

International statements of support for UC Davis protests

26 November 2011

Sri Lanka

As the Sri Lankan section of the International Students for Social Equality, we vehemently condemn the police attack on students at the University of California, Davis. We have watched this horrific scene on videos. This is a part of a broader attack unleashed on the working class and youth by capitalist regimes worldwide, from the Obama administration in the United States, to the governments of David Cameron in Britain and Mahinda Rajapakse in Sri Lanka.

Here in Sri Lanka, the Rajapakse government has carried out several police attacks on students' protests against the privatization of education and deteriorating conditions in the public universities. Four students were arrested and classes were suspended for 130 students due to these protests. As part of its militarization, the government has enforced a compulsory three-week military training for all students hoping to enter into universities starting this year. And university security services have been granted to two institutions, which function under the purview of the defense ministry. The higher education minister said last week that steps would be taken next year to establish permanent police units on university campuses.

The destruction of public education is only one part of a wholesale attack on every social right won by the working class. A successful struggle against those attacks can be waged by the independent political mobilization of the international working class, based on an international socialist program. Students must turn to the working class for this international struggle.

Oppose attacks on public education!

Oppose repression on students!

Fight for socialism!

International Students for Social Equality in Sri Lanka

Britain

Students in the UK are experiencing a huge rise in university fees, which have put a lot of working class students off the idea of higher education. Education is being marketised, which only serves the interests of finance capital. In my college, we have lost 25 percent teaching time, so the less able students get less teacher attention. Many students have lost their Education Maintenance Allowance, which personally affects them. The picture is the same in hospitals, where vital services are being cut because they cannot afford to stay open.

At the most recent student protest, the police presence was very visible and intimidating. Students were warned that plastic bullets would be used, and thousands of police lined the streets. In a supposedly democratic

country, students and workers should have the right to protest against the cuts, which are having the most negative and detrimental impact on our education and our social provision. However, protests are met with violence and police hostility. There is clear opposition to the cuts and privatisation process, but the media and the government try their best to ignore this, and through violent police tactics try to pressure people into not attending demonstrations.

This is happening all over the world—the repression in Egypt, the pepper spraying at Davis. Internationally, the linking of student and workers struggles is vital to oppose the ruling class and their programme of mass austerity.

Claire, a supporter of the International Students for Social Equality at Woodhouse College, north London

We all watched here in horror at the video of students being pepper-sprayed. It showed so clearly how the state feels about people's inalienable right to assembly and freedom of speech.

On the streets of London, demonstrations are now broken up and "kettled", with students forced to stand surrounded by police for hours, sometimes in freezing conditions without food, shelter or bathrooms. We've seen videos of plainclothes police barging into crowds trying to start fights in order to have a pretext to clamp down.

The oppression we face around the world will not be stopped by pressing this or that politician or police chief, or securing the support of trade unions who have been betraying their members for years. These groups have shown their true colours. The only true allies we have are each other! Workers and students around the world, fighting for an end to social inequality and war. Turn to them and you won't regret it. Turn to them and you will never be betrayed.

Aidan, a supporter of the International Students for Social Equality at Oxford University

The repressive measures meted out to students at UC Davis recently, especially the pepper-spraying of peacefully demonstrating students, echo the efforts of governments globally to increase their police-state powers in reaction to growing opposition to attacks on the education system, high youth unemployment and social inequality.

In Britain, increasing tuition means that graduates will now walk away from their studies \$82,000 in debt. The interests of students and young people are the same in every country, and the political problems facing our generation as we enter into struggle are also international in scope.

The ISSE at the University of Manchester held a meeting on Wednesday where we watched footage of the UC Davis demonstration and placed these events in the context of a two-pronged assault by the ruling class in each country. On the one hand, the weapons of the state are being sharpened—for example the “total policing” methods employed against the student protests in London two weeks ago.

On the other, various political forces, many claiming to represent the traditions of the socialist movement, are being employed to channel the emerging opposition movements—such as Occupy Wall Street—behind the political system of capitalist society.

This formed part of a discussion of the perspective of international socialism, and the necessity for students to turn to working people around the world in the increasingly life-or-death struggle in defence of our inalienable social rights.

