

For a working class movement to defend higher education!

International Students for Social Equality
24 November 2009

Recent 32 percent fee increases at the University of California (UC) have provoked an outpouring of opposition from students. These protests should be welcomed and become the starting point for a movement throughout the US and internationally to reverse crippling cuts in education and other basic social services.

The fee raises, which will effectively put the UC system out of reach for thousands of working class youth, are part of billions in budget cuts. Similar attacks have been made in the Cal State system, and additional funds have been cut from community colleges, adult education, health care programs, and critical state services. More cuts are to come, as the state faces a budget deficit of more than \$20 billion next year.

In protesting the fee increases, students have learned a bitter lesson: there can be no hope of “pressuring” the university boards and the state government into rescinding the attack on education.

The state reacted by deploying hundreds of police, some in full riot gear, to block any democratic participation by faculty, staff and students in determining the future of the universities. Twelve students at UC Los Angeles were quickly arrested for speaking against the cuts at the regents’ meeting, two students were tasered outside of the meeting, and one student suffered a broken leg after a confrontation with police. Dozens were arrested at UC Davis and UC Berkeley after occupying buildings to oppose the cuts.

Police at UCLA were armed with advanced crowd suppression equipment including a device euphemistically called a “bean bag gun.” The gun fires a fabric “pillow” containing #9 lead shot which is meant to stun or incapacitate a subject but can easily cause death when aimed, accidentally or otherwise, at a target’s vital areas.

The reaction of the police, with the backing of the university administration and the state government, is an ominous warning. Over 40 years ago, the apparatus of the state was mobilized in a similar fashion to suppress widespread demonstrations on college campuses against the Vietnam War. In that case, the repression culminated in national guardsmen opening fire on unarmed students at Kent State, killing four and wounding thirteen others.

The protests are an important sign of growing resistance to the attack on education and the interests of the working class as a whole. For this opposition to succeed, however, what is needed above all is a political program and perspective to guide it.

Reject all budget cuts and fee increases! Reinstate laid off professors and workers!

The International Students for Social Equality calls for an immediate end to all fee increases, faculty layoffs, furloughs and wage cuts. Tuition for higher education throughout the country must be sharply reduced, and free, public education should be made available to everyone.

Billions should be poured into rebuilding our schools to ensure a decent, quality education for everyone, from kindergarten to university. The ISSE also calls for immediate relief for students who have been burdened by extraordinary levels of debt, often to the very banks and financial institutions that have benefited from taxpayer funds.

Jobs and quality wages for all!

Students graduating from high school and college face a bleak job market, which is only getting worse. Unemployment in California now stands at 12.5 percent, and real unemployment is much higher. Since the recession began, close to 8 million jobs nation-wide have been wiped out. Wages, benefits and hours are being slashed across the country in order to boost the profitability of the corporate and financial elite.

The ISSE calls for a public works program to guarantee full-time employment for all those who need a job. Instead of using mass unemployment as an excuse to destroy public education, we demand the allocation of the necessary resources to put people to work building homes, schools, health care facilities and basic social infrastructure.

Reverse the bank bailouts! Redirect bank bonuses and military spending to meet social needs!

The argument that there is “no money” to fund education and other social services, that cuts are necessary, is a lie. The US government’s bailout of the banks and Wall Street could total over \$23 trillion. The bonus pool at Wall Street firms is expected to rise this year to \$28 billion—more than the anticipated budget shortfall for California in the 2010-11 fiscal year! Every year, hundreds of billions are expended on the US military in order to fund illegal wars of repression abroad.

The ISSE calls for the expropriation of the ill-gotten gains of the

financial and corporate elite. These vast sums have been “earned” through parasitism, speculation, and fraud. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan must be immediately halted, with the funds used to rebuild the societies devastated by American intervention and meet pressing needs at home.

Turn to the working class! Build independent student and neighborhood committees!

The attack on public education in California and throughout the country is part of a broader attack on the working class as a whole. The most powerful sections of the corporate and financial elite are using the economic crisis to curtail or eliminate social programs, drive down wages, and destroy millions of jobs.

Education cannot be defended on the universities alone, nor through the occupation of this or that university building aimed at pressuring the government. What is required is a broad social and political movement of the working class, on the basis of its independent class interests.

A turn to the working class does not mean an alliance with the trade unions. The presence of trade union executives at student meetings and protests is aimed at blocking unity between students and workers while providing a false veneer of solidarity. These are not working class organizations. They have worked systematically to impose defeats on workers, while channeling anger into support for the Democratic Party and cultivating the privileges of their own conservative bureaucracies.

The ISSE also rejects those who argue that the attack on education is only an attack on minority populations, or that it is a manifestation of racism. This assault is directed against the working class as a whole—of every race, ethnicity and nationality. The working class can successfully resist it only through its unity across all divides.

The ISSE calls for the formation of independent student and neighborhood committees to organize opposition and establish the closest ties with the working class as a whole.

Break with the Democrats and Republicans! For the political independence of the working class!

Students and workers face a political struggle against the Schwarzenegger administration, the Democratic Party-controlled state legislature and 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 mean only 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 fight to defend education requires a political break with the Democratic and Republican Parties, the twin parties of big business.

For equality and socialism!

What kind of society is it that guarantees the multi-million-dollar bonuses of bank executives while starving the education system of resources? It is a society in which the accumulation of private wealth and profit is the basic principle, not the needs of the people. It is a society in which a wealthy elite controls every aspect of economic and political life. It is, in short, capitalism.

There is no solution within California alone. The problems confronting the state are only a concentrated expression of the failure of capitalism. Indeed, recent mass demonstrations in Europe against education cuts demonstrate that workers throughout the world face the same basic question—the question of the organization of social and economic life. 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 establishment of a workers’ government that will nationalize the banks and large corporations and transform them 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!

To contact the ISSE, click here.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact