their benefits.

In higher education, \$500 million each has been slashed from the University of California and the California State University systems, and an additional \$400 million was taken from community colleges, leading to continuous cutbacks and tuition increases.

These attacks must be rejected. Teachers, students and all workers must proceed from the principle that a high quality education, from pre-school to university, is a social right that cannot be surrendered.

The SEP and ISSE call for a new program of struggle to defend education.

## **1. Increase taxes on the wealthy, not working people!**

Brown and the unions are trying to convince workers that the only alternative to further cuts in K-12 public education is the extension of regressive taxes that mainly target the poor. This is a lie!

California has one of the largest economies in the world and is one of the wealthiest states in the country. The richest man in

California, Larry Ellison, could cover the entire budget deficit and still be a billionaire. A tiny layer of the population monopolizes sums of money unimaginable to ordinary people, while workers—whose collective labor creates society's wealth—are facing hardships and levels of poverty not seen since the Great Depression.

Both parties are in the pockets of the financial elite and refuse to raise taxes on the rich. We insist that the ill-gotten wealth of the financial and corporate elite, accumulated largely through speculation and parasitism, must be reclaimed by sharply raising taxes on all incomes over \$250,000. These resources must be used to reopen closed schools, reduce class sizes, invest in new technologies, rehire tens of thousands of teachers in the state and increase pay for all teachers.

## **2. For a public works program to guarantee full employment!**

The attack on public education is part of a much broader assault on all social spending that does not directly benefit the wealthy. Cuts to CalWORKS, Medi-Cal and other social welfare programs have a direct effect on the wellbeing of students. It is impossible for students to study when they don't have a home or enough food to eat, or if their parents don't have a decent-paying job.

The expansion of public education must be linked to a public works program—paid for through a massive redistribution of wealth from the rich to working people—to ensure that all workers have a quality, high-paying job.

## **3. Break with the Democrats and Republicans!**

The actions of Brown and Obama make clear that the Democratic Party, no less than the Republican Party, is an instrument of the corporate and financial elite. Brown was brought into office to work with the Democratic Party-controlled legislature to implement cuts that even Schwarzenegger had trouble getting through.

As for Obama, more than two years of his administration have brought only increasing inequality, the expansion of war, and growing attacks on democratic rights. Since the 2010 mid-term elections Obama has shifted even further to the right, agreeing to extend the Bush-era tax cuts, planning deep cuts in social programs and pledging a sharp reduction in regulation on business.

## **4. For independent organizations of working class struggle!**

A struggle in defense of education requires mobilizing the widest layers of the working class in a common struggle. The struggle must be taken out of the hands of the trade unions through the formation of independent organizations of struggle, controlled by rank-and-file teachers, students, parents and other workers.

Unions like UTLA and CTA have completely accepted the firing of thousands of their members. Instead of opposing mass layoffs and budget cuts, they have supported Brown's assault on workers—insisting only that they be “partners” in these

attacks. The only protests they have called are attempts to lead students, teachers, and workers into the dead end of Brown's tax proposal.

From mid-February to mid-March hundreds of thousands of workers fought a determined battle against Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker. But the struggle was betrayed and eventually smothered by the unions, which tied it to the Democratic Party, accepted without question the need for concessions and budget cuts, and limited their demands to the most narrow institutional interests of the labor apparatus. After selling out the fight, the unions rushed to sign contract extensions that handed over everything to Walker—including collective bargaining rights—in order to preserve the collection of union dues for the well-paid labor executives.

## **5. Nationalize the banks and major corporations! For a socialist program to defend education!**

Like all the most basic social rights of the working class—to a job, a livable income, health care and retirement—the right to education runs into immediate conflict with the private ownership of the giant banks and corporations, which exercise a dictatorship over economic and political life.

Increasingly, America's wealthy elite considers public education an unacceptable drain on profit, particularly since they are condemning the vast majority of young people to a future of unemployment, low-paying jobs and war.

To free up resources for public education, and to break the control of the financial elite over society, the big corporations and banks must be transformed into publicly owned and democratically controlled entities.

The only way for the working class to implement such a solution is to take political power in its own hands. The Socialist Equality Party and the International Students for Social Equality call on workers and youth to fight for this perspective and to make the decision to join the fight for socialism.



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