

California governor's State of the State speech celebrates austerity

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California Governor Jerry Brown gave the third State of the State speech of his current term last Thursday. In contrast to previous such speeches, the latest was given under conditions where the state's immediate financial woes appear to be in abeyance. However, the Democratic governor used the occasion to once again present himself as a reliable proponent of austerity.

Indeed, Brown's speech won unanimous praise from Democrats and Republicans alike. On his repeated calls for "fiscal restraint," Republican assembly leader Connie Conway remarked that "These are very Republican themes."

Bill Whalen, a researcher at the Hoover Institute, said of Brown, "He hardly has been a liberal governor of excess. It's hard to get mad at him."

While the two parties and their adjuncts in the media and the trade unions and pseudo-left organizations spent countless hours manufacturing non-existent political differences, the explicitly reactionary character of this speech along with its repeated invocations of right-wing nostrums simply could not be ignored.

Brown, a former Jesuit seminarian, regaled his audience with tales from the Book of Genesis and asked it to heed the wisdom of the prophets when the state experiences "lean" years. Austerity in the hands of this governor is considered a solemn, and perhaps even a religious duty. "Fiscal discipline is not the enemy of our good intentions but the basis for realizing them. It is cruel to lead people on by expanding good programs, only to cut them back when the funding disappears," he declared.

On the question of education, which is a key component of the state's budget, Brown perversely contrasted the state's code with the Old Testament to the detriment of the former. Said Brown, "Lay the Ten Commandments next to the California Education code

and you will see how far we have diverged in approach and in content from that which forms the basis of our legal system."

The governor placed a great deal of emphasis on giving more local control to school districts and thus laying the groundwork for the further privatization of public schools. The principle of "subsidiarity" was thereby introduced as a means to achieve funding reductions and lay the groundwork for an acceleration in teacher and staff layoffs.

"Subsidiarity is the idea that a central authority should only perform those tasks which cannot be performed at a more immediate or local level," Brown stated. "In other words, higher or more remote levels of government, like the state, should render assistance to local school districts, but always respect their primary jurisdiction and the dignity and freedom of teachers and students."

The governor celebrated the fact that the state was the first in the nation to pass laws allowing for the smooth implementation of the federal Affordable Care Act which begins 2014. The state will at that time implement a program called Covered California which, according to its executive summary, will assist consumers, "to meet the personal responsibility requirements imposed under the federal act."

In other words, millions of Californians faced with joblessness and constant financial peril will have to pay through the nose for health care coverage which in any rationally organized society would be an essential social right.

The portion of the speech on jobs was notable for not even mentioning the state's unemployment crisis. The state's unemployment rate remained unchanged as of last December and the state itself has the third highest unemployment rate in the nation after Nevada and

Rhode Island.

The governor gave the answer to mass unemployment in the form of his GoBiz program which provides huge tax incentives to businesses that relocate to California.

Continuing the deregulatory themes of his address, the governor sought reductions in the enforcement capabilities of the California Environmental Quality Act which requires environmental impact analysis be performed prior to any new construction.

In the area of higher education, the governor claimed that while no further tuition increases were necessary as a result of the passage of Proposition 30 which is projected to add an additional \$6 billion in projected state revenue. However, the governor hopes to make a number for core curriculum at universities available only online.

At a recent meeting for the University of California Board of Regents, the governor pressed the board to seek additional ways to “live within its means” and seeks to impose tuition penalties for those students who take more than four years to complete their degree.

Brown began and ended his speech by claiming that “California is back” as a result of a balanced budget which is itself the result of unprecedented austerity and which will lead to further budget imbalances.

As a direct result of the policies of this Democratic governor, who, moreover, has enjoyed the unwavering support of the trade unions, public education has been steadily eroded, public university tuition has skyrocketed, mental health programs have been slashed, assistance for the unemployed has been cut in half, prison conditions have steadily deteriorated, medical care for the poor and infirm has been slashed to the bone, and literally hundreds of thousands of state and municipal employees have either lost their jobs or seen their pay and benefits sharply deteriorate.

Workers and youth must be warned. These policies are no accident, and will not stop as a result of an ostensibly balanced budget. From the standpoint of the ruling elite, the dismantling of the social position of the working class has only just begun, in spite of the already massive bloodletting. The working class must organize in opposition to further attacks.

This requires first and foremost a complete and irrevocable break with Brown and the Democrats and all the institutions which support them.



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