

# The political issues facing California teachers

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This year's Better Together: California Teachers Summit, a statewide professional development day for teachers on July 29, takes place amidst a nationwide assault, spearheaded by the Obama administration and both big business parties, to dismantle public education and expand for-profit charter schools.

The 15,000 teachers expected to attend this summit will be gathering at 38 campus locations up and down the state to network and share their experiences in implementing the new California State Standards (CSS) and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS).

Every teacher knows their living standards, work conditions and the very right to high-quality public education are under attack. Not only are class sizes larger and budgets smaller but a steadily increasing number of students are entering school who are suffering from the devastating effects of the economic and social crisis. Despite Obama's claims that things are "pretty darn good," child poverty in California is up nearly 20 percent since 2007, even before the global financial crisis.

The state has the dubious distinction of having more children in poverty than any other in the nation. It also has the largest class sizes in the country, according to a June 2016 study by the National Education Policy Center.

While Obama and Bush before him handed over trillions to bailout out the Wall Street banks and to fund endless wars, both parties have starved the states, municipalities and school districts of resources forcing them to go deeper and deeper into debt to the very same financial criminals who wrecked the economy. The White House than dangled federal Race To The Top money to cash-starved school districts, rewarding only those who closed public schools and expanded for-profit charters, and attacked teachers' tenure, wages and social rights. When the Democratic-controlled state assembly passed AB 215 reversing due process rights

for teachers, and a Los Angeles Superior Court judge declared teacher tenure and seniority laws unconstitutional in *Vergara vs. California* the Obama administration hailed the ruling for setting a national precedent.

Hillary Clinton is the heir apparent of Obama's reactionary anti-education agenda. She and her husband were among the first Democrats to embrace "school choice," which had long been the mantra of only the most right-wing Republicans. Whatever efforts the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) make to paint Clinton as a defender of teachers and public education, the truth is she is a tool of Wall Street and the powerful corporate interests seeking to cash in from the privatization of public education.

This means the assault on public education will be accelerated whether Clinton or the billionaire Republican Donald Trump wins in November.

Educators, parents and students have repeatedly demonstrated their determination to defend the right to high quality public education. Earlier this year, teachers in Detroit and Compton, California organized sickouts and students have carried out walkouts in Boston and other cities to defend their schools.

The fight against the privatization is international as can be seen with the strikes and struggles by teachers in the Mexico, United Kingdom, Australia and other countries. In the name of preparing students to compete in the global market, the public education system is being destroyed with the methods of the free market—the same capitalist profiteering that created the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. In every country, classroom teaching is being transformed into a data-driven, assessment-based curriculum that has nothing to do with developmentally appropriate learning for children.

In the face of the growing opposition to these attacks,

the AFT and NEA, and their state and local affiliates have done everything to prevent a unified struggle of educators because the unions are directly tied to Obama, Governor Jerry Brown and the Democratic Party. Far from opposing corporate-driven “school reform,” the unions are only looking for a seat at the table and a share from the spoils of dismantling public education.

The United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA), for example, has been instrumental in the creation of “pilot schools,” which are charter schools run by the union executives themselves.

According to those hosting today’s summit teachers a “better together” if they work with the very same corporate and political forces that are destroying public education.

One of the main organizers of this education summit is the New Teacher Center, a national “nonprofit” that focuses on teacher training. Although originally founded by teachers in 1998 in Santa Cruz, California the organization is now a right-wing foundation allied with the AFT, NEA and the Democratic Party. Among its long list of “philanthropic” backers is the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as dozens of banks and big corporations. Also included is Oracle CEO is Lawrence Ellison, the richest person in California whose net worth is estimated at \$54 billion, an amount that would eliminate the deficits of entire countries.

This year’s newest sponsor is the California Charter Schools Association (CCSA), a highly funded lobby group whose three key players are WalMart heiress Carrie Walton Penner, Netflix CEO Reed Hastings, and Republican politician Steve Poizner.

The starting point of any struggle to defend the right to education is an understanding of the class character and origins of this attack and the political forces behind it. Public education is under attack, just like pensions, health care benefits and other social rights, because society is dominated by a corporate and financial aristocracy that derives its vast wealth, not by producing anything of value, but largely by looting already existing public resources. This aristocracy controls the political system and both the Democrats and Republicans.

Claims that the destruction of public schools is “racist” are aimed at deceive workers and dividing the working class along racial and ethnic lines. Teachers

and working class students of all races and nationalities are coming under attack while the perpetrators are big business politicians of every race, gender and nationality, including Obama and Hillary Clinton.

If the social needs of masses of working people are to take priority over the insatiable appetites of the super-rich, then the working class must assert its own independent interests in opposition to the oligarchy that rules America and the world.

The Socialist Equality Party is running Jerry White for US president and Niles Niemeth for vice president as a socialist alternative to Clinton and Trump. We are building the SEP to unite every struggle—against inequality, war, police killings and other attacks on democratic rights—into a single, political struggle by the working class to take political power in its own hands and replace capitalism with socialism.

We say that high quality, free public education, from preschool to the university level, is a *social right* just like a decent job, housing, free health care, secure retirement, and access to culture. These are essential to life in a complex modern society and, therefore, inalienable and non-negotiable.

When the politicians say there’s “no money” for public schools, the working class must answer with a socialist program, which includes nationalizing the banks under workers’ control, ending the squandering of trillions on war and reorganizing society to serve human needs, not profits.



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