

Oppose the privatisation of education

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (Britain)
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Prime Minister David Cameron, addressing a global finance forum in Switzerland in January, declared bluntly that as part of the largest austerity drive since the 1930s the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government was “busting open the monopoly” of state education.

News of the latest stage in this process came last month. A document leaked to the *Independent* revealed government plans to sell academy schools to the private sector. The document states that budget cuts must be made, declaring, “It is difficult to see how we could manage expansion of the academies and free schools programme much beyond 5,000 without increasing central resource.”

It outlined two possible scenarios, each of which would result in a devastating assault on education provision. The first option would see academies grouped together and managed by a trust, which would be allocated a dwindling budget from government. In the National Health Service, a similar model has been used to pave the way for the hiving off of health care to the private sector, with disastrous consequences for care and treatment and the pay and conditions of health workers. The government is currently imposing £20 billion of budget cuts in health care, equivalent to nearly 20 percent of the overall budget.

The second option would be aimed at “fundamentally shifting the basis of our relationship with academies through reclassifying academies to the private sector, possibly coupled with a change in the legal framework such as adopting a licensing or FE [Further Education]-like statutory corporation approach.”

The ruling elite is aiming at nothing less than the elimination of public education. Education provision is to be determined by private enterprise, which will have a free hand to set the curriculum, hire teachers and other staff on low pay and impose student selection. It will lead to a deepening of the already shocking levels

of inequality in Britain’s schools.

Although academies receive state funding, local authorities have no control over them. This has enabled some academies to introduce the teaching of Creationism.

There are currently 2,309 academies, including 200 set up under the previous Labour government. The government target is to reach 5,000 by the next election.

Free Schools have been set up by groups of parents, teachers, charities and voluntary groups. They are funded in a similar way to academies and based on the charter school system in the US and trust schools in Sweden.

The expansion of academies, free schools and other forms of private sector involvement in education is a goal shared by the entire political establishment.

Stephen Twigg, Labour’s education spokesman, declared last November, “Today, hardly anyone thinks that local authorities should directly run schools, though there is still an important role for local government in education.”

Privatisation is being implemented across the country. In Scotland, where education is a devolved power, a recent report urged the Scottish National Party administration in Edinburgh to grant schools more “autonomy.” The Commission on School Reform stated that head teachers should be seen as “chief executives”, free to make decisions on the running of schools. Local authorities were “too involved in the day-to-day management of schools.”

In Wales, the regional administration led by Labour has removed the right of two councils to oversee education, and it is considering the appointment of commissioners or involving private sector firms. A review of education provision is underway.

The unpopularity of privatisation is shown by the methods used to impose it. The government is bribing

head teachers with up to £65,000 to convert their schools to academy status. The *Independent* reported on “brokers” whose task it was to use public money for the “buying off” of privatisation critics.

The trade unions have played a critical role in ensuring that privatisation goes ahead. The National Union of Teachers (NUT) has refused to call strike action to protest against the conversion of schools into academies and the setting up of free schools, even as the process is used as a mechanism to slash pay and undermine working conditions. After a national strike at the end of 2011 which saw the participation of workers across the public sector, the education unions shut down any further action against the government’s attack on pensions. Nothing has been opposed since the betrayal of the pensions’ dispute.

A new perspective is required to oppose the destruction of public education. It must begin with a rejection of all the established political parties and the trade unions, which are instruments for controlling workers and young people and imposing the demands of the ruling elite.

The alternative advanced by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality is the formation of action committees made up of teachers, students, parents and working people to take the struggle out of the hands of the unions. These committees must become the organising centre of a mass campaign to reject any attempt to privatise public education. They must insist that education is a social right to which all should be entitled.

Protest actions attempting to block the privatisation of individual schools have shown the determination of students and teachers alike to resist the government’s plans. But these initiatives cannot remain isolated if they are to be successful. The ruling elite as a whole are fully committed to the privatisation of education as part of a broader assault on all that remains of public services and the welfare state. The crisis of capitalism across the globe, which has deepened sharply since 2008, has been used by the ruling class to launch a social counterrevolution against the working class not only in Britain, but across Europe and internationally.

Opposing this raises the need for a revolutionary struggle against the capitalist system. Young people, teachers and workers must turn to the building of a new socialist and internationalist leadership to advance the

independent interests of the working class. This is the perspective advanced by the IYSSE and the Socialist Equality Party for the formation of a workers’ government to implement planned production to meet essential social needs such as free, quality education provision. The IYSSE urges young people, teachers, and workers who are seeking to fight the privatisation of education to contact us today. *To join the IYSSE, click here* .



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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