

BULLETIN OF THE TEACHERS FORUM FOR EMPOWERMENT AND RIGHTS

EDUCATION IS A RIGHT!

ISSUE NO. 22—FEBRUARY 11, 2002
IN THIS ISSUE:

Group Defends Right to Refuse
Pledge of Allegiance 2

SUNY Massive Cuts to Primary
and Secondary Education
Continue 3

Students Statewide: No Tuition
Hike! Education Is a Right! 3

ALL TOGETHER! Worldwide Anti-
war Day of Action 4

JOIN IN! HELP BUILD THE DISCUSSION!

Teachers Forum for Empowerment and Rights organizes educators, parents, youth and students to solve the problems in society. This means fighting for the people to be the decision-makers so as to guarantee the rights of all.

Working out how to empower the people is a key problem to solve, and we have an important role to play in bringing about this new arrangement. A concrete step is to build our group, where we are the decision-makers. Together we acquire the knowledge and consciousness needed to fight for our interests and the interests of society. *Education Is A Right!* is being developed to serve this aim.

Teachers Forum encourages readers to take up this very important work by sending in reports, views and articles, and sharing this bulletin with colleagues and friends.

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War, Budgets and Decision-Making

Fight for A Government Where the People Decide!

Resources once used for education and other social programs are now being increasingly used for imperialist war abroad and state repression at home. This trend is only serving to deepen the crisis confronting the society.

A crisis is a turning point; it signifies an unstable state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending. Times of crisis are by their nature very dangerous, but they also constitute historic opportunities for great advance. They pose the need for the people to activate themselves to resolve the crisis in their favor.

The fight over budgets and the fight over war and peace are in essence fights over the direction of society, that is, how to resolve the crisis facing society. They are not merely struggles over who gets what piece of the pie, or what policy the U.S. will adopt towards Iraq.

Presently there are two competing visions for the direction of the society. On the one hand, there is the vision of the ruling class for fascism

and war. This vision is evident in what choices the rulers make regarding the important issues of how the human and natural resources of the society are used. It is evident in the all-important issue of war and peace. It is evident in laws passed which violate all democratic norms and principles, such as the *No Child Left Behind Act*, which, for example, mandates student information be handed over to the military, or else. The *USA PATRIOT Act*, which effectively eliminates civil liberties and establishes police impunity as a norm is another example. With all this, prison funding is increased; school funding is decreased. Funding for war is increased; social programs are further cut. Armed forces of the State receive millions more; students are forced to "prove" their loyalty by saying the pledge, and militarism is promoted as a way of life.

The line that there is "no choice" in all of this is a last minute attempt by the ruling class to

DECIDE, PAGE 2

As Billions Go for War School Budgets Decimated

Future Threatened as Attacks on Education Intensify

Over the last 18 months cuts to education funding have deepened dramatically around the entire country, affecting practically all school districts. As predicted well over a year ago, more deep cuts are being made today, with even more cuts expected over the next year or two. Within this context, the federal government recently promised budget deficits for the next 10 years, while the National Governors Association also recently reported that almost all States, including New York, are experiencing their worst budget crisis since World War II.

On top of the endless number of school programs and services eliminated, curtailed or postponed already, even more will now be cut or eliminated. Many more education workers will lose their jobs. In many school districts class sizes are growing rapidly and

the school week is being reduced to four days.

Three months ago the *New York Daily News* reported that, "Budget cuts will worsen long-term crowding in already crowded school districts citywide." Less than six months ago, Rochester's *Democrat and Chronicle* reported that, "Despite assurances from City School District officials that the number of students per classroom would remain small and manageable, teachers are reporting that class size in certain schools has ballooned — in some cases, even surpassing the maximum limit set by the teachers' contract." The Democracy Resource Center (DRC) reports that, "22 percent of public schools were classified as overcrowded in 1999." While all students will be harmed by the constant funding cuts, poor, working class, and minority youth will

FUTURE, PAGE 4

Allegiance is A Matter of Conscience!

