

Unite the working class to defend public education!

Statement Socialist Equality Party (US)
29 September 2011

The following statement will be distributed to teachers and students in the United States, who returned to school this month under conditions of an all-out assault on public education. To download it in pdf format, [click here](#).

Teachers and students in public schools across the country begin the 2011-2012 school year facing an attack on education unparalleled in the history of the United States.

Starved of funds, states and localities throughout the country are shutting public schools and ending critical programs. Teachers are victimized for the crisis in education and have been forced to accept mass layoffs, cuts in benefits and wages, and increased class sizes. Since 2008, more than 200,000 teaching positions have been eliminated, with hundreds of thousands more on the chopping block.

The attack on public education is part of an overall drive by the corporate and financial elite to undermine all the rights of the working class. After handing out trillions of dollars to the banks, the governments at the state and federal levels are imposing brutal cuts to education, health care, and other critical social services.

The Obama administration is spearheading this campaign. The president, through the “Race to the Top” program has given his support to all the right-wing nostrums aimed at attacking public education, including charter schools, merit pay, and the firing of teachers at “underperforming schools.”

Obama has proposed \$30 billion in education spending as part of his “American Jobs Act,” announced in September. Even if it is passed by Congress, this spending is dwarfed by the cuts being carried out throughout the country. These measures,

moreover, are intended largely as sugarcoating for the real agenda of the corporate and financial elite—further massive cuts in health care and other social programs unveiled by Obama a week later.

Under conditions of a historic attack on public education, the official trade unions, wedded to the Democratic Party, have done nothing to organize opposition.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for mass opposition from teachers, students and the working class as a whole against the attack on public education. We demand:

**1. Reverse all school closures and privatizations!
End the victimization of teachers!**

The political establishment justifies school shutdowns by pointing to declining enrollment, but this is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Billions must be expended to ensure quality public education for all youth. Schools must be rebuilt and equipped with new supplies, textbooks, and technology. The SEP opposes the destruction of public education in favor of charter schools and voucher programs.

The attempt to scapegoat teachers for the crisis in education is aimed at pitting workers against each other and shielding those who are truly responsible. Teachers are engaged in a heroic effort to educate youth, confronting the impact of social decay and budget cutting. Often teachers are forced to pay out of pocket to give their students the most basic necessities. Teacher pay and benefits should be increased and all benefits restored. Thousands more teachers must be hired to reduce class sizes and workloads.

2. For an emergency public works program to rebuild schools and neighborhoods, and to hire teachers!

It is impossible for students to get a decent education when they are homeless or hungry. Cities and towns across the country are falling into decay. According to recent census figures, there are more people living in poverty than at any point since the 1950s. In some cities, child poverty exceeds 50 percent. Americans are suffering through the worst jobs crisis since the Great Depression.

The fight to defend education must be linked to a struggle to defend jobs and living standards of all working people. A massive public works program is required to guarantee good-paying jobs for all.

3. Increase taxes on the rich! For the nationalization of the banks and major corporations!

Teachers, students and workers must reject the claim that there is no money for education. The bonuses handed out to the top Wall Street firms last year could pay for the budget deficits of all 50 states in the US! Corporations are sitting on a record cash hoard, refusing to employ these resources for productive purposes.

There are resources; it is a question of who controls these resources and how they are distributed. To break the economic and political grip of the financial elite over society, the banks and major corporations must be nationalized and placed under the democratic control of working people. The enormous sums accumulated by a tiny layer must be reclaimed for the populace to meet pressing social needs.

4. Break with the Democrats and Republicans! For independent rank-and-file committees!

Many hoped the election of Obama would bring an end to Bush's policies of war, attacks on democratic rights, and handouts to the wealthy. The past two years have demonstrated that it is impossible to enact serious change through the two-party system.

The trade unions have responded to the attack on public education led by Obama by deepening their ties to the Democratic Party. The National Education Association, one of the principal teachers unions, was among the first to endorse Obama's reelection in 2012.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the formation of independent committees to unify all sections of the

working class—including teachers, school staff, city workers, auto workers, parents and student youth—in the fight to defend public education. These organizations must be completely free from the Democratic and Republican Parties and the trade union apparatus.

A socialist program for the working class

While education in the US has always been plagued by inequality, the expansion of American democracy was accompanied by increasing access to education. These earlier reforms are now being reversed. It is precisely the egalitarian aspect of public education that makes it the target of the right-wing politicians and the corporate interests they represent.

The satisfaction of the basic needs of the population, including education, immediately confronts the fact that every aspect of economic and political life is subordinated to the money-mad drive for personal wealth of a small minority, at the expense of the vast majority.

Public education is based on the fundamentally egalitarian principle that *everyone* should have access to quality education. As such, it is incompatible with an economic system whose fundamental premise is *inequality*.

The defense of education is therefore bound up with the socialist transformation of economic life. The forces of production must be publicly owned and democratically controlled, in the interest of social need, not private profit.

If the working class is to secure its interests, it must mobilize independently on the basis of its own program. We appeal to teachers across the country and around the world take up the fight of the Socialist Equality Party and join our movement. The SEP urges all those who are looking for a way to fight to contact or join the SEP, click here.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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