

# Louisiana college students protest budget cuts in Baton Rouge

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13 November 2010

University students from throughout Louisiana descended on the capitol in Baton Rouge on November 10 to demonstrate against cuts in state spending on education. About 500 students from Louisiana State University (LSU), Southern University, University of New Orleans (UNO), Southeastern Louisiana University (SELU), University of Louisiana-Lafayette (ULL), Nicholls State University, Northwestern State University and Grambling State University were in attendance.

The budget cuts in education, already amounting to \$310 million, are part of a larger series of austerity measures that will affect virtually all state-funded public services. Recently, Governor Bobby Jindal, a Republican, announced an additional cut in higher education spending of as much as 35 %, or up to \$500 million more.

Students crowded the steps at the base of the capitol with signs, banners, and raised fists. As elsewhere, the policies of the federal and state governments have produced major disillusionment and an acute feeling of frustration among students, workers and youth in Louisiana. One sign, outlining the state's crisis of education and indicting Governor Jindal, read sarcastically, "Iff you kan reede this, thanck Bobby Jindal."

State officials and legislators made clear their hostility to the students' demands. Only one Democratic state legislator attended the demonstration. Another legislator screamed at demonstrators as he left the capitol building. "We don't need socialism in our economic policy," he said, "and we don't need it in our educational system! This is Un-American!"

Coupled with the ending of the meager federal stimulus package at the close of this year, the entire state higher education system is in crisis. Tuition has

risen sharply, entire departments and programs have been cut, teachers, faculty and workers have been laid off, and services essential to the survival of these institutions are in danger.

"The cleaning staff in the Liberal Arts building have been laid off," one UNO student explained. "The classrooms are filthy. It's not uncommon to see trash all over the room. My anthropology classroom even floods." He went on to talk about his financial concerns: "My tuition is skyrocketing. If it goes up any more, I won't be able to continue."

Foreign language departments have also been hard hit. "First they cut our third level course, then our second year course, and in the spring they will even cut German 1101," a professor of German at LSU explained. One of her students added that if he graduated in the spring, he would still have to make up a course due to cuts in the university's curriculum.

There were a series of speakers at the rally, including students and professors from each university. The majority of speakers, although passionate, did nothing reveal the class character of the situation—appealing instead to the Democrats against Governor Jindal. Typical was a professor from Southern University who proclaimed, "When young people get involved in the political system, you can literally change the world!" Such a statement expresses and propagates the misconception that the corporate-controlled two-party system represents the interests of the people.

One exception was Gregory William Esteven, a student from SELU, who broached the wider issues confronting working people: "All our public universities are facing such situations to one degree or another, and it means that higher education will be available to increasingly fewer people, and especially to the working class who make up the vast majority in this

country and state. It means that Louisiana will have a dramatically-less educated population, which translates into a less educated workforce and political culture.”

The stories told to the rally show the direction of the education system, not only in Louisiana, but also across the United States and other developed nations. The universities’ lack of funding will result in the abandonment of an entire generation of working class youth, and loss of a vast intellectual potential. The education-deprived youth will be offered only the future of becoming instruments of the ruling class in new wars driven by the profit concerns of the ruling class.

There has been resistance to this new ruthless offensive waged by the capitalists, although it has been sporadic and lacks unity or direction. Last month, roughly 70 UNO students occupied a campus building for several hours, ending with a brief and minor clash with the police.

The working class and youth need a new direction. The youth and working class must break from the big-business parties and independently pursue a socialist program—a program that values the many over the few, of human need over profit.



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