

New York: CUNY students denounce police attacks

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Hundreds of students from the City University of New York (CUNY) marched Monday from Madison Square Park to Baruch College in lower Manhattan to protest police violence that culminated in the arrest of 15 students last week. The march also opposed a proposed tuition hike of \$300 for the colleges of the City University of New York.

The college cancelled classes held after 3:00 p.m., and the New York Police Department maintained a heavy presence at the demonstration. NYPD squad cars and vans were ubiquitous, and motorcycle police attempted to hem in the marchers. Police could be seen readying the orange netting used for kettling protesters. Over a dozen police were observed in full riot gear.

The CUNY Board of Trustees was meeting inside Baruch to vote on the 30 percent tuition increase that would affect all students in the CUNY system. As expected, the board approved the tuition hike. The increase was a part of Democratic New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's state budget, along with \$10 billion in cuts to social services, education, and pensions.

At a public hearing on the increase last week, students who wanted to attend were prevented from doing so, and several were assaulted by officers from CUNY's Public Safety Department. Some were struck by nightsticks and others were dragged out of the building.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to a number of students who had come to the protest.

Mahjabi and Rama are students at Baruch College, where the violence occurred last week. Mahjabi said, "Students were protesting, but they weren't violent. I don't know what happened, but they tried to sit and that's when the cops got violent. It wasn't the students' fault.

"I think these tuition hikes are going to affect

everybody, all the students, even though we get financial aid. It could get to the point where financial aid might not cover the tuition. We are New Yorkers. We have to work two jobs, three jobs sometimes. And we have families to support or we have to support ourselves. It's really a big concern for me. Most of the CUNY students are working class."

We asked Rama about the pepper spraying of the UC Davis students, who said, "I couldn't believe what I saw. People were sitting down in a park and then a cop passed by spraying pepper spray. It's unbelievable. They were just sitting down, calmly protesting, saying what they think.

"We're here to support our fellow students. We're all working class here. All of the police brutality that's happening is in a way connected because the Board of Trustees and all the people up there, they're the 1 percent, and the students are a part of the 99 percent. They're not thinking about people that are working two jobs by increasing tuition by \$300 every year. That's insane. It's going to affect every CUNY student."

Massiel from Borough of Manhattan Community College said, "I am here today because we are marching against tuition hikes. We're marching against what happened to some of the students last week on the 21st of November. Fifteen students were arrested and we're asking for the head of security to be taken down. We were just asking for Cuomo's attention, asking for us to have a voice at the Board of Trustees meeting."

As to the violence at Baruch, Massiel said, "They're students, you know, young kids. This is a school. Who are they protecting? Are they protecting their students? Why are you hitting us? We're the students." Asked about the dramatic rise in police violence toward peaceful protesters across the country, she said, "I'm not sure why it's happening. I just know that it

shouldn't be happening."

"As far as I know," Massiel said, "CUNY was free through the Great Depression, CUNY was free through other financial crises until 1976, when a predominantly black and Latino student body came in. We have been fighting tuition ever since then. We shouldn't have to be constantly struggling. CUNY should be free for everybody. Education is a human right, not a privilege."

"My family has suffered through this recession. My brothers lost their jobs at a printing company. So did my sister-in-law, and they were having kids at the time. They had just finished buying a condo."

John, a student from Hunter College, told us, "I came out today because they keep on pushing tuition up way too high for the working class and the poor people. Tuition's been raised at least \$2,000 since I've been in the school. I work a full-time job and go to school part-time. During a recession they're just pushing it up too high for most people to afford."

"I saw the footage of the violence last week. I didn't think that was going to happen at a CUNY institution. I mean, this is a public institution. Anybody should be able to go in there and say whatever they want, and occupy the space if they need to. And yet we're not allowed to.

"I think it's because the Board of Trustees is stacked with people who are not from an educational background. I mean, they're millionaires. The chancellor makes half a million dollars a year, plus a chauffeur and \$60,000 living expenses. These people are not from the working class. They're not from the middle class. They have no idea what running an institution like this should be like."

In relation to the pepper-spray attack at UC Davis, John said, "It just reminds you what a struggle this is against people who behave like that, people that behave like we're second-class citizens. The UC Davis incident made me think of solidarity with my classmates, with my peers. It's shocking to see children and young adults get hurt like that."

Misael Peralta, a junior from Hunter College, said, "The tuition hikes are uncalled for. Just because CUNY is the most affordable university in the country does not mean we can afford it. Tuition should become open admissions like it once was. They already are getting more money because they had an increase in enrollment. It is like they are trying to keep up with the

recession. Obama inherited this, but he needs to listen to the people some more."

Professor George Brandon is an anthropologist teaching mostly pre-med students in the Community Health and Social Medicine Department of the Sophie Davis School of Bio-Medicine of the City College of New York. "This is a battle that has been going on in stages since last spring," he said. "There were marches here and in Albany, with a big mobilization on May 12. But they will probably pass the tuition increases."

"They had also pledged a month ago to request funding for adjunct health insurance. It is in danger of not being funded and adjuncts will not have health insurance. Sixty to 70 percent of the courses are taught by adjuncts now. Yet their funding has not kept up with the increased use of adjuncts. They could fund it by seeing that the 'millionaire's tax' does not sunset."

"There are multiple causes to the struggle that is going on, certainly the economic situation. There is an abysmal performance in both the state legislature, and in the White House and Congress. In education, Obama's Race to the Top policy is substantially similar to Bush's No Child Left Behind. I see it as a continuation of Bush's policies."



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