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Speak Out Now

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An Attack on Education is an Attack on Us All!

Oakland schools are under attack and teachers, students and parents are fighting back. The Oakland Unified School District claims that it doesn't have enough money to provide even the most basic education for the young people of Oakland. Those who oversee the 86 schools that 37,000 young people attend, are responsible for the current situation of Oakland schools. Many students don't have access to a library, programs like Art and P.E. have been cut, there are just 21 nurses for 37,000 students and one counselor for every 600 students.

The School District is threatening that the situation will get even worse, that it will have to make \$30 million in budget cuts this year. It has announced the layoffs of 150 support staff and administrators and the closing of Roots International Academy, the first of 24 schools it is threatening to close.

Teachers have been working without a contract for the past year and a half. They are demanding smaller class sizes, more counselors and nurses, no school closures and a pay increase for teachers. Most Oakland teachers can't afford to live in the area, resulting in a constant turnover of teachers - one out of every five leaves each year, which creates a tremendous instability.

The School District cries broke every year, even though last year's education budget, like others before it, ended with a surplus. In the face of this, Oakland teachers have been forced to strike to resist these continued cutbacks.

Underfunded education, overcrowded classrooms and underpaid teachers are not unique to California. Most school systems are severely underfunded, receiving insufficient funding from the state and the federal governments. Since 2008, states across the country have made \$23 billion in cuts to K-12 funding. In that same time period, the number of K-12 teachers and other school workers has fallen by 135,000, while the number of students has risen by 1,419,000.

For-profit, non-unionized charter schools are springing up everywhere, claiming to offer a better education.

Oakland already has 44 privatized, publicly-funded charter schools. And it's likely that the School District will hand over many of the schools they want to close to these charter school organizations or to real estate developers.

The situation facing teachers, education workers and students is similar to that of other workers throughout the country. Workers are struggling to get by as corporations and their owners are making a killing. In 2018, the richest 400 people in the U.S. had a total wealth of \$2.89 trillion, more than the bottom 64 percent of the country combined. The average CEO makes 312 times the average worker. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos' wealth recently skyrocketed to \$160 billion, making him the richest man in the world. In just nine seconds he gets what the average Amazon worker earns in one year.

We are surrounded by enormous wealth but supposedly no money for education! Public education reflects the values and priorities of society. It shows the future offered to its young people. This is a system that cannot serve our interests or our basic needs. Its foundations rest on the violence of poverty, racism and exploitation. It is a system served by politicians, both Democratic and Republican, who willingly sacrifice the education and futures of young people to the profiteering of the corporations. We don't have to accept this.

In France, the "yellow vest" movement made up of hundreds of thousands of low-paid and retired workers has been in the streets for three months in opposition to the worsening conditions they face. The movement has spread to workers from all over France, and high school and university students have joined in too.

There's no reason this kind of a fight can't happen here too. We have seen recent teachers' strikes in Chicago, West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Arizona and most recently in L.A. This could be the beginning of a larger fight. Working people have an enormous power because our work makes this whole society run. If we can organize our forces together, we can defend our interests and fight for the world we want to live in.