

California State Assembly passes bill to enable teacher firings

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On May 29, the California State Assembly passed a bill that speeds up and “streamlines” the process for firing teachers. Assembly Bill (AB) 375 attacks accused teachers’ right to due process. If passed in the senate it will aid the state’s witch-hunt of teachers who oppose the gutting of education.

Current law allows teachers who have received dismissal notices to protest through a hearing process. This is presided over by an administrative judge who creates a commission composed of him or herself and two teachers: one chosen by the accused, the other by the district. There is a discovery process, in which evidence is collected and judged suitable. Teachers can also appeal to the California Superior Court.

AB 375 severely limits the discovery process and forces appeals to stay in the administrative court. Cases would no longer proceed as necessary; they would have to finish within seven months of being served. Instead of having sections of the year for firing, teachers could be accused, and temporarily suspended, at any time. During the commission process, the district teacher who sits on the panel would be required to have three, instead of five, years of experience in a subject common to the accused. (See “California union supports Democratic-sponsored attack on teachers”)

The authors of the bill claim that it will “ensure the safety of children by maintaining the provisions that allow those accused of child and sex abuse to be removed from the classroom immediately and to be charged at any time.”

However, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) data suggests that the dismissal process is not primarily aimed at abusive teachers. In the years leading up to the 2008 crash, the LAUSD successfully fired between 3 and 6 teachers each year. In the 2011-2012 year that number had increased to a record

99 teachers fired.

When seen in the context of massive budget cuts, it is clear that the dismissal proceedings have been used as a mechanism to get rid of older, more expensive, teachers and those resistant to the dramatic changes underway in teaching.

In the past few years California’s K-12 annual budget has been cut by around \$18 billion. Thousands of schoolteachers have been laid off in California this year, and tens of thousands last year. Proposition 30, which took money from the working class to stage a temporary halt to the liquidation of education, at best only postponed further cuts and privatizations. As Democratic Governor Jerry Brown made clear, future cuts to education are possible, for “great risks and uncertainties lie ahead.”

In step with its policy of attacks on public education, the Obama administration has spearheaded the Common Core initiative which standardizes the entire K-12 education system. Common Core removes individuality, creativity, and critical thought from the classroom by promoting an identical state-by-state curriculum strictly focused on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math). For instance, Common Core argues that kindergarteners read too much fiction; accordingly, it requires that 50 percent of kindergarten literature be “informational non-fiction.”

A New York state schoolteacher’s resignation letter describes the change: “STEM rules the day and ‘data driven’ education seeks only conformity, standardization, testing and a zombie-like adherence to the shallow and generic Common Core, along with a lockstep of oversimplified so-called Essential Learnings. Creativity, academic freedom, teacher autonomy, experimentation and innovation are being stifled...” (See “What is the Common Core Initiative?

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It is in this context that AB 375 is passed: not to rid California of abusive teachers, but to give school districts the power to easily discipline teachers who do not conform to the new normal.

Under current California law, teachers can be fired for “unsatisfactory performance,” “dishonesty,” or “unprofessional conduct.” Such vague bases of dismissal have and will increasingly be used to rid the system of those who oppose or hesitate implementing standardizing, teacher-hostile programs, such as Common Core. However, in order to fire more teachers on this basis, it must be cheap and easy to do so.

Indeed, the bill’s authors “wanted to fix an expensive, redundant appeal process so that it is faster and less costly for all cases, including those for immoral conduct, unprofessional conduct, and unsatisfactory performance.” Gross instances of abuse are therefore being used as mastheads for changes that will help transform teaching into little more than a robotic process for sorting and producing future workers.

Three years ago this witch-hunt took on a new level when the Los Angeles Times published LAUSD data on the “effectiveness”—essentially their students’ test scores—of some 6,000 California teachers. A teacher at one of the poorest schools in Los Angeles killed himself a few days after the article was published; he had been deemed a “less effective teacher.”

The unions are playing the most cynical role. While posturing as defenders of education, they are leading supporters of the Obama administration, which is spearheading Common Core, charter schools, and education cuts. The unions fundamentally agree with the need to shut down schools and reduce the education workforce. They seek only to play a role in the cuts, giving a veneer of democratic process while securing their finances. The California Teachers Association (CTA) endorses Common Core; according to their web site, their only concern is making sure schools “have the support and resources they need in order for the new standards to be implemented effectively.”

The crisis of education, like the crisis of capitalism from which it originates, is global in scope. In Denmark, 70,000 teachers were locked out earlier this year. In April, Mexican teachers went on strike to protest sweeping anti-democratic reforms to the entire

education system. Over the past few years, millions of Chileans, encompassing a huge percentage of the population, protested against the education system. A few days ago, UK universities called to cut funding for poor students.



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