

\$87 Billion for Iraqi Occupation, US Schools Faced with Privatization: Capitalism in Action!

As President Bush and Congress spend \$87 billion and commit yet more soldiers to the imperialist war in Iraq, the education system at home is more cash-starved than ever. As US soldiers and Iraqi civilians die daily under the US occupation, school districts around the country are having to cut everything from sports and elective classes to programs teaching English as a second language. Some districts are even facing complete privatization, such as the St. Louis public school system. As many states are suffering their worst budget crises in decades, university staff are being forced to take pay cuts and furloughs as well as tuition being raised at most state colleges. This is a completely criminal situation in which exploiting weak countries takes precedence over learning and life. This is also an excellent social studies lesson – it exposes the real motives of our ‘democratic’ government, which is pursuing the economic and political interests of the rich elite and the top corporations at the expense of the health and education of the youth of the United States and the world.

In fact, the plight of education in the United States and the war in Iraq also makes for a good mathematics lesson. The \$87 billion that the government has put towards the occupation of Iraq (this amount does not include the costs of the *reconstruction* of Iraq) could pay for: All undergraduate (tuition and living expenses) for 2,709,831 private university students, 5,840,667 students at four-year public universities and 7,171,543 students attending community colleges. \$75 billion would also be enough to provide tuition-free access to community colleges for 43,227,666, and could buy 40,816,326,530 free school lunches to students grade 1-12 under the Free School Lunch Program. But the imperialist government in Washington DC would rather rain death and mayhem on the people of Iraq with this money than invest it in the nations greatest resource!

Although cuts in education are especially deep at present, for over eight years school districts and some state colleges in every region of the country have continually suffered budget shortfalls with the resulting elimination of classes and lower salaries for teachers. This has been especially acute in the urban areas, where the combination of a declining local tax base and lack of adequate funding from the states and the Federal government has produced a horrible situation. But the recent state fiscal crisis and the Bush Administration’s war budget have compounded the problem. Many school superintendents, teachers and students are being driven to near desperation. The superintendent of schools for Buffalo, NY, was quoted in the *New York Times* saying that “It’s the worst thing I’ve ever seen, and I’ve been in the district 35 years. I mean we’re looking at crazy things, like a four day week, no kindergarten, no pre-kindergarten, no sports. I’ve done everything I could think of, I’ve closed schools. I’ve suspended service at schools. It’s been horrible.”

In St. Louis, the district’s school board has gone so far as to hire a New York-based consultancy firm, forking over badly needed cash at a time when the district is nearly bankrupt! And the advice of these Wall Street sages? Close half of the district’s schools, and make sure that nearly all of those closed are on the city’s overwhelmingly African-American north side! These corporate clowns have aroused the anger and indignation of the city’s students, educators and residents – St. Louis is definitely learning

the meaning of the words “privatization” and “downsizing.”

As the crisis has worsened, students and teacher’s unions have begun to take action. March 2003 saw a demonstration of 1,000 New York state teachers, administrators and students in the state capitol, Albany, protesting Governor Pataki’s proposed budget cuts on education. Under his plan, the school district for the city of Buffalo, for example, would face a \$65 million shortfall. This mirrors what is happening around the country. In Oregon, teachers have been forced to work two weeks without pay. The situation in “The Education President’s” home state of Texas is especially dire, where state contributions towards educational funding stands at less than 50 percent. Around the country, teachers, students and supporters are demanding that our schools be rescued. In every state of the country as debts and cutbacks mount, teachers and students have begun to speak out, many within the burgeoning anti-war movement. This is a step in the right direction – the crisis in education is inextricably linked to the war, as well as to the economy, to the US’ foreign and domestic policies, and last but not least to the system which in the end is the cause of all of these problems: Capitalism in the era of imperialism.

The state and federal budget crisis is not purely the result of which capitalist political party sits in office, or even because of the political personality of the President (or lack thereof.) Neither is the fact that the US spends more than half of its massive budget on arms the result of a Republican administration and Congress – this situation has continued for the last fifty years through Democratic administrations as well, even under the ‘pacifist’ Carter. The reason that the educational system in this country is in crisis is due to the fact that the politicians of both parties, and their corporate sponsors, have chosen “guns before butter” so to speak. The United States today is the sole imperialist super-power, which defends its economic and political interests around the world through military, diplomatic and economic means. In defending *its* interests around the world, the American capitalists are more than ready to put tanks, warships and bombers before the education of a whole generation of future workers and members of society.

Despite all of the promises, pledges and alligator’s tears shed by the capitalist politicians about peace and ‘democracy,’ they cannot provide a future to the youth or the working class. Only through the establishment of socialism, in which society is democratically administered by the working class and private property of the means of production is replaced with social property, can the people of the world be allowed to live the lives which they deserve. That is the lesson that all students and educators must learn to really understand the world around them!

- * **Join Us in the Fight for a Better World!**
- * **Fund Education! Books, Not Bombs!**
- * **No To the War on the Working Class at Home and Abroad!**
- * **No To Privatization! Roberti & Co., Get Out of Town!**
- * **Write us at: wil@socialistappeal.org for more info!**

