

California governor pledges continued austerity

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19 January 2013

California Governor Jerry Brown announced last week that the state will have a budget surplus for the first time in over ten years. The governor cited this fact as proof of the need for continued austerity and budgets that allow the state to “live within its means.”

The governor’s latest budget forecast included a surplus of \$167 million at the end of the current fiscal year, followed by a \$1 billion surplus at the close of fiscal year 2013. The figures are arrived at through a combination of rosy economic forecasts for the state and for the country, and the assurance that past budget cutting activity will remain firmly in place.

“What must be avoided at all costs is the boom and bust, borrow and spend, of the last decade,” Brown declared.

On NPR’s Marketplace radio program Wednesday, the Democratic governor laid out precisely what had been done so far, with the collaboration of the Democratic Party-controlled legislature. “We reduced the pensions of the elderly, we cut back on the money that we provide to families that are on our social welfare, the CalWORKS program. We cut 25 percent from the university. We eliminated the state redevelopment program for economic development. We eliminated the subsidy for open space. And on and on—it was brutal.”

Anticipating the further growth of popular opposition to these measures, the governor attempted to turn reality on its head in his proposed budget summary. “Fiscal discipline is not the enemy of democratic governance, but rather its fundamental predicate.”

“Fiscal discipline” is here a code word for the insistence that the working class be forced to pay for the economic crisis, even as the corporate and financial elite responsible for the crisis pull in record pay and profits.

The governor’s budgets involved massive unpopular cuts, carried out without the input and behind the backs of the population. These budgets cut more than \$20 billion from public education, prison health care, welfare, pensions, mental health services, low income health care and other programs.

The actions of Brown and the Democratic-led state legislature have been supported by the trade unions, even as more than 30,000 state worker jobs have been slashed.

The latest budget, while not yet as drastic as its predecessors, still includes further cuts to social services. A small restoration of funding for public education only addresses a fraction of the funding lost since the onset of the economic crisis.

The current budget, although it contains fewer new cuts than its predecessors, effectively institutionalizes those previous cuts. Among them is the maintenance of a reduction of CalWorks welfare benefits from 48 to 24 weeks. The average length of unemployment in the state now stands at 37 weeks.

The \$240 million that was cut from state-supported child care will not be restored, along with a \$90 million cut to In Home Support Services, \$88 million in cuts to hospitals and nursing homes, and \$402 million in lost wages to state workers.

There is every indication, however, that new cuts will be introduced into the latest budget as the governor’s office admits that its economic forecasts are overly optimistic when compared with other forecasts.

Similarly, manufactured fiscal crises in Washington such as the upcoming debt ceiling debate have previously had a ripple effect on the state’s economy, leading to a reduction in revenues and the consequent demand to slash social programs even further.

The current proposed budget is nothing more than a

prelude to further massive attacks against the working class.



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