

Hundreds of students rally against budget cuts in Detroit

A WSWS reporting team
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Hundreds of students participated in a demonstration at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan to protest budget cuts on Monday.

Students demanded a repeal of cuts to the Michigan Promise Scholarship, which provides grants of between \$1,000 and \$4,000 to assist 100,000 state residents to pay for college. These students will see a substantial increase in their tuition as early as the spring.

The elimination of these scholarships was part of an overall 61 percent cut to student financial aid. Also eliminated were state nursing scholarships, the Michigan Work-Study Program, and the Part-Time Independent Student Program.

The rally's leadership sought to line up the demonstration behind the Democratic Party and Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm, who has presided over the cuts in education throughout the state. Earlier in the day, Granholm spoke to a small assembly of students and Democratic Party supporters at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti.

Granholm tried to present herself as a proponent of higher education. "I didn't negotiate this budget," she said. "It was presented to me. I didn't agree with it. But I decided to sign it and fight." She sought to palm off education cuts as solely the work of Republicans, despite her active participation and the participation of the Democratic Party, which controls the state legislature, in the budget cutting process.

Granholm recently announced state cuts to K-12 schools. The most recent bout of cuts will slash per-pupil funding for schools in the state by nearly \$300. Some schools, largely in the suburban areas of Detroit, face substantially higher cuts of more than \$500 per student.

No politicians showed up to the rally at Wayne State University, but the organizers of the meeting sought to

channel the students' anger along the lines proposed by Granholm. The Student Council, which helped to organize the event with support of the College Democrats, gave out shirts saying, "Hey legislators, keep your 'Michigan promise.'"

When one of the College Democrats mentioned Granholm in his speech, boos were heard in the crowd. "You need to be booing the Republicans," he said nervously.

Members of another student group, whose members wore prison uniforms, put forward similar views. One of its members spoke at the rally, saying "why is it fair for prisoners to get cable TV when students can't even afford to attend college. The average prisoner costs \$35,000 per year."

Andre Damon from the ISSE said he disagreed with what he called an "attempt to pit students against lower-income workers," saying "What matters is the \$35 million apiece that bank CEOs are taking home this year. That's where your scholarship money is going. Not to other workers; they're just as badly hurt by this policy as students are. The banks are robbing society at your expense."

Damon continued: "It's necessary to draw some conclusions: The two parties are in this together." He said that Granholm's attempts to present herself as a defender of education are a fraud. "She signed the bill and she postures like she's trying to defend education." Damon noted, "Democrats control both the US House and Senate, the White House, the governorship, and the mayoralty of this city."

Jesse, a member of the International Students for Social Equality, said, "The struggle of students needs to be united with the struggle of workers. When you graduate, you'll be standing in unemployment lines just like the rest of the Detroit working class. We need to

fight together with the workers.”

The sentiments of a large portion, if not the majority of the students present, ran against support for the Democratic Party. Following the speeches, the students rallied around the campus chanting, “No cuts, no fees, education should be free.” The demonstration spilled over into city streets, but was contained when police threatened to arrest its organizers.

ISSE members distributed leaflets that stated, “These cuts are not being imposed against the will of the Democratic Party. Rather, they express the interests of the corporate and financial elite that both the Democrats and Republicans represent. The destruction of public education is being carried out in accordance with the cost-cutting measures announced by Barack Obama, and are the direct result of his decision to refuse to bail out states facing enormous budget deficits. Granholm has played a leading part in this process. No support should be given to Granholm, Obama, or the Democratic Party!”

The WSWS spoke to students at both Wayne State and Eastern Michigan University. Trambien, a junior at Wayne State University, said, “I have friends and classmates who received the Promise scholarship and they have been told they have to pay back the money.” Trambien was equally critical of the Republicans and the Democrats, including Granholm, for the cuts that have been carried out.

“It’s really unfortunate because this will affect everyone, from those in college down to kids in kindergarten. They are also cutting money from kids in K-12. Education for working class students is just being destroyed.”

Reem, who attended high school in nearby Dearborn but now goes to Wayne State, said, “They are cutting so much money from all of the schools. How can students further themselves this way? In Dearborn they are cutting over \$500 per student this year alone. How can they take all of this money? What are people supposed to do about getting an education?” She said that she thinks the government should stop the cuts and give the money back to schools.

“My aunt teaches at a charter school and she said she has 40 people in her class,” she said. “Can you imagine that? 40 people? This is bad for both the teacher and the students. Who can learn under those conditions? How

can teachers teach, and how can students learn? It’s just impossible.”

Joseph, a sophomore at Eastern Michigan University, told WSWS reporters after Granholm’s speech that he had never been actively involved in politics, but that he came to the event because he had lost the Promise scholarship.

“My family doesn’t have that much money,” Joseph said, “I’m one of four kids. I got the scholarship because of my good MME [Michigan Merit Examination] score. And now it’s gone. They’re choosing to cut back on all these things people depend on when there are a lot of areas that could stand to be cut.” Eastern Michigan University has 2,200 students, or some 14 percent of its student body, with Michigan Promise scholarships.

“I know they came up with the name—Michigan Promise—in a corporate boardroom, but they should’ve thought that one through a little more carefully,” Joseph said. “It’s apparent that Michigan isn’t doing well economically. The people who have money and a lot of disposable income aren’t getting cuts. I had to quit my sports to work more just to afford rent, food, books—the students need that money to live. We can’t all get on food stamps and get welfare assistance.”



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