

California students face unending tuition hikes

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On November 16, California State University trustees meeting at California State University, Long Beach approved a 9 percent increase in tuition and fees. Students, furious at another round of increases, confronted the trustees and forced them to reconvene at an alternate site, where they passed the fee hike.

The increase of \$498 will bring student costs to \$5,970 per year. If one were to include the average campus fees of \$1,047, the total, not including books or housing, rises to \$7,017. The California State system has 412,000 students. Last year, the University lost some 10,000 students who could no longer afford to attend, and there is no end to fee hikes in sight.

College students across California can expect their tuition to continue rising. After years of budget cuts, the University of California (UC), California State University (CSU) and community college systems raised their tuition by an average of 21 percent this year, and they are already planning more for next year.

As part of the proposal, the trustees included a request that the state increase CSU funding by \$397 million next year in order to prevent the tuition hike. This is nothing but wishful thinking as California's revenues have continued to decline.

Similarly, UC president Mark Yudof has proposed tuition hikes of between 8 and 16 percent each year for the next 4 years, potentially raising tuition to \$22,000 a year by the 2015-16 school years. This year's tuition is already 18 percent higher than last year's. Last week, though, Yudof focused on the UC's request for an additional \$411 million in state funding next year in order to avoid tuition hikes.

However, like the CSU trustees, Yudof knows full well that the politicians in Sacramento have no intention of refunding education. Instead the regents and trustees are hoping to wash their hands of responsibility and deflect growing student anger.

This attitude is exemplified by the President of the California State Student Association, Gregory Washington, who told the *Los Angeles Times*, "I support giving the Legislature the opportunity to buy out the tuition increase. It puts the ball in their court in terms of defining the quality of higher education they want to see."

Leaving the question of education funding to state legislators is as good as endorsing future cuts. Through their actions Democratic Governor Jerry Brown and the state legislature have repeatedly told Californians that the quality of education they want to see is "dismal."

For the 2008–09 school year the UC and CSU systems were receiving around \$3 billion each in state contributions. After this year's budget cut funding to both systems by \$650 million, the state's contribution is hovering above \$2 billion each. For the first time in history, the UC system is actually receiving more money from tuition than it receives from the state.

In fact, the additional cuts triggered in the state's budget if revenues continue to fall below rosy predictions are unlikely to make up the difference. The budget will cut an additional \$100 million each from the UC, CSU and community college systems if estimated revenues fall \$2 billion short of the budget's predictions.

According to State Controller John Chiang, during the first four months of this fiscal year California is already short \$1.5 billion. The State Finance Department puts the difference at "only" \$1.275 billion. Either way, the state is looking at a significant gap in this year's budget.

The latest estimate released by California's Legislative Analysts Office predicts a \$3.7 billion shortfall this fiscal year and an additional \$10 billion shortfall next year. Including the already planned trigger cuts, that leaves a \$13 billion gap for the next budget.

Far from refunding education, Brown is most likely to fill that gap with even more cuts to all levels of education. The members of the financial elite that serve as UC

regents and CSU trustees know this, and are terrified that there will be a mass movement of students against the bipartisan calls to make workers pay for the economic crisis.

In response to expected protests, the UC regents canceled their meeting in San Francisco this week, citing a police warning about “credible” threats of violence. Given the excessive police violence against student protesters at Berkeley and Davis this past week, the most credible source of violence at the protests would be the police themselves.

More important for the regents’ decision is the growing consciousness among students that the regents represent the same financial elite that caused the economic crisis and is demanding that students and workers pay for it.

The regents are appointed by the governor for twelve-year terms and are regularly chosen from wealthy businessmen who make large campaign contributions. The prime example of the incestuous relationship between business and politics among the regents is Richard Blum.

Blum is a multimillionaire investment banker who was appointed to the Board of Regents in 2002 by former Governor Gray Davis, a Democrat. He is the husband of Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein and has profited handsomely from the housing crisis. Blum is chairman of the board for the CB Richard Ellis Group, which was awarded a government contract in 2008 to sell foreclosed homes. Suspiciously, Blum’s private investment firm bought over \$37 million worth of new CBRE shares shortly before news of the contract raised the share price by over 25 percent.

It is no surprise, given Blum’s ties to the Democrats and the financial elite, that he has openly called for the UC system to seek private funding from corporations and to give up looking for public funding. Small wonder that Yudof is willing to float an unlikely scheme to avoid cuts in an attempt to draw students’ attention away from the fact that people like Blum are given any say at all in how the UC system is run.

The UC regents and CSU trustees are not alone in their efforts to prevent a serious struggle by teachers, students, and workers against cuts to education. They are aided by teachers unions, which do not represent their members, but rather a privileged layer of union executives that is closely tied to the Democratic Party.

After spending millions of dollars campaigning for Governor Brown, the California Teachers Association (CTA) has stuck by their man, calling this year’s budget, which stands to cut over \$2 billion from higher education,

“the best that could have been achieved for schools under the circumstances.” They have steadfastly refused to mobilize their members in defense of education, or even slightly criticize the Democrats who have wholeheartedly voted for these cuts to education.

The California Faculty Association (CFA), which is affiliated with the CTA, has called a one-day strike at two CSU campuses in order to let their members blow off steam without raising any serious challenge to the budget cuts. In neither the CFA’s statement nor the CTA’s endorsement of the strike is there any call for systemwide action or a demand that the state refund education.

Instead, the CFA leadership is intentionally trying to limit the strike to only address the issue of faculty raises. It is seeking to mislead its members by claiming, “The real issue is how the Chancellor chooses to spend the money he does have.”

The CFA has even chosen for its headline slogan the timid “We don’t want to strike, but we will.” That slogan certainly does not reflect the sentiments among teachers and students who are eager to fight for everyone’s right to an education.

To win that fight, workers, teachers and students must break from the myopic isolation of the union bureaucrats and broaden the struggle. The issue of teacher pay is not limited to two campuses in the CSU system. It is common to all public teachers in the state and internationally and is intimately tied to the questions of student debt and open access to education.

The defense of public education and the rights of teachers must be connected to a mass mobilization of the working class as a whole, in opposition to the Democratic and Republican Parties and the capitalist system they defend.



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