

# Workers should defend teacher tenure!

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Three million teachers and over 49.8 million students from prekindergarten through grade 12 will return to public schools across the country for the 2012-2013 school year. They do so under conditions where the destruction of public education is a top bipartisan priority spearheaded by the Obama administration.

State after state has fallen in line with the reactionary declaration of war against teachers, students and their families known as “Race to the Top.” One of its components is an attack on teacher tenure.

Recently, almost half of New York’s eligible teachers were denied tenure in the latest attempt to force the current economic crisis onto the backs of the working class. In this instance, it is under the guise of teacher “accountability.”

The truth is that younger teachers, those without tenure, cost less in strictly monetary terms than more experienced teachers. In addition, the high turnover and burn-out rate of the young teachers, from working long hours in an attempt to appease the administrators, contributes to the self-fulfilling prophecy of the Obama administration that the problems in public education are due to “bad teachers.”

In 2007, prior to the bank bailout of 2008, 97 percent of eligible teachers who worked at least three years earned tenure. By 2010, when Mayor Bloomberg announced that he planned on “ending tenure as we know it,” 89 percent of New York City teachers were receiving tenure at the end of their three-year probations.

Last year only 58 percent of teachers gained tenure after three years, and 39 percent had their probations extended for another year. This year only 55 percent of the eligible teachers in New York who worked at least three years earned tenure from the city’s Education Department.

States such as Arizona passed laws as long ago as 2009 that prohibit tenure and seniority rights from

being considered when teachers are laid off and recalled.

The dismantling of education has been impossible without the complete collaboration of the teachers unions. The AFT and the NEA are leading the campaign to reelect Obama under the false premise that the reelection of a Democrat will somehow protect public education against the far right. Last year the NEA added an involuntary \$10 to the dues payments of each of its 3.2 million members to fund the Obama election campaign. That’s a cool easy \$32 million handed over to Obama’s campaign.

The role of the unions has been to aid the Democrats and Republicans in implementing the attacks on seniority, while ensuring that their own finances are protected.

It is noteworthy that the calls for “accountability” are limited to public school teachers. A 2009 study from Stanford University’s Center for Research on Education Outcomes found that 37 percent of charter schools performed worse on student test measures than their traditional counterparts. These “failing” schools have not been closed down. They are much too profitable.

Tenure is a basic achievement won in struggles by the working class so that teachers could not be fired at the whim of a principal or administrator.

What has been the consequence of its undermining? Experienced teachers—who know that smaller classes, adequate supplies, and adequate preparation time all contribute to a better education for children—are driven out. Experienced teachers are more equipped to deal with the conditions of untold misery caused by social conditions of poverty and destitution.

Today there are millions of children in the United States living under this stress and alienation, which lead to both physical and cognitive hindrances to learning.

I am among the three million teachers who return to work this year mindful of the most recent research

concerning the effects of poverty on learning, and proper social and emotional development. We also see the need to marshal the world's scientific and pedagogical resources for the development of healthy, happy human beings.

This means a fight against the future that capitalism has in store for all working people. According to a report issued recently by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), 28.3 percent of all workers are receiving poverty-level wages today, and that figure is projected to be virtually unchanged, at 28 percent, in the year 2020. Based on employer surveys of where jobs will be created in the next eight years, the EPI found that 25 percent would not require *even a high school education*, although barely 8 percent of the current work force falls into that category.

The ridiculous Orwellian doublespeak about making education better by getting rid of teachers and closing schools is an insult to the intelligence. What about holding accountable those really responsible for the crisis of education, and of the US and world economy as a whole?

After all, in the city of Wall Street, most of its 75,000 public school teachers must be aware of the irony that an enormous transfer of wealth took place in 2008, also spearheaded by the Obama administration, from the public treasury to provide TARP funds for speculators that ruthlessly gambled on the housing market. How, do tell, is their "accountability" and pay for "performance" coming along?

These institutions that were "too big to fail" were handed trillions, and are apparently also "too big to be held accountable" as is evidenced by the recent decision to not prosecute the open illegality of Goldman Sachs.

What is required is the abolition of the system of parasitism and looting that has come to pass for official politics in America and throughout the world.

The claim that money is not the problem is a cruel hoax. It is not poor teachers, negligent parents or students who don't want to learn that created the problems in public education. These are the result of the institutions being starved for resources, and the vast majority of the population being placed on a starvation diet of poverty, impossible living conditions, lack of medical care, and basic necessities like heat in the winter. This can only be resolved through a thorough

redistribution of the wealth of society.

My running mate Jerry White and I are running in the election because the right to free, quality education requires a political struggle by the working class against the capitalist system and its two big business parties. Ensuring the resources that are needed to defend public education, expand it and provide the best education that money can buy for every child requires a break with the Democratic Party and the building of a mass political party of the working class.



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