

Michigan slashes funds for education

by Suzanne Rose

Michigan's "New Age" Republican Gov. John Engler signed legislation on Aug. 19 which will eliminate the use of local property taxes to fund public schools, beginning with the 1994-95 school year. Approximately two-thirds of the education budget is currently financed by property taxes. The legislation does not contain a proposal for an alternate source of funding.

Observers believe that the events which led to this astonishing act were orchestrated by the lobby in the state which is promoting the satanic "outcome-based education" program (the governor is a backer of OBE). They are seeking to use the budget crisis to complete a transformation of the education system from one appropriate to the requirements of a scientifically and technologically advancing economy, to one which only requires slave labor in "free-enterprise zones." What made the state vulnerable to such dismantling of education, was the elimination of hundreds of thousands of auto industry jobs in the 1980s. This caused a collapse of the state's ability to finance essential services. In 1989, Michigan took the barbaric step of eliminating the general assistance welfare program, the last-ditch income support system of the childless unemployed. The latest actions of the legislature portend the end of public education in the state.

A bitter fight

The collapse of the tax base in Michigan has led to a bitter war on the education front among families who have children (a declining portion of the population), retired people with no children to support and rising taxes consuming an increasing portion of their income, and corporations trying to escape taxes. Inequalities in education funding between the depression-ravaged inner cities and the more affluent suburbs have also become a populist issue. The fascistic social engineers sponsoring "outcome-based education" are seeking to exploit the passions of the population in order to tie shrinking budget resources to state-mandated "performance outcomes."

Amid the growing attacks on property taxes to support education, in a state where today only 20% of the families have children in the schools, and stoked by populist rhetoric from the politicians about the inequalities which result from this method of financing, the legislature was induced to refer the matter of school funding to the voters in a referendum last spring. The governor joined the fray by promoting the

idea that excessive property taxes make Michigan economically "uncompetitive" with other states by discouraging industry from locating there, and driving existing industry out. The referendum was set to abolish property taxes and increase the state sales tax funding for education from 4% to 6%. The referendum went down to defeat. Four populous and heavily industrial and commercial counties defeated it — Oakland, Wayne, Genessee, and McComb. These are relatively poor areas with many children, which relied heavily on corporate property taxes to fund education. Other counties, which have a larger portion of retirees, supported the referendum.

In the ensuing uproar, a Democratic legislator introduced a bill to abolish real estate taxes as the method of funding education. It was reported that the Democrats in the legislature hoped to use the bill to discredit the governor, a Republican and proponent of eliminating the property tax, who would be forced to veto it because it contained no alternative method for funding the schools. But Governor Engler signed the bill, and four weeks later the legislature released a proposal for a new formula for state aid to education, without dealing with the question of funding.

The funding proposed for each district is well below the previous average — a reflection of the fact that Michigan has been conditioned to accept the collapse of the economy as inevitable. The elimination of funding parallels the elimination of educational content which the state has already accepted, albeit on an optional basis, with the adoption by the legislature of Public Act 25 in 1990, the OBE Core Curriculum. Districts that "choose" OBE get generous grants from the state.

The case of Minnesota

Similar moves are afoot to cut education funding in the state of Minnesota. The Education Finance Subcommittee of the Minnesota Business Partnership issued a report in July, indicating the direction in which certain corporations intend to move. Entitled "Education Finance: Education Quality and Funding Reform," the report represents the views of banks and corporations whose "post-industrial society" policies are bankrupting small businesses and farms. The likes of Cargill, Honeywell, and Norwest Bank argue in the report that education does not require more funding, just a reallocation of existing resources: "We have enough resources now if distributed according to improved funding."

The report proposes that property taxes be eliminated as a method of funding education, and be replaced with state financing based on the willingness of the district to carry out the New Age restructuring of educational content. The amount recommended by this group to be expended by the state on each child to implement the OBE Core Curriculum is \$3,125 — lower than the \$3,600 currently being spent in one of the nation's most impoverished inner-city school districts, Detroit.