

Public education is a social right!

Socialist Equality Party
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This statement will be distributed at a demonstration of teachers, workers and students against budget cuts Saturday in Lansing, Michigan. Click here to download it in pdf format. To become involved in the fight against cuts, or for more information on joining the Socialist Equality Party, click here.

Public education, a basic social right, is under attack in Michigan, throughout the US, and indeed around the world.

As a result of budget cuts, schools are being shut down in district after district, state after state. Class sizes are increasing, teachers laid off, and key programs eliminated as “unnecessary.” At the same time, soaring tuition for higher education is placing it out of reach for the majority of working class students.

Teachers, who perform one of society’s most important functions, are victimized for a crisis created by chronic underfunding. Underpaid and overworked, often having to pay out of their own pockets for basic tools of education, teachers are vilified by the media and the political establishment as the cause of failing schools. As corporate CEOs take in tens of millions of dollars a year, it is teachers who are denounced as overpaid, with benefits that are unaffordable!

These conditions are intolerable! 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. The question is, how can this be done?

A social counterrevolution

It is not just public education that is under attack. Every right and gain of the working class—health care, a secure retirement, a decent living standard, the democratic right of the working class to resist the demands of the corporations—is targeted for elimination.

In Michigan, Governor Snyder and the Republican-controlled state legislature are slashing hundreds of millions from education and other social programs. They are imposing a de facto wage cut of thousands of dollars each year by forcing teachers to pay at least 20 percent of the costs of health care, while gutting seniority and other workplace rights.

At the same time, Snyder is shifting the tax burden from corporations and the wealthy onto the backs of workers and retirees. The passage of the tax bill last week, carried out with the complicity of state Democrats who could have blocked it, will reduce taxes on businesses by 86 percent. Companies will

pay just two percent of the cost of public education, the lowest percentage in the United States.

The compromise reached between Democrats and Republicans Thursday to restore some of the cuts in per-pupil spending comes with the proviso that school districts devise even stricter means to slash spending—i.e., further concessions from school employees, privatization schemes, etc.

The Michigan Education Association and other unions are pointing to the attacks by Snyder and his fellow Republicans in Wisconsin, Ohio and other states in order to call for support for the Democratic Party. But the Democrats, on the federal level, and in states like Massachusetts, New York, and California, are carrying out attacks no less savage.

Just last week, the Democratic-controlled state legislature in Illinois passed an anti-teacher bill that facilitates the firing of instructors, destroys seniority rights and all but bans strikes by Chicago teachers.

The Obama administration is spearheading the victimization of teachers and attack on public education. Last month, Education Secretary Arne Duncan declared Detroit “Ground Zero” for his reactionary agenda of school “reform” and urged the city to emulate New Orleans, where 75 percent of students are now in charter schools.

Moreover, the cuts in states throughout the country are a direct result of the federal government’s refusal to provide emergency assistance. While insisting there is no money for schools, health care and other social needs, the Obama administration has found trillions to bail out Wall Street, extend Bush-era tax cuts for the rich and finance its colonial-style wars.

The entire political system is controlled by a tiny financial and corporate elite. Having looted society to cover its gambling losses in the Crash of 2008, the ruling class is engaged in a social counterrevolution—the ruthless and systematic destruction of the fundamental gains and social rights won by the working class over a century of struggle.

Mobilize the working class to fight back!

The only force that will oppose this attack is the working class itself. The trade unions, including the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers and their state affiliates, have completely thrown in their lot with the Democratic Party. This is not because the Democrats are opposing the Republicans—they are not. It is because the

Democrats prefer to use the services of the trade union executives to impose these attacks on the working class.

The NEA and AFT do not oppose school “reform,” i.e., merit pay, the firing of teachers, the slashing of living standards and expansion of charter schools. The union apparatus only asks that they be allowed to be partners in implementing these attacks. This will allow them to continue to collect unions dues to pad the salaries of such officials as NEA President Dennis Van Roekel, who took home \$397,721 in salary and benefits last year.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the formation of new organizations of struggle, democratically controlled by rank-and-file teachers, and fighting to unite all school employees, parents and students to defend the right to public education. School, workplace and neighborhood committees must be organized throughout the state to resist school closings, budget cuts and layoffs.

If these organizations are to represent the working class and be capable of rallying the widest possible support for this fight they must be free from the control of the unions and Democratic Party, which insist that workers must pay for an economic crisis we did not create.

Reject all cuts! Tax the wealthy to fund education!

The Socialist Equality Party opposes all budget cuts. We insist that it is not a question of what must be cut, but how the essential rights of the working class can be met. We reject the lying claim there is no money to meet social needs. The banks and corporations, including GM and Ford in Michigan, are making record profits and paying out executive bonuses at pre-2008 levels.

As an initial measure, we propose a 10 percent wealth tax on the top one percent of the population. If such a tax was levied on Michigan’s ten richest people alone, who have a combined wealth of over \$20 billion, the state’s entire educational deficit (\$421 million) would be wiped out more than five times over.

A radical redistribution of wealth will provide the basis for a program of public works to ensure a high-paying job for everyone, expand social services and rebuild the country’s cities and infrastructure.

Break with the Democrats and Republicans! For equality and socialism!

Militant and popular actions by teachers, students and parents are absolutely necessary. The struggle to defend public education, however, is, above all, a political struggle.

The principle that every child, regardless of socio-economic background, has the right to high quality, free schooling is incompatible with the continuation of the capitalist system, and the rule of the richest one percent of the population.

To these millionaires and billionaires the resources expended on public education are an intolerable deduction from their potential profits. They are determined to destroy public education and transform what is left into a money-making business.

To defend and advance their rights, workers need their own political party. This means a complete break with the Democrats and Republicans, the parties of big business. It was by subordinating workers to the Democrats that the unions in Wisconsin demobilized and defeated the powerful movement of workers, handing victory to Governor Scott Walker.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the building a mass political movement of the working class to fight for a workers’ government and the socialist reorganization of the economy.

Only when working people control political power can the wealth we create be allocated in a democratic and egalitarian fashion to meet the needs of the society as a whole, not the wealthy few.

The ill-gotten gains of the financial speculators must be confiscated and the banks and major corporations placed under workers’ control. This is the only way to guarantee the social rights of the working class: for a decent and secure job, a livable income, education and culture, health care, housing and a comfortable retirement.

This year has seen the reemergence of the working class throughout the world, from Tunisia to Egypt, to Wisconsin, California and New York. There is a new mood of resistance and determination. What is needed, above all, is a new leadership and strategy.

The Socialist Equality Party, together with our sister parties throughout the world, is spearheading the fight for a renewed socialist movement of the working class. We urge all teachers, public employees, parents and students who agree with our program to join and build the Socialist Equality Party.

To get involved in the fight against budget cuts, click here to contact the Socialist Equality Party today.



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