In solidarity,

Joe, ISSE Manchester

On behalf of the ISSE in Sheffield, UK, I would like to send my support for your fight against the attacks on your right to a decent education. We completely deplore the brutal and utterly despicable methods recently used against students and protesters in many cities and campuses around the US.

We followed with horror the recent police outrages at UC Berkeley and UC Davis. Similar methods have been used in Britain over the past year. A march of more than 50,000 students and academics in London November 10, 2010 against the Conservative-Liberal Democratic coalition government’s education cuts ended in the occupation of the Tory Party’s headquarters and confrontations with riot police.

Last October’s student protest saw over 150 arrests, both during and after the event. This summer’s riots—provoked by the police killing of an unarmed man—were followed by over 4,000 arrests and over 2,000 prosecutions, with long custodial sentences handed out for the most trivial offences.

Authorisation for baton rounds was given during the summer rioting in Britain’s cities, the crime correspondent for the UK’s *Guardian* newspaper said, and “perhaps less well known ... they were also authorised for use during the student demonstration against cuts a year ago.” Wherever workers and young people seek to protest the imposition of savage austerity cuts, they are met with brutal repression.

Today, a fabulously wealthy oligarchy dictates all aspects of social life in pursuit of ever-greater personal enrichment. Under conditions of worsening economic crisis, this translates into demands for cuts and austerity for millions, for which there is no possibility of securing a democratic mandate.

Tim Wade, president of the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE), University of Sheffield

Germany

The ISSE group in Berlin fully supports the fight of the students at the UC Davis, and condemns the brutal police violence against them. The attack on public education, social inequality and the increasing violence employed by the state against students are international phenomena. Since the outbreak of the world economic crisis they have reached a dramatic

scale. In Berlin, ferocious attacks on the living standards of workers and youth were forced through by a Senate composed of the Social Democratic Party and the Left Party, working closely together with the trade unions. Millions of euros were cut at the universities, and hundreds of university staff lost their jobs.

For students and workers in Germany and throughout all of Europe the experience of this “left” coalition provides an important lesson. Like the Democrats in the US, these organizations are not different from the openly conservative and right-wing political parties and advance the same unsocial and anti-democratic politics. As the economic and political crisis in Europe deepens, the

financial aristocracy is now demanding an all-out assault on the social and political rights of workers and youth. Resistance is met with brutal police violence as recently during the general strike in Greece.

To fight the attacks we students have to turn to the working class and build a powerful political movement based on an international socialist perspective. The situation at UC Davis, in Berlin and the whole world proves that capitalism has failed. It must be overthrown and replaced with an economic system that is based on the needs of the population as a whole and not private profit.

International Students for Social Equality Berlin

South Korea

I send my warmest regards and support for your just struggle from South Korea. The unprovoked and vicious assault on UC Davis students by the police has not gone unnoticed here.

Students in South Korea are facing similar conditions. Over the last 10 years, universities have raised tuition fees by as much as 84 percent, resulting in some of the highest education costs in the world. However, these high costs have not resulted in quality educations. The student to professor ratio is 32.7 to 1, and many students have difficulty obtaining access to libraries and library materials. Students must reserve spots in advance if they wish to use a library, and the number of books available is also low. The highest ranked school in Korea, Seoul National University, has a budget of just over \$200 per student for materials.

This conscious disregard for education has translated into soaring profits for universities, many of which, both private and public, engage in cooking their books to justify raising tuition costs still further. From this practice, one university is believed to have taken in between \$34.6 and \$51.9 million annually from 2004 to 2008. As of 2009, 149 universities held \$5.97 billion. Essentially, nothing has been done to put an end to this practice.

Korean students rallying for lower tuition costs have also been met with police violence and oppression. In one particular event this past September, police attacked students using water cannons as riot police assaulted students, many of whom were engaged in sit-down protests. Forty-nine students were arrested. Police justified this brutality by stating the protesters had “inconvenienced” other citizens by “illegally occupying the road.”

Regardless of location, the ruling class and their police enforcers will resort to violence without hesitation to defend their ill-obtained positions. We must join together in solidarity in order to throw off the chains of oppression so that internationally all students and workers can have access to a quality education, a good job, and a decent livelihood.

