

California students and faculty denounce education cuts

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Thousands of students, faculty, and workers rallied throughout California Thursday in opposition to budget cuts, tuition hikes, and faculty layoffs. The demonstrations were called on the first day of the new year at several of the schools, as students returned to sharp tuition increases and higher class sizes.

The turnout exceeded the expectations of organizers, reflecting mounting anger over the economic crisis and the massive budget cuts pushed through in California by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and the Democratic Party-controlled state legislature.

Rallies, teach-ins, and walkouts took place throughout the 10-campus UC system, which has 220,000 students and 170,000 faculty and staff.

UC campuses have laid off nearly 900 employees this year, and plan to lay off 1,000 more next year, according to a report by UC Vice President Patrick Lenz.

The UC system has raised student tuition by nearly 10 percent this year, and has increased class sizes up to 25 percent. UC's governing board is pushing for an additional 33 percent fee hike next year, to more than \$10,000 a year. The state is planning to implement \$2 billion in education cuts over the course of the next two years.

At UC Berkeley, as many as 5,000 students, professors and staff participated in a rally and march. The demonstrators yelled, "No cuts! No fees! Education should be free!" and, "Is this the corporations' university? No!"

The walkout was sponsored by a number of student and faculty organizations, including the California Student Association, which represents over 200,000 students, the American Association of University

Professors, and the University Professional and Technical Employees.

At UC Berkeley, the administration has already eliminated classes, laid off lectures and custodians, shortened library hours and eliminated Saturday library hours, and is planning to close a number of departments.

A further 700 people rallied at Bruin Plaza in UC Los Angeles, where students similarly denounced tuition hikes and professor layoffs. More walked through the crowded streets chanting and bearing signs.

English professor Jenny Sharpe, one of the speakers at the rally, said, "State support for higher education has to be seen as a public good, not a private privilege."

UC Irvine also held a substantial demonstration, with around five hundred people rallying outside the administration building. Organizers of the protest said that students were dismissed at a number of large lecture classes to attend the rally.

"Some of the students I know are going hungry; they have to choose between textbooks and food," said Chris Kopitzke, a student at UC Irvine.

The hour-long rally featured denunciations of the budget cuts and calls for free education. Some protesters chanted, "They say cut back, we say fight back" while some marched with signs that said, "No fee hikes" and "defend UC." Other signs charted the growth of tuition in the UC system: from free in the 1960s, several hundred dollars in the 1980s, to nearly \$10,000 now.

At UC Davis, striking technical workers picketed in the morning, before setting up a rally at noon, with some three to four hundred faculty, students, and staff present. Afterwards, there was a march to the

administration building, and then across campus to the Chancellor's house.

Much of the chanting and slogans were directed against UC President Mark Yudof, who has pushed for the tuition increases and layoffs. This summer, Yudof was given emergency powers by the UC system, which he has used to implement furloughs amounting to ten percent pay cuts for faculty. At the same time, top administrators in the UC system have given themselves substantial pay raises.

While the rallies in the UC system expressed growing opposition among students and workers, the orientation of the organizers was toward pressuring the Democratic Party. There were no critiques of the role of the Obama administration, which has supported massive spending cuts throughout the country by refusing to bail out states facing budget deficits, including California.

The International Students for Social Equality held a rally at San Diego State University, the only event organized outside of the UC system. In contrast to the UC demonstrations, the rally was called on the basis of opposition to the Democratic and Republican parties and the Obama administration, and for an independent socialist movement of the working class.

Two ISSE members addressed a crowd of students and faculty. Cody Stephens, the president of the ISSE at SDSU, opened with a speech outlining the position of the ISSE on the UC walkout.

"The ISSE called this rally in defense of the impulse behind the UC walkout," said Stephens, "which we consider to be a healthy display of political discontent. By orienting their struggle toward the Democratic Party and the trade unions, however, the organizers of the UC walkout are betraying the popular frustration that is the essence of the protest."

Ricardo Ruiz, the secretary of the ISSE at SDSU, outlined the nature of the budget cuts facing all three tiers of the public higher education in California. "The California budget slashed \$3 billion from public higher education this fiscal year," said Ruiz. "It easy to forget amongst such chaos that not long ago a college education in California was practically free... Today this seems like a fantasy."

A full report on the SDSU rally will be published on the WSWS on Saturday.

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party and members of the ISSE attended several of the demonstrations and distributed a statement, "For a fight against education cuts in California!"



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