Education in a Democratic Socialist Society

Democratic Socialism recognizes that our education system is important for developing responsible citizens and a capable workforce and helping people to realize their full potential. The education system is an important tool to reduce inequality and poverty. A socialist educational system will allow all citizens to become adults with equal opportunities and the ability to maximize their contributions to society.

History

Socialism recognizes the following three important foundations of the American education system:

1) Moral Education – Thanks to the early Puritans, a system of public schools was established with space and taxes set aside for teaching literacy skills so that people could read the Bible and lead moral lives.

2) Good Citizens – With the introduction of a democratic republic in the newly formed USA, leaders such as Thomas Jefferson advocated for public schools as a way of providing an informed citizenry.

3) Human Resources – With industrialization the nation needed a workforce capable of performing many specialized activities. The Human Resource Model introduced technical/vocational education to meet the economic demands.

Issues

While each tradition provides desirable goals for an educational system, some measures to achieve the goals may be contradictory and result in inequality and discriminatory practices. For example:

• What should be taught?
  ♦ Reading and Writing: What literature is or is not appropriate for school children? How much should students be sheltered from the ugly aspects of life?

♦ History and Society: What views of history should be presented? For example, was the Civil War a moral battle about slavery, or an economic confrontation between an industrial north and plantation based agriculture in the South? Much of history can be interpreted very differently with a change of perspective.

♦ What kind of skills should be taught? Some employers want a compliant workforce with relatively low levels of technical skills. Other employers want highly skilled, creative employees.

♦ How to provide a quality education to all students regardless of racial and economic background? Our current system promotes inequality by providing different levels of support for education in different communities. These different levels create different learning conditions and different expectations, thus creating inequality.

♦ Conflicting Demands: These conflicts create opposing demands on public schools and wide-ranging expectations for educational outcomes.

Creating a base for a socialist education requires the following:

1. Encouraging divergent viewpoints in classrooms.
2. Providing equal and adequate funding for all schools.
3. Standardizing curriculum for all schools.
4. Creating community schools, where schools are a central part of a neighborhood or community.
5. Introducing children to a broad range of disciplines, which include reading, writing, math and science.
6. Adjusting to a changing world. Changes in family structure, multi-cultural and racial populations, and new forms of communication, including social media.

7. Preparing children to face the relevant issues of our time and those expected in the future. This means
- Rigorous teaching of reading, writing, and mathematical skills.
- Providing social studies courses that teach governing and democracy, as well as geographic and historic information about the world we live in.
- Providing science courses that teach the basic understanding of scientific principles and the moral issues related to implementing scientific findings.
- Developing science courses linking how science impacts life, especially our environment.
- Supplying classes that teach art, music, physical education, parenting skills, food and nutritional issues, driver education, foreign languages along with conflict resolution and living in a multi-cultural world.

8. Integrating a diverse, multi-cultural society. All students should become productive, contributing members of society.

9. Providing adequate financial support for all to receive a high-quality education.

10. All institutions of higher learning should become publicly owned. This means providing free post-secondary education to all. Entrance and opportunity to attend a college or university should be based on one's ability, not one’s ability to pay.

11. Recognition that the educational benefits and skills received benefit the community as much as they benefit the individual.
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EDUCATION IS FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD, NOT FOR PERSONAL GAINS!

• Stop promoting privatization. Research on the value of charter and voucher schools has been mixed. There is no proof of improved student achievement. Privatization does nothing to address the real issue of educating the public. Privatizing schools is an effort to undermine the strength of teacher unions and to provide a new source for corruption. Voucher and charter schools are a waste of taxes.

• Respect teachers as skilled professionals. Educators are skilled professionals who should be given a stronger voice in the development of education programs. Educators need to be financially rewarded as true professionals.

• Hold our educational system accountable for how well it meets society’s goals. Teaching to a test or requiring that all teachers conform to a given method ignores the problems of our diverse society. Students enter with a variety of goals, customs, and degrees of readiness. Success is difficult to gauge, simplistic standards (for example standardized tests) lead to poor teaching and inaccurate evaluations. Evaluations should be based on mastery of a subject and students’ growth and development, not on test scores.

• Encourage small class sizes. One practice that has proven to be effective is smaller classes, especially at the elementary level. Smaller classes make it possible for teachers to give more personalized attention to students, helping them learn to be comfortable with their backgrounds, while learning to accept others.

Value of Education!

An enlightened citizenry is indispensable for the proper functioning of a republic. Self-government is not possible unless the citizens are educated sufficiently to enable them to exercise oversight. It is therefore imperative that the nation see to it that a suitable education be provided for all its citizens.

THOMAS JEFFERSON

Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Education is the most powerful weapon, which you can use to change the world.

NELSON MANDELA

An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

For additional information contact:

Socialist Party of Wisconsin
Phone: 414 – 332 – 0654
Email: demsocvanguard@gmail.com
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