Ben McGrath, ISSE Seoul, South Korea

Australia and New Zealand

Young people across Australia have watched the police attack at UC Davis with horror and anger. The response of the Democrats, the Republicans, and the Obama administration to any movement against social inequality, and massive cuts to social spending, is to unleash police violence. The images of students being treated like vermin by the police have exposed the real state of social relations in the US, to an international audience. The bankers and billionaires who caused the crisis have been given trillions of public funds, but students opposed to the looting of the economy are denied the democratic right to peacefully protest. I hope the knowledge that the attack at UC Davis is now a major international political event, being followed by young people around the world, will strengthen your resolve.

The right to decent education is under attack internationally. In Australia, the Gillard Labor government, basing itself on the US education model, is carrying through an agenda of transforming universities into businesses through the casualisation of the workforce, subject cuts, the downsizing of university libraries, and sackings. Like in the US, Occupy protests across Australia were attacked by the police, and protesters have been evicted.

Cuts to social spending at home are accompanied by militarism abroad. In the last few weeks, Obama came to Australia, announcing a new military base directed against China. Obama's reckless policy, which threatens to spark a major military conflict, is supported by the entire political establishment in Australia.

The social and political issues facing youth, above all the drive to war and austerity, are international in their scope. The entire purpose of the ISSE is to unify the struggles of workers, students and youth internationally, on the basis of social equality—the perspective of reorganising society to meet the social interests of the vast majority, rather than the profits of the minority. To accomplish this, we need to take up a political struggle against the parties of the “one percent”—in the US, that means the Democrats and the Republicans.

In solidarity,

Oliver Campbell, ISSE University of Sydney

The police assault on peaceful protesters at UC Davis has shocked young people and students in New Zealand. Arrests, beatings, tear gas and pepper spray have been the Democratic administration's only response to anyone who opposes the austerity agenda—and the pauperisation of millions of people—that is being demanded by the financial elite to pay for the crisis of capitalism.

This drastic reduction in workers' living standards cannot be imposed democratically. In New Zealand this weekend an election is being held in which the working class is completely disenfranchised. The ruling National Party, the opposition Labour and the Greens all agree that drastic spending cuts must be made to appease the financial markets. As in the US, young people are bearing the brunt of the crisis, with around one in five unemployed. Universities starved of funds have increased fees, cut courses and restricted entry criteria, turning away thousands of prospective students. In recent months students have protested against these attacks. In Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and other centres. Occupy encampments have been set up to protest soaring inequality.

The worldwide protests express a deep alienation from established politics and hostility toward the capitalist system. They presage a much wider upsurge in class struggle. The urgent task is to unite the struggles of the working class and youth internationally in a conscious fight for socialism.

Tom Peters, ISSE, Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand

I wish to condemn in the strongest possible terms the actions of police against peaceful students at UC Davis on November 18, and more widely against the entire Occupy protest movement across the United States and internationally.

The increasing resort to methods of violence and repression by state forces against protesters demonstrates that freedom of speech, assembly and other democratic rights can be withdrawn at any time by the ruling classes.

Furthermore it illustrates that the situation where the vast amount of wealth is concentrated at the apex of society and every growing levels of poverty are imposed on the great mass of people at the bottom is fundamentally incompatible with any democratic norms.

In Australia the same austerity measures are being implemented, including the dismantling of public education, health and other essential services. Universities are no longer centres to enrich the intellectual and cultural development of society but are run for profits.

Young people in Australia who have begun to oppose the austerity program being implemented by the Gillard Labor government on behalf of the financial and corporate elite have also been subjected to increasing levels of police violence.

Capitalism has failed and is now determined to place the burden of its crisis onto the backs of ordinary people everywhere.

In their fight, students and youth in the US, Australia and internationally must turn to the working class, which is the only force that can establish a new society that provides for need, not profit. That is a society organised on socialist lines.

