

Liberian students protest increase in university fees

Our correspondent
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On March 31 and April 1 thousands of students at the University of Liberia (UL) in Monrovia—the nation’s highest institution of learning—protested against the hiking of tuition fees by 148 percent. The first day of the two-day protest saw a sit-in lasting four hours in front of the Cassel Building (which houses the offices of the university president and other administrators).

Students chanted slogans and carried placards, including ones that read: “Don’t Privatize the UL,” “UL is not a profit-making enterprise but a center of learning,” “Stop the attack on education.”

Later, the students marched on the grounds of the National Legislature, adjacent to the university, where they demanded action to prevent the increase in university fees. Amongst those addressing the protesters were members of the International Students for Social Equality at the University of Liberia, who spoke against moves to privatize education and argued for the socializing of education and for free education for all.

Credit hours fees have been raised from 100 Liberian dollars (US\$1.42) to LD 175 (\$2.50). Registration and fees have also risen from LD 645 (\$9.21) to LD 1450 (\$20.71).

This is under conditions where the recent census by the National Statistical Bureau reveals that 68 percent of Liberia’s population of 3.4 million lives on less than \$1 a day; unemployment is currently around 85 percent and the country has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world.

“The fundamental reason why the University of Liberia was set into historical motion was to serve as a center of learning and not as a profit making enterprise,” said student leader Jacob Jallah, who

presented a petition to the National Legislature.

Speaking to the WSWS, Charles Wesseh, a junior student of Biology and Chemistry, explained, “I had to migrate from as far as southeastern Liberia to Monrovia to attain education, as this is the only state university. I cannot survive the hike and will definitely drop out from college.”

Wesseh noted the fact mentioned above, that “the economy is so bad that 68 out of every 100 Liberians live on less than a dollar per day.”

A third year student in Accounting and Management, Augustine B. Nagbe, told the WSWS, “The increase will kick thousands of students out of school this semester and in coming semesters as the fee hike is going to continue according to the administration.

“Unemployment currently stands at 85 percent as the government of Liberia continues to downsize, leading to job cuts and the layoffs of thousands of public employees just to meet World Bank and IMF regulations,” he emphasized.

Paul Nyenpan, studying sociology, commented, “A huge number of our comrades only survive in school as a result of scholarship and financial aid from individuals in society. The 148 percent will acutely reduce support, leading to the dropping out of thousands of students.”

In day two of the student rally on the grounds of the legislature, the agitation for socialized education grew in strength.

“We are seeing an attack on education in this country,” Marylyn Harris, a fourth year student of political science and history, pointed out. “Tuition fees have been increased by more than 50 percent in non-public high schools and support for public schools from the national government continues to nosedive. This attack must stop.”

Moses Weah said, “These ruling class people argued that the government of Liberia has suffered the effect of the global financial crisis, thus undermining its funding capacity to the UL, but there are fleets of cars being bought [by the rich] every day.”



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