

Students and staff protest against education cuts in US

A WSWWS reporting team
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Tens of thousands of students, teachers and workers participated in protests Thursday against cuts in education across the US. Many of the largest protests were in California, where the state government has pushed through massive cuts in K-12 education funding, as well as sharp increases in university fees.

Students at many colleges and schools walked out for at least part of the day, with the main state universities in California and several other states staging rallies. Students in the University of California system were recently hit by a 32 percent increase in fees. Large evening demonstrations were called in the major cities as well.

In Southern California, as many as 2,500 demonstrated at Cal State Long Beach; about 500 at University of California Los Angeles; and 1,000 at University of California San Diego. Several other schools held rallies that attracted hundreds of students and staff. A rally in downtown San Diego in the evening drew several thousand; in LA, about a thousand participated in the evening rally.

More than 500 high school students participated in a walkout at six schools in the Los Angeles Unified School Districts, which have been subject to steep cuts.

In Northern California, over one thousand students participated in a demonstration at University of California Berkley, later joining hundreds gathered across the bay in Oakland. A demonstration in the evening in San Francisco drew perhaps five thousand.

Several students in Oakland, California temporarily shut down a highway in the early evening. Dozens were arrested and at least one protester was hurt after jumping from the freeway.

At San Diego State University, students walked out of class at 11:30 AM. This demonstration and the demonstration downtown were addressed by members

of the International Students for Social Equality, who spoke out against the Democratic and Republican parties and called for a socialist program to defend education. (See, "For a working class movement to defend education!")

The WSWWS spoke to students and workers participating in the demonstrations in Los Angeles. Charlene, a third year Psychology student at UCLA, transferred from Orange Coast College. "It was very hard for me to make the 32 percent fee increase," she said. "My financial aid doesn't cover it, and I plan to borrow from my family."

Another student, who will be graduating, is in his senior year majoring in History and Asian American Studies. "The budget cuts have been campus-wide. Professors aren't able to print as freely as before beyond test materials. And they're being made to take furlough days. Classes are being cut, and there are less class offerings. Our education is being cheapened."

Alvaro, a maintenance worker at UCLA, told the WSWWS, "We are protesting today because our hours have been cut by five percent, from 40 to 38 hours each week. On Fridays we have been cut by two hours, from eight to six.

"This cut affects 4,000 workers at UCLA," he said. "Also being cut are student workers who work alongside us. Some of those students only get one or two hours a week! It is impossible to live on that."

Alvaro added, "As far as the union is concerned, they have only been showing up lately. Most of the time, they ignore us. AFSCME [the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees] represents workers at all the UC campuses, but we are fighting separately when we should be united. We need to strike together at all the campuses, together with the students."

Maggie is in her first year at UCLA majoring in Communications. She discussed some of the effects of the budget cuts. “The lecture classes are very large. They used to have small discussion groups to have time to discuss and understand the material. Now they’ve closed the discussion groups, even though they are an important part of the class.

“The housing here is more expensive than anywhere else,” Maggie added. “It’s \$15,000 a year for room and board. The building where I live was built in the 70s. It’s nasty and really old, and there are ants everywhere. Six of us girls have to share one bathroom, one shower, and two sinks.”

Fowzia majors in Islamic Studies and South Asian Studies. “In regards to ethnic studies, they’re gutting Islamic Studies completely. I’m Muslim, and I study South Asian Studies. I think Islamic Studies is very important because we’ve become a global civilization. Several professors are leaving.

“In the languages, they’re limiting the number of students in the Asian languages and do not allow auditing. They’re cutting guest lecturers and associate professors. They just don’t have the funds.”

Shawn, a fourth year English student, said, “This year there were classes where people had no chairs to sit. One room had 120 chairs, and there were 125 students.

“The university shut a whole computer lab down in one of the libraries as a budget cut. There were about 40 computers in it. Now, every time I have to print a paper, I just hope it’ll print. I’ll always have to pay, but there are so many students trying to get access to few printers. Then there’s no paper. They should be building more computer labs, not closing them.

“They tried to get rid of the 24-hour library. But the students protested, and they ended up keeping it open.”

Students in New York conducted protests and walkouts against budget cuts and tuition hikes throughout the day. Some students left their classes at the City University of New York colleges including the City College of New York, Hunter College, and at least two private institutions, the New School and New York University.

The demonstrations also coincided with protests over plans by the city and the Manhattan Transit Authority to eliminate free Metrocards for hundreds of thousands of working class students in the city. Several dozen students from EBC Bushwick High School For Public

Service in Brooklyn attended an afternoon protest at City Hall.

Frances said: “I came here today because the MTA wants to cancel the free Metrocards for students. We are protesting because this will close the schools, since so many students won’t even be able to ride to school. At the least, students would have to change schools.”

Kimberly agreed that the city would simply have to close many schools if the MTA took away the subsidized Metrocards. “My mother would go broke if she had to pay for my card. I think that this is a set-up. They want to take our education away from us. There’s money for the army, and there’s money for the charter schools. Bloomberg has mad money and he doesn’t want to share it.”

About 300 students and their supporters rallied at New York Governor Paterson’s Manhattan office in the afternoon. One student from Brooklyn Tech, Ashiz, told the *World Socialist Web Site*: “They are making us pay for our Metrocards and for our education. They come in limousines but say they do not have enough money. They don’t fix elevators in train stations, even for ten years.”

On Thursday evening, hundreds of students, mostly from public high school from throughout the city attended the MTA’s hearings on fare increases, the eliminations of bus lines, and the possible elimination of free Metrocards for public school students. Police began turning students away from the auditorium of the Fashion Institute of Technology where the hearing was being held.



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