

No to all school closures! Unite the working class to defend public education!

The Socialist Equality Party
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This statement is being distributed at a demonstration of Chicago teachers today. To download a pdf version of this statement for distribution, click here.

Teachers, students and workers of Chicago: Now is the time for action! The announcement of plans to shut down 61 elementary and middle schools must be met with a mobilization of the entire working class against the attack on public education.

We all know what the impact of the latest plans of the Emanuel administration will be. Some 13 percent of students will be affected, forced to travel long distances to attend school or drop out altogether. Struggling neighborhoods will receive another, possibly fatal, blow. About 1,000 teachers, four percent of all teachers in the city, will lose their jobs.

The pretense of city officials—that they are seeking to “improve” education—is a fraud. In fact, the entire institution of public education is being dismantled. What remains is being handed over to private companies operating charter schools.

The attack on public education has the support of the entire political establishment, Democrat and Republican. Emanuel is carrying out in Chicago the Obama administration’s national policy of victimizing teachers, expanding testing and promoting charter schools. Propelled by Obama’s Race to the Top program, mass school closures have been announced in Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., New York and Detroit—all overseen by Democrats.

In this context, the demonstration called today is based on a fundamental fraud. The Chicago Teachers Union, which has organized the rally, is seeking to pull the wool over the eyes of teachers and the entire working class. The CTU attempts to present itself as an opponent of the closure of schools, while it in fact fully supports this attack and is dedicated to its political

alliance with the Democratic Party.

As part of the demonstration, CTU officials are planning “civil disobedience” stunts. The aim is to cover over their own political complicity with a phony show of defiance. In boasting about bringing out city aldermen, CTU solidifies its alliance with the Democratic Party that is carrying out the attack.

The CTU effectively gave a green light to the school closures by shutting down last year’s strike of 26,000 teachers. The contract eventually pushed through by the CTU contained everything that Emanuel demanded, including several measures making it easier to victimize and fire teachers.

The present wave of school closures is the logical outcome of the betrayal of the teachers strike.

In a recent interview CTU president Karen Lewis repeated earlier assurances that she does not oppose all school closings, calling this position “not a real argument.” During the Chicago Teachers Strike in September, Lewis declared that the CTU “understands that whole movement of closing schools and doing it aggressively. We either do this together in some reasonable way or we will always be fighting.”

The union, which includes in its leadership a top member of the pseudo-left International Socialist Organization, wants Emanuel to accept their assistance in ensuring that school closures occur “reasonably.” They are also eager to secure a deal to extract union dues from low-paid teachers at newly opened charter schools—recently reaching an agreement with UNO charter schools for precisely this purpose. **A new way forward is required!** The Chicago teachers’ strike was a major experience for the working class. It won the support of workers in Chicago and across the country who correctly saw the attack on teachers as part of a broader attack on every basic social and democratic

right.

In its intervention in this struggle, the *World Socialist Web Site* insisted that the defense of public education required a break with the CTU and a political struggle against the two-party capitalist system. The CTU's moves to rapidly shut down the strike, we explained, would be seized on by Emanuel to accelerate the closure of public schools throughout the city. This has now come to pass.

A new way forward is required. This must begin with the insistence that there be no school closures, and that enormous resources be made available to fund and vastly expand public education. The claim that there is no money for this is a contemptible lie. Such arguments are made by representatives of a ruling class that has, in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis that it created, amassed even more unimaginable sums of wealth.

Public education is a basic social right, alongside the right to a job at a decent wage and the right to health care, housing, and a secure retirement. It is these rights that must determine how society is organized and resources are distributed—not the “right” of the investor to speculate and the “right” of the executive to exploit.

The rights of the working class can be secured only through struggle. Nothing was ever won without a fight. To organize such a struggle, new democratic action committees must be formed, independent of the unions and the Democratic Party. The task of these committees will be to organize and plan opposition, including preparations for a general strike.

The entire working class must be united in a powerful movement against the dictates of the corporations and the banks. As part of its effort to divide workers and keep them tied to the Democratic Party, the CTU and organizations around it claim that the school closings are a “racist” attack. In fact, all workers—black and white, male and female, young and old, immigrant and native born—face the same conditions. Class, not race, is the fundamental dividing line. The defense of public education is fundamentally a political struggle, pitting the working class against the institutions of the capitalist state, in Chicago, throughout the country and internationally. The working class needs its own political party, dedicated to taking power and carrying through a fundamental reorganization of economic life.

Capitalism has failed the working class. The vast wealth created by the labor of generations of workers

must be taken out of the hands of the privileged few and placed at the disposal of the people as a whole.

Society must be placed on entirely new foundations, in which production is organized on the basis of social need, not private profit. The major banks and corporations, in the United States and internationally, must be transformed into public utilities controlled democratically by the working class. Such a form of social organization has a name: socialism.

The Socialist Equality Party is organizing opposition throughout Chicago and across the country. Contact us today to become involved.



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