

Thousands of California students protest against a war on Iraq

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Thousands of California high school and college students walked out of classes to protest the imminent US war against Iraq. The antiwar actions spanned from San Diego in the south through the San Francisco Bay Area to Sacramento. Notable among the protests was a walk-out at Garfield High School in East Los Angeles. Braving threats by administrators that they would be expelled, a majority of the 5,000 students walked out. Hundreds rallied at a nearby park.

Leonardo, a Garfield freshman, said, "The school administration threatened to suspend students who walked out for twelve weeks, and even have them expelled from the school district."

Students held signs calling for Bush's removal from office, and for more money for schools. Other students carried signs that said, "Let the Rich Fight in Iraq," and "This is What Democracy Looks Like." Some students wore armbands with the words of the first amendment.

Sandy, a Garfield student, said, "Our school is overcrowded. Many times there are not enough desks to accommodate students and our textbooks are outdated and marked with graffiti. Many of us have family in the army. One of my cousins is a Marine and is being sent to Iraq. My sister is in the army. Why should they get sent to fight for oil? Nobody likes Bush; he wasn't even supposed to be president. The Supreme Court picked him. He didn't have to go into the army because he was rich and was sent to the best colleges. There is a big divide between the rich and the poor. They think that we are trash, but we are human too."

Cristina, a senior, described how the students had decided to walk out. "All the students are against the war. We are fighting for what we believe in. I believe that students have the greatest price to pay.

"Our school doesn't have the up-to-date material that we need to learn. Some of our teachers and administrators are unqualified. The result is that students graduate with

grade point averages that are not high. They are forced to join the military, to help their families out and not be disgraced.

"Most teachers support our protest. They did not walk out because their jobs are on the line, but many lent us their classrooms to make signs."

The Garfield walkout took place on the 33rd anniversary of the 1968 walkout at Garfield and other East Los Angeles High Schools to protest the Vietnam War and sub-standard education for Latino students.

High school walkouts took place all across Los Angeles. At Beverly Hills High School the administration gave students permission to walk out. They joined with students from Hollywood High School at a mass rally in West Los Angeles.

Other high school administrators were not as accommodating. At Alhambra High School, administrators closed the gates to try to contain the students. At other schools students were videotaped as they walked out.

The intimidating tactics did not deter many students. At Venice High School 500 students left class for a protest on the school's front lawn, waving signs and chanting, "No more war, no more war."

In San Francisco, over 1,000 high school students rallied at City Hall. Over 350 demonstrated in San Diego. In Sacramento, both high school and university students walked out.

At Stanford University professors cancelled classes to encourage students to join in the protests.

University students also walked out in Los Angeles. Among the community colleges where protests took place were Santa Monica College, Glendale College and Whittier College. At Santa Monica, more than 1,000 students attended a teach-in.

A massive protest took place at UCLA, where about 2,000 students rallied at the center of the campus. WSW

supporters distributed over 700 copies of the open letter to students on the fight against war.

Shantee Larkins, a UCLA staff member, spoke to a WSWs reporter. “Frankly, I think the students of this country need to evaluate the motivations behind our government’s insistence and push for war,” she said, “given our history in other countries.

“I think there is a lot more here that hasn’t been discussed; the media are not discussing, not asking questions. Journalism has gone straight out the window, with the exception of alternative press like wsws.org.

“A very small cabal in Washington is going to benefit from this war. All you have to do is look at where the money goes. The poor are going to suffer and students are already suffering. Costs are going up, there is going to be a mid-year [tuition] hike and cutbacks in student services. Public education has been suffering for a long time and it’s going to suffer further.”

Tracey, a communications major, said, “Bush stole the election and staffed his administration with oil executives. This is a big business war not an American war.”

Seth, a sociology major, said, “I’m here because I am against this war. There is no question that this attack had been planned and decided on long ago, perhaps before the war in Afghanistan. It wouldn’t surprise me.

“Oil interests dominate the government and they will do anything to push other countries to support their plans in Iraq to grab the oil wealth. The US armed and financed the Taliban so UNOCAL and Mobil could have a pipeline from the Caspian oil fields to the Indian Ocean.

“I am concerned that the media tells us nothing—nobody is asking questions and something this important absolutely needs to be discussed. But the media peddles the lies the government wants on the front page.

“This is not the 1960s. Most of the students learned what happened, how the Democratic Party took over the movement and buried it. The Democrats have no credibility at all, and yes they supported Bush to a man. But the leadership doesn’t have a perspective beyond protest marches. That’s the problem.”



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