

Thousands rally in San Diego, California against education cuts

A WSWS reporting team
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About 1,000 students and faculty gathered at a March 4 rally against education cuts at San Diego State University in California. A similar number of people demonstrated at the University of California, San Diego. A subsequent demonstration in downtown San Diego drew several thousand.

The events in San Diego were among the largest demonstrations in the state. Tens of thousands of students, parents and workers demonstrated throughout the country against school closings, tuition hikes, and teacher layoffs. (See, “Students and staff protest against education cuts in US”)

Among the main speakers at the San Diego rallies were members of the International Students for Social Equality, the student organization of the Socialist Equality Party. The ISSE, which helped organize the demonstration at SDSU, called for a break with the Democratic Party and for a socialist movement to defend education.

Despite their size, the San Diego rallies went largely unreported in the media. If their numbers were mentioned, they were generally reported as “hundreds.” This was part of what appeared to be a general attempt by the media to downplay the significance of the demonstrations.

The first speaker at the SDSU rally was Priscilla Diaz, a straight-A high school student who was denied admittance to SDSU because of budget cuts. The university cut its total enrollment by 4,500 this year, and expects to cut another 11,000 over the next two years.

The other speakers included representatives of the March 4 UCSD educational committee as well as various other student groups on campus. These groups, to the extent that they had any explicit political perspective, called on students to lobby their local

representatives and the Democratic Party to carry out reforms.

Several of the speakers called for repealing a rule that requires a two-thirds vote of the legislature to raise taxes. Trade unions in the state have championed this as a measure that would save education.

Speaking on behalf of the ISSE were Andre Damon and Emanuele Saccarelli, a professor of political science at SDSU.

Damon argued that pressuring the Democratic Party was completely unviable, saying, “We have a Democratic president, the California State Senate is Democratic, Congress is controlled by the Democrats, yet these cuts are still being implemented.”

“We need a new political party, one that represents the entire working class; the people who have been the victims of budget cuts, school shutdowns, and unemployment,” Damon said.

Saccarelli strongly condemned the Campus Faculty Association trade union, of which he said he was a “captive member,” for refusing to support the walkout. Once the rally had taken place, the union sought to take credit for it, and to persuade students to send protests to Democratic politicians.

Saccarelli said that the unions only seek to divide and repress workers, citing the fact that the United Auto Workers called police on its own members at the NUMMI plant in Fremont, California who “wanted to do something besides close the plant.”

He further denounced the Democratic Party and Obama. Saccarelli noted that Obama had come out explicitly to endorse the mass firing of teachers in a Rhode Island school district, holding this up as a model of education reform. Obama claims that “students and teachers ought to be accountable,” Saccarelli said. “How come the billionaires and the hedge fund

managers and the generals and the war criminals are never held accountable, but only the teachers?”

The demonstration in downtown San Diego began with a rally at Balboa Park, which drew between 1,500 and 2,000 people. The group then marched downtown to the governor’s office, picking up even more members. The path of the rally went past high schools, and hundreds of high school students joined as classes were let out.

Ricardo, a senior at San Diego State University and member of the International Students for Social Equality, was among those who addressed the rally at the governor’s office, calling for a socialist movement to unite all workers to defend public education.

“It is not a matter of what must be cut,” he said. “Instead, it is a question of the necessary political strategy to oppose all cuts.”

“We are always being told that there is no money for education and other basic services. This after the treasury has been emptied to bail out the banks and fund two criminal wars,” he said.

For a video of these remarks, see, “ISSE members speak at San Diego rallies”



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