Group Defends Student's Right to Refuse Pledge of Allegiance

Reflecting the growing opposition to laws mandating patriotism in the schools, the January-February 2003 issue of *Draft Notices*, publication of the Committee Opposed to Militarism and the Draft, contained an article called "Resisting the Pledge." *Education Is A Right* is printing below excerpts from that article.

"Since September 11, 2001, schools across the U.S. have increased the recitation of the 'Pledge of Allegiance' in an effort to enforce patriotism. Previously lax policies have become mandatory in many school districts, making students feel pressured to pledge allegiance to a country and a flag regardless of their personal, religious or political beliefs.

"The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has advised many school districts in recent years on the constitutional rights of students wishing not to pledge allegiance. When students at Mark Morris High School in Washington State chose not to participate in the school's daily recitation of the pledge, Washington ACLU Legal Program Director Julya Hampton wrote in a 1998 letter to the school: 'In response to legal challenges brought by students, the courts have

uniformly upheld their right to remain quietly seated during the pledge. . . . Students should not be compelled to participate in the pledge by the symbolic act of standing, or be compelled to leave the classroom because of their peaceful expression of political beliefs.'

"The U.S. Supreme Court decided in 1943 (West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette) that a compulsory flag salute would violate students' right to freedom of expression. The Court proclaimed that a state cannot 'prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion' and that students cannot be compelled to affirm their loyalty 'by word or act.' The Supreme Court also decided in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District* that students do not 'shed their Constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.'

After noting that laws within each state may differ, the article suggests students read "High School Students' Rights: What Every Student Should Know," a brochure which can be downloaded at www.comdsd.org/youth.htm. The article

continues:

Students "have the right to refrain from reciting the pledge, but you may also choose to reframe the pledge instead. This could take two forms: you could stand at the time of the pledge in your classroom, and recite an alternative pledge on your own; or you could circulate an alternative pledge to students and start a movement of like-minded youth." Showing how far the state has gone in violating students rights, the article notes that in "some states it is mandatory that students wishing to abstain from the pledge sit quietly and not interfere with those students wishing to pledge allegiance. Your local ACLU can inform you of local laws and how they will impact your alternative pledge plans." The article continues: "If you are interested in an alternative pledge that follows the cadence of the 'Pledge of Allegiance' and is non-sectarian and globally focused, you could try something along these lines: I pledge allegiance to humanity, and to each person for which it stands, multiple nations, sharing peace, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.... Or write your own alternative pledge!"

DECIDE, FROM 1

convince the people that they have no role in governance; it is a frank admission and effort to get the people to accept that the present government is something standing above and against the people — otherwise how could officials talk of having no choice but to act so blatantly against the interests of the people and society as a whole? Who is it that they represent if not the people and the broad interests of society?

As people oppose war and the attacks on social programs, they are increasingly seeing *themselves as decision-makers*; they are choosing to increase funding for social programs, they are choosing peace, they are deciding to defend all the rights of all the people — they are directly confronting the existing government's right to decide on their behalf! The people empowered would stop paying the rich in the form of "debt servicing," they would stop handing

over hundreds of billions to the military, and they would immediately increase funding for all social programs as a first step in lifting the society out of the crisis. They would outlaw the attacks on the rights of the people to their views, their language, culture and religion.

Government officials' insistence that "we have no choice" is serving to consolidate the growing consciousness that the present governing arrangements cannot and will not represent the will of the people. Such a government in fact cannot choose to represent the people for its existence rests on serving the rich and their

system — *even if it means threatening the entire society with another cataclysmic world war.*

In response to this objective circumstance, people are stepping up to bring the people to power, where the aim of budgets, and all the work in the society, is to guarantee the rights of all under all circumstances and conditions. It is in fact because such a possibility objectively exists that the present crisis is deepening. It is this vision of the people that represents the path to peace and progress! It is through fighting for the people to be the decision-makers that this vision will be realized!

