

Dismantle

Bureaucracy

Not Education



*A*cross Stanislaus County - and the state of California, School Boards are laying off teachers, shutting down schools, and placing workers on furlough (unpaid) work days. In Salida, the School Board is considering shutting down Salida Elementary school, laying off teachers, and possibly placing them on furlough days. Workers at Modesto City Schools are facing a round of layoffs, and since March 3rd of 2009, the District has OKed \$11.3 million in education cuts, despite internal and public protest. Meanwhile, 50 positions at the Sylvan Union School District that are also up on the chopping block while in Atwater, up to 30 teachers have been laid off in recent months. In Empire, Teel Middle School was closed down in 2009, which was home to 542 students. Also, substitutes, councilors, custodians, yard duties and others all are having a harder and harder time finding work - if they can manage to keep their jobs at all.

Why These Cuts?

As Classified Employee's Union President Aaron Castro commented, over the last few years at the Modesto City School District, 4,000 fewer students have been enrolled, however 22 more managers have been employed. Thus, while student enrollment has actually been declining, those at the top have still found it in their hearts to keep raking in the cash. But it's not just the rich locally looking out for themselves, but the desire of those in power in Sacramento to completely dismantle public education. In his State of the State address, Gov. Schwarzenegger promised he would not cut funding for public education, however, days later, he released his budget proposal containing \$2 billion in cuts and plans to outsource classified employee jobs. Schwarzenegger is resurrecting his call to slash state funding for school transportation proposing to cut \$300 million by out-sourcing classified employee jobs to private companies. These attacks on public education mirror the same attacks that are happening to higher education across the state, as CSUs and UCs have faced a 32% fee increase this year, hundreds of faculty have been laid off, and classes on multiple campuses have been cut. At Modesto Junior College, 180 classes have been cut, while student fees have gone up by 33%. At CSU Stanislaus, more faculty have been laid off than any other campus, while fee costs have gone up 32%.

Meanwhile, last year Stanislaus County was awarded \$18 million for a new 60-bed Youth Detention Camp, while four other valley counties were given a total of \$30 for similar prisons. Likewise, in places like Livingston in late 2007, police were awarded a grant by the state to put in a \$112,339 high resolution surveillance system in the local high school of only 1,150 students. As Dan Walters commented in the Sacramento Bee, "[Prison cost] has jumped from less than \$5 billion a year to more than \$10 billion in the last decade, over twice as fast as school spending, the biggest budget item. It now costs about \$45,000 a year to feed, clothe and medicate each of the state's 170,000-plus inmates, or roughly five times what taxpayers spend on a typical public school student. And that doesn't count what it costs to supervise tens of thousands of parolees."

Who Pays - Who Gains?

Those who will be firstly and greatly affected by these cuts are school children, as many will be faced with every increasing sized classrooms taught by overworked and underpaid teachers. Staff will also be overworked and underpaid, leading to more and more derelict and run down campuses, while teachers themselves will find it harder and harder to engage with students in any meaningful way. Furthermore, if students do decide to enter into college, they will find it harder and harder to do so, as the cost of higher education increases at both Junior Colleges, California State Universities, and University of California campuses. What will it mean to live in a society that has more interest in locking us up than education? In a nutshell, children of working and poor families will face the brunt of this assault; an assault that will not end with K-12.

These attacks on our living standards effect us all, as out of work staff and teachers struggle to pay

their bills and home payments and slip into foreclosure. As one poster on the *Modesto Bee* website stated, "[M]y husband is [a school employee] and has been for 11 years. After 11 years of dedication to the children of Salida, he will be laid off. He has absolutely nothing to do with the finances and yet he and 15 other teachers will pay for these errors in very big ways. We could lose our home. Our son is going to college next year and we can't help him if my husband is unemployed. Due to health issues, I am only partially employed normally, but I was laid off this year due to program elimination. I just want someone to find answers other than repeatedly laying off teachers. This country gives great lip service to how important education is, but then they want to pack 30 children in a classroom. I truly fear for our future."

Those who seek to profit from this crisis have the most to gain - those in power and the heads of corporations which can provide cheap labor for outsourced workers that the budget cuts will displace. This works also in the governments favor, because it decreases the power of organized labor as a whole, and makes it much easier for the state government to push working people around.

Strike, Occupy, Takeover!

Since 2009, there have been ongoing protests and demonstrations at school board meetings - calling for an end to layoffs and school closures. Another tactic that people have employed in Stanislaus County is the packing of meeting spaces over capacity, so that fire department officials are forced to close the meetings down, thus delaying the decision at hand. But, our tactics need to move from just prolonging these decisions and begging those in power not to carry them out, to actually going on the offensive. In Britain during the middle of 2009, community members and concerned parents occupied their elementary schools when the Labor Party threatened to close them down. The two schools, Wyndford and St Gregory's were both occupied by up to 20 parents, families and supporters at the start of the Easter holidays. Parents slept in the sports halls of both schools, and mounted a determined campaign to keep the other threatened institutions open. Under the "Save Our Schools" umbrella group, parents across the city have mounted a series of demonstrations, events and press conferences. One occupier commented: "Everybody has supported us. Shops have been handing in rolls, crisps and juice in morning." Again at the start of 2010, five parents barricaded themselves inside the school until their demands were met. This is only one exciting example of parents, students, and workers overcoming their divisions and coming together to better themselves. Elsewhere, such as in Greece, students in High Schools and Universities have also continuously occupied their schools against cuts to education. In California, students at community colleges, CSUs, and UC, have also launched a movement that has employed the occupation of campus buildings as a way to stop attacks on public education. Across the world, these actions have often been effective - not only in stopping the closure of certain schools, but also in bringing people together.

March 4th

On March 4th, there will be actions happening throughout California in response to attacks on public education. As workers are laid off, teachers are fired, classes are cut, and students are herded into more and more overcrowded class rooms - we have to stand together and fight. Different actions are being planned for different cities - and demonstrations are being called for at Modesto Junior College (MJC) and California State University Stanislaus (CSUS). In other cities, teachers are going on strike on this day in response to layoffs and cuts to schools. Now is the time to organize with other parents, staff, faculty, and students - for our schools and our educations. Hold protests and demonstrations, calling for an end to the attacks on education. Disrupt school board meetings, don't let the bureaucrats sign away our futures! Strike and walkout, shut the school down! Occupy, take our schools back until our demands are met! No layoffs, no furloughs, no school closures, no bigger classroom sizes!

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Links and Resources

Save Our Schools (UK) -
sosglasgow.wordpress.com

Occupy Central Valley -
occupycentralvalley.blogspot.com

Occupy California -
occupyca.wordpress.com

LibCom -
www.libcom.org



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