Joshua Newsham, ISSE Newcastle, Australia

The attack on protesting students at UC Davis by the police is a display of the fear and desperation of the ruling class in the face of rising unrest amongst the working class. The United States has long claimed it acts to defend its country and its citizens. This is not the case. The tiny ruling elite of the US keeps itself protected, but at the same time it throws its population into war after war, using them as cannon fodder, to defend capitalist interests.

The willingness of the police to brutalise its own population reinforces the fact that the working class of the US, the working class of Iraq, of Afghanistan, of all countries, are united. Violence against workers has been perpetrated by the US overseas in war after war.

The extremely tenuous state of the economy has seen the ruling class gouge funds and resources out of the pockets of workers in brutal austerity measure programs worldwide. Uprisings such as those in Egypt have made the ruling class worldwide more wary of discontent amongst workers. The Egyptian revolution was a reminder of the strength of the working class and yet also pointed to their vulnerability without a leadership.

The police in the US are attempting to crush any uprisings before they spiral beyond the control of the ruling elite. Given the strength of the working class, it is only a matter of time before there are more, and bigger, protests. However, without the leadership of the Trotskyist movement, the working class will be led back into the straitjacket of the parliamentary establishment and away from advancing their own independent interests. It is essential for workers, including students, to study the lessons of past workers' struggles and not fall back under the control of the state.

Elle, ISSE University of New South Wales

From the south-eastern most tip of Australia, on behalf of the International Students of Social Equality at the University of Melbourne, I

express the upmost support for the struggle being conducted by students at UC Davis to defend their basic democratic rights.

While police brutality against the international Occupy Wall Street movement took a particularly foul form in the hosing down of peaceful protesters with pepper spray at UC Davis, the content of the response being meted out against youth in our country is the same. Last month at an Occupy Melbourne protest, held in solidarity with the movement in the US and to protest growing social inequality in Australia, hundreds of police descended on demonstrators, dragging many across the ground and beating up those who resisted. In country after country, what is being made clear is that the policy of gutting spending on ordinary people is not compatible with the defence of their basic democratic rights.

Three years ago, thousands of people in Australia looked to the election of Obama, as some of you may have, in the hope that it would mean an end to the endless drive to war by the Bush administration. Those hopes have been shattered. Following his continuation and expansion of wars in the Middle East and Africa, Obama recently arrived in Australia as part of his aggressive push against China in Southeast Asia. Here he secured a base for US marines in northern Australia. With the full support of our Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard, Obama is placing Australia at the front line of a future war against China which threatens humanity with nuclear catastrophe.

Whatever danger the American ruling class represents for the world's people, it is the American working class, the most powerful in the world, that is the only social force capable of overthrowing capitalism in the United States and putting an end to war, social inequality and the attacks on democratic rights. Your role, as is ours in Australia, must be to take up the fight for a new political party, based on the perspective of socialism and internationalism, within the working class.

Will Morrow, ISSE University of Melbourne

As a student at Curtin University and ISSE member in Perth, Western Australia I send greetings of support and solidarity to UC students, and the strongest condemnation of the violent state attacks on that occurred recently.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has pointed out: "It is no mere coincidence that the attack on UC Davis students occurs as the US-backed military regime in Egypt is brutally suppressing demonstrators in Tahrir Square. The scale of the attacks may be different, but the content is the same.

"Throughout the world, workers and young people are involved in an expanding class struggle against austerity and mass unemployment. The response of every government is to use state repression to impose the dictates of the financial elite."

Violence has been used against young people who have joined the Occupy protests both in Sydney and Melbourne.

In Western Australia, the supposed "boom" state, university students have to pay high upfront fees if international students, and many students, both international and local students, have to work long hours with low pay rates to support themselves, while trying to complete studies and having HECs debts to pay when they graduate. Only a small fraction, the 1 percent, feel any benefits from the mining boom.

Here in Australia as in the US, we are part of a global working class, and the working people must come to the defence of students and vice versa.

As the WSWS has pointed out, "Students at UC Davis and other Occupy protesters cannot restrict their activity to the campuses and encampments. They must turn to the working class—to all those who live from paycheck to paycheck and work in the offices, factories and social services—and transform this sympathy into a powerful political movement, independent of the two big business parties and armed with a program to

put an end to social inequality forever."

Celeste, ISSE Curtin University



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