Check Out Our Website for These Recent Articles:

February 11, 2003

- Association of Universities Calls for Forums on War
- State's Arbitrary Standards Pushing Students Out of School
- Get the Military Off Our High Schools!

February 4, 2003

- Nazareth College Faculty Oppose War on Iraq
 - Anti-War Activists Leaflet High Schools
 - Candidate for School Board Calls for Action Against Budget Cuts
- And More!**

Massive Cuts to Primary and Secondary Education Continue

The Governor's budget calls for state funding to local K-12 school districts to be cut by more than \$1.2 billion, 8.4 percent less than last year's budget. The proposal also calls for the elimination of funding for "various discretionary grant programs," citing as specific examples Universal Pre-Kindergarten and Class Size Reduction. The proposed 2003-04 state budget is \$90.8 billion. The state currently funds schools to the tune of \$14 billion a year.

While claiming that "the last thing I want to do is reduce spending on education," Pataki's budget calls for huge cuts to education and a 7 percent increase in funding for armed agencies of the State. This sharply reveals that it is the rich and their security which the governor serves.

Not even itemized in the Governor's budget proposal is the huge payments from the State treasury to the banks in the form of debt servicing. According to the Office of the Comptroller, debt servicing on the "state supported" debt in December of 2002 alone was nearly \$275 million. This category of "state supported" debt, which totals nearly \$40 billion, is just one part of the more than \$100 billion in outstanding state-related debt held by the state government and its various public authorities. According to the State Budget Office, the Governor's budget proposal would require payments to the banks of at least \$2.8 billion for 2003-04, all while more than a billion is cut from education.

Already educators and education advocates in the region are saying that the impact of these cuts will be devastating and unmanageable.

"His [Pataki's] proposed budget will surely damage the quality of the educational program available to New York State's 3 million public school students, further denying many school children their constitutional right to a sound basic education," said the Campaign for Fiscal Equity.

Interim Superintendent of the Rochester City School District (RCSD), Manuel Rivera, expects the RCSD's budget gap to possibly balloon to \$68 million for the 2003-04 year. As a result,

many programs and services will be further cut or eliminated.

Superintendent of Buffalo City Schools, Marion Cañedo, states that, "Even if the final budget gets better, it's still going to be worse," reports the *Buffalo News*. Class sizes are expected to grow and pre-K and Kindergarten are expected to suffer, if not disappear altogether. With a school deficit possibly as high as \$60 million, "That would mean a third consecutive year of deep personnel cuts and elimination of the staff needed to carry out the federal government's No Child Left Behind legislation," reports the *News*.

Under Pataki's budget, Niagara-Wheatfield schools in Niagara County would see an 11% percent, or \$2.3 million, cut in funding. Elementary music, summer school, library services, guidance, kindergarten, most electives and other so-called "unmandated" programs may be eliminated or curtailed. "Niagara Falls Schools Superintendent Carmen A. Grant told the School Board on Thursday night [Feb. 6] that the district faces a shortfall between \$3.2 million and \$6.2 million in next year's budget, depending on the severity of state aid cuts," reports the *News*.

The *News* also reported that, "Alden Superintendent Donald Raw told the School Board on Thursday night [Feb. 6] that the district will have to re-examine its spending priorities in light of a proposed sharp decrease in state aid. Alden is looking at a decrease of about 4.5 percent in state aid -- a loss of nearly \$400,000."

In Cattaraugus county, Salamanca City School Superintendent Mark Ward said, "The budget is particularly devastating to poor rural districts like ours," according to the *News*. The district expects \$1.2 million in cuts for the year. Ward added, "The budget will have a catastrophic impact on the children, and we do not have the ability to raise the taxes needed to close this gap (a one percent increase in the tax levy generates \$20,000). While our state is in financial crisis, balancing the books at the expense of our children is irresponsible."

Students Statewide: No Tuition Hike! Education Is a Right!

Students at New York's state colleges and university's immediately rejected Governor George Pataki's proposed \$1,200 tuition hike and took action to defend the right to education. From Buffalo to Long Island, rallies and vigils were held demanding that education be funded now and refusing to accept the State's "no money" excuses.

In Buffalo, actions were held at the University at Buffalo (UB) and Buffalo State College on January 30, the day after the Governor unveiled his new budget plan. Braving bitter cold, they rejected the "we have no choice" line of the Governor and the gutting of higher education in the name of a "fiscal crisis." At BuffState, one student pointed out, "We're being held hostage" to a fiscal crisis we did not cause and do not benefit from.

On Long Island, actions were held on campuses including Stony Brook, Old Westbury and Nassau Community College. Students from these and other campuses also demonstrated in Plainview on January 24 when Pataki spoke there. Signs and chants expressed the demands of those gathered: "No Tuition Hike!" "Don't Drop Bombs on SUNY Students" and "Don't Balance the Budget on Our Backs." More actions are planned for February 25.

While the New York State government's track record on budgets suggests the final budget will not be passed until summer, students are vowing to step up their mobilization now. They are also rejecting the old game utilized by officials during previous tuition hikes in the early 1990s whereby the "issue" is supposed to be one of pressuring the Legislature to pass a smaller cut than the Governor's. "We not only say NO tuition hike," one student said, "Education is a right and funding must be increased NOW!"

Saturday, February 15
ALL TOGETHER!
Worldwide Anti-war Day of Action

BUFFALO
2pm – Elmwood
& Bidwell

Stop Attacks on Immigrants
and Minorities!

No War on Iraq!

STAND UP FOR
DIGNITY & RIGHTS!

NEW YORK CITY
Mobilize Contingents!

Buses leave
Friday, February 14, 10:30pm

Reserve space now:
WNY Peace Center: 894-2013

Buffalo Forum:

vordgbuf@yahoo.com

\$40/person, more if you can,
less if you can't.

FUTURE, FROM 1

be hardest hit. English as a Second Language (ESL) students, for example, are in some of the most over-sized classes. Teachers report that in one Global Studies classroom in Buffalo's Grover Cleveland High School, there were 63 students, the majority of whom are ESL.

According to a national survey released October 2002 by the National Education Association and the Association of American Publishers, one out of six elementary and secondary school teachers who use textbooks in their classes say they do not have enough books for every child in their class, and nearly one in three teachers report they do not have enough textbooks so that all students can take a textbook home. As one teacher put it: "We don't have up-to-date textbooks, not enough textbooks for the classroom and not enough textbooks to take home."

A steady stream of reports also show that it will take well over \$125 billion

just to repair America's school buildings. The National Education Association puts this estimate as high as \$200 billion.

"This is the exact opposite of what needs to happen," Alan Lubin, New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) executive vice president said, speaking to the Governor's recent budget proposal. "We should be investing greater resources in our future, and New York's future is in its classrooms."

"We are deeply, deeply disappointed by Gov. Pataki's proposed budget," said Randi Weingarten, president of the New York City Local union, United Federation of Teachers. "His statement that 'we have no choice' other than to cut education spending is simply wrong."

While funding for education, healthcare, libraries, welfare and dozens of other social programs continue to be cut, funding for the military, "homeland security," and prisons grows. Hundreds of billions of dollars

have been handed over to these areas over the last decade and especially since 9-11. As just one example, beyond the nearly half a trillion dollars now going to the military, the DRC reports that, "Between 1980 and 2000, per capita spending on schools increased 32 percent while per capita spending on prisons shot up 189 percent... The nation's prison population has doubled twice in the last twenty years to approximately two million." Prison spending continues to increase as education spending decreases. All the social problems will only worsen with ongoing cuts.

The people clearly demand more education, not less. The people are demanding an end to vast inequalities in how schools are organized, including how they are funded. The future of humanity depends in part on its ability to set aside the needed resources to educate the younger generation at a level consistent with the needs of the society.