

## **For a fight against education cuts in California!**

*Statement of the International Students for Social Equality*

*23 September 2009*

Faculty and students in the University of California system are planning a walkout on September 24 to protest the attack on California's university education system through a series of budget cuts, layoffs, furloughs, student fee hikes, and course reductions.

There is growing anger over the destruction of the public education system in California. The International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) supports the broadest popular mobilization to defend and advance public education in California and across the country. A successful fight, however, requires a new political perspective.

Students and youth confront a basic fact that will define their generation: capitalism has failed. The corporate and financial elite that controls the government and both political parties is determined to use the crisis they have created to attack every social advance, including education. The ultimate aim, through a systematic starving of funds and increasing tuition, is to create a class-based system in which quality education is the domain only of the wealthy.

Education can be defended only through a movement that attacks the very foundation of social organization, the subordination of everything to the interests of a wealthy elite. The alternative to bankrupt capitalism is international socialism, at the core of which lies the fight for social equality.

### **The crisis of public education in California**

The Schwarzenegger administration, in collaboration with the Democratic Party-controlled state legislature and the Obama administration, has responded to the budget deficits plaguing the state by pushing through billions of dollars in cuts to social programs, including education at all levels.

Starting this month, furloughs are being imposed on University of California (UC) faculty and staff, cutting the paychecks of over 100,000 employees by up to 10 percent. Hundreds of faculty and staff have already been laid off. Student fees, meanwhile, have doubled since 2001, and an additional increase of over 30 percent has been proposed by UC officials.

In the California State University system, student fees

have been increased by 33 percent, and the situation is expected to worsen dramatically in 2010. The California Community Colleges, 110 institutions with a total enrollment of 2.9 million students, have seen \$840 million slashed in the last two state budgets.

Spending for K-12 education is also being drastically curtailed, with untold consequences for millions of California youth. The country's most populous state, which once boasted one of the best education systems in the country, will soon rank last in metrics such as per-pupil funding and teacher-student ratios.

The actions orchestrated in Sacramento correspond to the interests of the most powerful sections of the corporate and financial elite in California and the US. Their aim is to use the economic crisis to carry out far-reaching changes in class relations by curtailing or eliminating social programs, driving down wages, and destroying millions of jobs.

Unemployment in California stands at 12.2 percent and rising, the highest level in 70 years. The concessions being demanded of students and faculty are one part of the common situation facing the working class throughout the country and internationally.

### **The Obama administration**

The Obama administration has led the offensive against the working class in California. As California and other states worked out their budgets earlier this year, the administration repeatedly refused federal aid, with Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner declaring that states needed to "put in place reforms that will restore their creditworthiness." This could only mean one thing: cutting social programs and education. This came after trillions of dollars had already been handed out to the banks and financial institutions.

Millions of students and young people voted for Obama hoping for a change. Obama, however, has continued the right-wing policies of his predecessor, including bailing out the banks; expanding war in Afghanistan and continuing the occupation of Iraq; leaving in place the Patriot Act and other anti-democratic measures; and insisting that the working class must "sacrifice" as a result of an economic crisis caused by the financial elite.

Workers and students confront a bitter truth: The Obama administration is a government of, by, and for the financial aristocracy.

### **A new political perspective**

Initiatives such as the September 24 walkout will no doubt multiply and intensify. A political radicalization of the universities in California is already under way.

These coming struggles, however, will not succeed in stopping the assault against higher education in California without a clear and independent political perspective that is opposed to the two-party system, the Obama administration, and the trade union apparatus that supports it. The entire framework of the official debate must be rejected and the working class must put forward its own solution.

### **Reject all budget cuts!**

The ISSE calls for an emergency program to address the economic crisis in the interests of the working class. Billions should be poured into rebuilding our schools to ensure a decent, quality education for everyone, from kindergarten to university. The ISSE calls for an immediate end to all faculty layoffs, furloughs, and wage cuts.

Tuition for higher education must be sharply reduced. The astronomical costs—even at public universities—increasingly bar working class students from acquiring a quality education. The ISSE calls for immediate relief for students and workers who have been burdened by extraordinary levels of debt, often to the very banks and financial institutions that have benefited from taxpayer funds.

The argument that there is “no money” to fund education is a lie. The sum total of the US government’s multiple obligations to the bailout of the banks and Wall Street could total over \$23 trillion. This amount would be sufficient to fund California’s education system for nearly two millennia. The richest man in California, Larry Ellison, has a personal net worth approximately equal to the entire budget deficit of California. The question is: How will society’s wealth be organized—according to private profit or social need?

### **For the political independence of the working class!**

The defense of public education cannot be carried out simply within the framework of protests on universities

and college campuses. Students and faculty must turn to the working class as a whole.

A turn to the working class does not mean an alliance with the trade union bureaucracies. These organizations have helped to systematically impose defeats on American workers. In the education sector as in the auto industry, the unions have worked actively to suppress the opposition of their membership, channeling their anger into support for the Democratic Party, while cultivating the privileges of their own conservative bureaucracies.

The ISSE calls for the formation of committees of struggle to unite students and faculty on university and college campuses with workers and youth throughout the state.

It is impossible to effect change through the existing political system. The Schwarzenegger administration was installed through the recall of right-wing Democrat Gray Davis. The result: even deeper attacks on the working class. The political establishment is impervious to the wishes and needs of the population. The working class needs its own party, based on its own class interests.

### **For equality and socialism!**

The crisis in California is rooted in the failure of capitalism, a social system based on private ownership of the main levers of economic life by a tiny layer of the population, which controls them in the interests of private profit and individual wealth accumulation. Such a system is incapable of meeting the needs of workers and youth for education, health care, good jobs and housing, and a future for coming generations.

There is no solution within California alone. The problems confronting the state are only a concentrated expression of the failure of world capitalism. The alternative to capitalism is socialism—an egalitarian world society based on the rational and democratic development of the wealth of the planet in the interest of social need. This requires the nationalization of the banks and large corporations and their transformation into public utilities under the democratic control of the working class.

We call on all students, faculty and university workers who are looking for a way to fight against these attacks to join the International Students for Social Equality and its parent organization, the Socialist Equality Party. Take up the fight for socialism!

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For more information, or to contact the ISSE, visit **[www.intsse.com](http://www.intsse.com)**

Read the World Socialist Web Site — **[wsws.org](http://wsws.org)**