No to all school closures! For action committees to defend public education!

The Socialist Equality Party
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The Socialist Equality Party calls on all workers, teachers, students, youth and residents of Philadelphia to form action committees to organize the defense of public education.

The unrelenting attack on our schools and all the rights of the working class has gone on far too long! The argument is always the same: there is simply "no money" for the most basic social needs, even as the stock market soars and the wealth of the corporate and financial elite reaches new and unimaginable heights.

In Philadelphia, Democratic Mayor Michael Nutter, Superintendent William Hite and the school board intend to close 37 schools as part of a "consolidation" plan. The claim of "underutilization" is being used to cloak a strategy of shutting down public schools and diverting public resources behind for-profit charters, where teachers have no rights and working class students are denied a decent education.

The city already has up to 40 percent of its student body enrolled in charter schools, many of which perform at a lower level than some schools slated for closure. The transformation of the entire district into a private charter operation is being discussed in political circles.

What is taking place in Philadelphia is happening throughout the country. New Orleans, Chicago, Washington DC, Detroit, New York and innumerable other cities face school closings and the expansion of charter schools. Teachers are victimized through test-based evaluation systems, and education workers—such as the striking bus drivers in New York City—face a relentless attack on jobs, wages and benefits.

At the head of the assault on public education stands the Obama administration. Obama's "Race to the Top" initiative forces school districts to accept the expansion of charter schools or lose all federal funding.

It is time to take a stand and fight back! To defend its interests, the working class needs organization. As a first step, committees of action should be formed to discuss and plan opposition to the demands of the corporations and wealthy. The SEP proposes the following as the necessary basis for these committees:

1. Reverse all school closures and privatizations! Public education is a social right!

The school board has organized public meetings throughout the city to give the pretext of offering the public a voice. In fact, these meetings are premised on the acceptance of school closings, with students, parents and community members given an opportunity to make a case for why their school—rather than another—should remain open. The city wants to pit neighborhoods against each other in a race to the bottom.

The entire framework must be rejected. Privatizations must be reversed. Billions must be expended to ensure quality public education for all youth. Schools must be rebuilt and equipped with new supplies, textbooks, and technology. New teachers must be hired, with good pay, benefits and job security.

Defending our schools means rejecting the calls for a "moratorium" on school closings by the city council and other organizations. Such calls implicitly accept the bogus framework of scarcity put forth by the wealthy and their political representatives.

Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell summed up the perspective of this proposal when she said, "We want the opportunity to have inclusion in the discussion about what schools close…" No! It is not a question of what schools will be closed, but how to oppose all closings.

Where will the money come from, the political establishment asks? The money required to fully fund

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public education can be readily acquired through a sharp increase in taxes on the wealthy and the appropriation of the vast wealth accumulated by the corporate and financial elite through fraud and speculation.

2. Complete independence from the Democrats, Republicans and the trade unions

The defense of public education can be carried forward only thorough an uncompromising break with the Democratic Party and all those organizations which encourage the belief that either of the two big business parties can be pressured to represent the interests of the working class. Indeed, Democrats preside over cities that are carrying out the most aggressive attack on public education.

As for Obama, his right-wing policies on public education are repeated on every front. In his first term, Obama continued all the basic policies of the Bush administration. Now, with the second inauguration past, the Democrats and Republicans in Washington are proceeding to a discussion on slashing trillions of dollars from Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security and other programs.

The trade unions have responded to the attack on public education led by Obama by deepening their ties to the Democratic Party. In particular, the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, the principal teachers unions, were among the first to endorse Obama's reelection in 2012. The teachers' union in Philadelphia has already made clear its willingness to work with the district in shutting down schools, as its sister organizations have done in other cities.

3. Unite the working class in a fight back!

Among the first tasks of committees to defend public education must be to issue a letter to workers throughout Philadelphia calling for a common struggle.

The strength of the working class lies in its unity, which transcends race, gender, ethnicity and nationality. Whether it is manufacturing workers facing a 50 percent wage cut, New York bus drivers defending their right to job security, or city and state workers opposing furloughs and job cuts—the basic issues facing workers are the same.

All around the world, the corporations and banks are demanding that workers pay for an economic crisis that they did not create. A determined struggle in Philadelphia will win the support of workers everywhere, and will become the basis for a counteroffensive to defend and advance every social right of the working class, including public education.

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.

The SEP calls on all those who want to take up a fight through the formation of independent action committees to contact us today. Write to education@socialequality.com or call (313) 409-8083.

A new leadership and political party of the working class must built. We urge workers and young people to read the *World Socialist Web Site*, study the program of the Socialist Equality Party, and take up the fight for socialism. For more information, visit www.socialequality.com.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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