

AFT WILL RESIST ATTEMPTS TO USE THE ECONOMIC CRISIS TO IMPOSE AUSTERITY ON PUBLIC WORKERS AND PRIVATIZE THE PUBLIC SPHERE

WHEREAS, one of the most disastrous long-term results of the current economic crisis—a crisis that is far from over for ordinary working people worldwide—is a sharp increase in attempts to privatize the public sphere and impose fiscal austerity on public employees; and

WHEREAS, public employees from New York to California, from Florida to Oregon, from Greece to Chile, have been subject to demands by state, local and national governments to bear the brunt of the economic crisis and accept sharp reductions in pay, working conditions, job security, pensions and healthcare; and

WHEREAS, despite the announcement by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Advisers in March 2010 that the recession that started in December 2007 is officially over, its sharpest effects on public employees are being felt this year, and may be felt even more intensely next year—both public-sector and private-sector workers in the U.S. and internationally are facing intense pressure for furloughs, layoffs, cutbacks and concessions; and

WHEREAS, the worldwide economic crisis that began in December 2007 and became apparent with the collapse of Bear Stearns in March 2008 had nothing to do with the cost of maintaining a modestly-paid public workforce, which serves the public and helps to lessen the corrosive effects of a capitalist economy; and

WHEREAS, the current economic crisis is being used opportunistically to accelerate the privatization of public life and public rights, public schools, public universities, public lands, public parks, public control, public spaces, the public commons, public power; and

WHEREAS, the accelerating attack on the public sphere and public employees is accompanied by a barrage of political and media attacks on public employees; and

WHEREAS, over the course of the last two fiscal years in the United States, 23 states have imposed mandatory pay cuts—in the form of furloughs—on public-sector workers and 16 have implemented layoffs (*Stateline.org*, a nonprofit news source focused on state policy and politics); and

WHEREAS, examples of efforts to impose austerity on public workers as a response to the worldwide recession abound:

- Dallas, Texas proposed solving a \$130 million budget gap by laying off 400 employees, cutting the salaries of remaining employees by as much as five percent and cutting funding for street services, neighborhood libraries, recreation centers and municipal swimming pools (*The Dallas Morning News*, “Dallas Likely to Lay Off Employees, Cut Salaries,” May 20, 2010);
- New Jersey has announced that thousands of teachers and school staff from 85% of school districts have received notice that their jobs may be cut in the 2010-2011 school

year (*The Star-Ledger*, “Thousands of N.J. Teachers Get Layoff Notices as School Budget Deadlines Loom,” May 14, 2010);

- California pressed members of the California Faculty Association to make the agonizing decision, for the 2009-2010 academic year, to accept a furlough plan and corresponding ten percent pay cut, a sacrifice made in order to maintain jobs and preserve employee benefits. (*Associated Press*, “California Faculty Union Approves Furloughs, Pay Cuts,” July 24, 2009);
- Hartford, Connecticut has threatened City employees who already agreed to four furlough days in FY 2010 with additional furloughs in FY 2011 (*Hartford Courant*, “Hartford Considering Furloughs for City Workers,” May 11, 2010.);
- New York City has announced that 4,000 teachers and school-related personnel will be laid off this June, while New York State has attempted to impose a 20% pay cut, in the form of furloughs, on faculty and staff at the City University and State University of New York;
- And in Greece, to take the sharpest international example, the recently adopted economic aid package from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund attempts to stabilize banks by imposing dramatic cuts on the pensions and salaries of public-sector workers, advancing the project of privatizing the Greek social security system and treating higher education as a market commodity; and

WHEREAS, the effect on the public of dismantling the public sphere—on ordinary, working people, on people of color, on those already disenfranchised, on the poor and working class worldwide—would be catastrophic, starting with small deprivations and leading to deep disenfranchisement and intensified economic oppression:

- Students enrolled in the University of California system, like many students across the nation, have been forced to pay more and receive less—while student fees increased, courses and programs were cut and class sizes enlarged. (“Why Cutting Back is Such a Problem,” www.associatedcontent.com.)
- Following a City Council vote on May 18, 2010, residents of Las Vegas, Nevada must adjust to fire department brownouts—a reduction by three units a day of the number of fire units available to answer calls, closure of eight community schools, and a reduction in the number of city marshals available to patrol city parks and trails, among other cuts. (*Las Vegas Sun*, “City Council Cuts 200 Las Vegas City Job Amid Budget Shortfall,” May 18, 2010.)
- Parents in Saugerties, NY tried to save their school librarian’s job by reaching out to their community for funds; and students at Templeton Elementary School in Bloomington, Indiana dramatized the effects of state budget cuts in *The Case of the Missing Librarian*, a play they wrote about children who literally lost their voices when their media specialist was eliminated; and
- Since 2008 , 30 states have cut funding for health care; 25 states have cut funding for services to the elderly; 30 states have cut funding for K-12 education; and 41 states have cut funding for higher education—the public sector is being dismantled before our eyes, while the need for these services did not diminish, and in fact increases, as the number of families facing economic hardship rose; and

WHEREAS, public higher education has experienced slow-motion privatization over the last 30 years, as public funds have been systematically withdrawn and public higher education has been hollowed out from within: today, only 25 percent of higher education teaching positions are tenured or tenure-track positions; and

WHEREAS, the AFT prides itself on a history of fighting for the rights of its members; and whereas and the role of a union is to fight back in the interest of all working people and the people whose health, education, prosperity and welfare depends on the work we do—work that matters; and

WHEREAS despite the trends toward privatization and devaluation of the public sphere, millions of working people both in the United States and abroad are looking to the union movement for resistance to privatization and austerity and support for the public good:

Resolved, that the AFT name and oppose the attacks on public workers and the public sphere for what they are, and not attempt to appease corporate media or political forces that demand our acquiescence in privatization of the public sphere and austerity for public employees; and

Resolved, that the AFT mount a national campaign against the imposition of austerity on public workers; and that the AFT support the efforts of working people both in the United States and internationally—not of the governments that oppress them—as they seek to resist austerity and privatization; and

Resolved, that the AFT provide substantial assistance to local unions and state federations that seek to reverse the agenda of forced austerity and privatization.

Approved by the Professional Staff Congress Delegate Assembly on _____.

Arthurine DeSola, Secretary

Barbara Bowen, President