

Socialism and the defense of public education in Chicago

The Socialist Equality Party
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The Socialist Equality Party calls for the mass mobilization of workers throughout Chicago to oppose plans to close down over 100 more public schools, ripping up communities and devastating entire neighborhoods.

Against the demands of the Emanuel administration and the entire political establishment, workers of Chicago must demand: no school closures! Instead of shutting down public schools, enormous resources must be mobilized to reopen closed schools, hire more teachers and modernize infrastructure. The claim that there is no money for education, as corporations pull in record profits and the stock market soars, is a lie!

What is happening in Chicago is part of a national strategy of the ruling class to dismantle the very institution of public schools. Cities like Detroit, New York, New Orleans, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C. face school closings and the expansion of charter schools. Teachers have been laid off by the thousands, and those still teaching are victimized through test-based evaluation. Education workers—like the striking bus drivers in New York City—as well as social workers, nurses, and support staff, face constant attacks on their jobs, wages and benefits.

As in other cities, the shutdown of schools in Chicago is justified on the grounds of “underutilization.” This is a sham. Classes are overcrowded and teachers overworked. Rather, schools are being shut to make the property and infrastructure available to private interests and charter companies.

The series of so-called community engagement meetings held on the planned closures and consolidations are a fraud. The meetings are supposed to give the process of school closures a democratic appearance, when in fact all the decisions have already been made.

Many of the meetings have been degrading spectacles. Parents, teachers and students were encouraged to wait for hours in order to have an opportunity to plead before public relations managers for the preservation of their school—and, by implication, the closure of another school. The entire framework is not a subject for consideration.

A fight back is required! But such a struggle must be based on a clear understanding of who are our friends and who are our enemies.

It is first of all necessary to understand that the fight to defend public education requires a political struggle against the Democrats and Republicans. Both big business parties are absolutely united in their commitment to dismantling public education.

The Bush administration initiated the “No Child Left Behind” program, which used tests to punitively close down schools. This was succeeded by Obama’s “Race to the Top”, which grants money to states that promote school privatization and mass firings of teachers and staff.

Emanuel is merely carrying through in Chicago the national policy of the Obama administration. Chicago is Obama’s home city, and Emanuel is his former chief of staff and top fundraiser. Emanuel is working very closely with the entire administration, including the current education secretary and former Chicago public schools CEO Arne Duncan.

Second, it is necessary to work through the experiences of the Chicago teachers strike and the role of the Chicago Teachers Union. The CTU does not represent the interests of teachers, who have shown great courage and determination in the fight to defend public education. Rather, the CTU speaks for a layer of privileged union executives dedicated above all to their political alliance with the Democratic Party and support

for the capitalist system.

While the CTU is now trying to present a “left” face, the aggressive program of closures and consolidations is in no small part the CTU’s responsibility.

This past fall, 26,000 teachers went on strike to defend public education. They won immense support from the entire working class. The response of the CTU was to try to shut the strike down as quickly as possible and prevent it from developing into a broader struggle of the working class against school closings and the attack on social services. After just over a week, the strike was ended entirely on Emanuel’s terms.

The Socialist Equality Party intervened in the strike, calling for the formation of new committees of struggle to unite teachers with all sections of the working class against Emanuel and the entire political establishment. The SEP warned that by ending the strike, the CTU was preparing the way for school closures and attacks on other city workers—the next items on Emanuel’s agenda. This is precisely what has happened.

It was widely known during the strike that school closures were being demanded by city officials. The CTU accepted this, seeking only to have a seat at the table. Shortly after the defeat, CTU President Karen Lewis told the *Chicago Tribune*, “We understand the whole movement of closing schools and doing it aggressively. We either do this together in some reasonable way or we will always be fighting, and I think the key is that the people that are making these decisions want to make them unilaterally.”

They have the same position today. In a video released this week, Lewis promised that the CTU would mobilize all of its forces to aid in the process of schools receiving students from the recently closed schools. She admonished teachers, many of whom will be laid off, to support the union as it helps to implement the closures.

The SEP calls on teachers, workers and community members to form action committees, independent of the unions, to unite the working class against the dictates of Emanuel and the school board.

The defense of public education is above all a political struggle—one that must be directed against the entire economic system. Public education is based on the fundamentally egalitarian principle that everyone should have access to quality education. This is incompatible with the continued existence of

capitalism, whose most essential feature is inequality, and which is unconditionally defended by both Democrats and Republicans.

The national policy of public education “reform” is one part of a wholesale attack on the basic social rights of the working class, which are being taken apart in order to pay for the bailout of the banks and corporations in the wake of the 2007-2008 financial crisis.

A new leadership and political party of the working class must be built. We urge all 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.



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