

New York police beat and arrest students protesting tuition increase

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Police from the Public Safety Department of the City University of New York (CUNY), assisted by the New York City Police Department (NYPD), arrested 15 students at a public hearing of the CUNY Board of Trustees at Baruch College in Manhattan Monday evening. The students had gathered to oppose a \$300 tuition hike and demand that earlier tuition increases be rescinded.

Students who had entered the lobby of Baruch's Vertical Campus were barred entry to the hearing by police. Some students sat down in protest. With drawn batons, CUNY cops advanced in an attempt to clear students from the lobby.

Police struck male and female students in the face, head and stomach, according to witnesses. Others were pushed to the ground and manhandled by as many as five officers at a time. Video footage of the incident shows police dragging students on the ground.

A Baruch undergraduate told the *Daily News*, "They started pushing us and beating us. We didn't want this to be violent. We just wanted our voices to be heard." One student who was arrested said, "The officers were attacking us, unprovoked."

In a statement, the university said that the students posed a "public safety hazard."

The protest was organized by Students United for a Free CUNY, which held a rally in the afternoon at nearby Madison Square Park. By 5 PM, some marchers from the rally had entered the Baruch College building.

CUNY's so-called Rational Tuition Plan will include hikes every year for the next four years. Democratic New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo originally proposed the increases, which were approved by the Democratic-controlled New York State Assembly. The

City university system is partially funded by the state.

The CUNY Board of Trustees is an unelected body. Cuomo's predecessors, Democrat David Paterson and Republican George Pataki, appointed 10 of the trustees. New York City's billionaire mayor, Michael Bloomberg, appointed three others.

In August, it took the CUNY board of trustees only fifteen minutes of discussion to approve a \$300 increase. The board will vote on a new increase later in the month.

The last few days in New York have seen an increase in student protests following police attacks on Occupy encampments and demonstrations. On Monday, students at the State University of New York (SUNY) held a smaller rally in Albany, New York State's capital, to protest tuition hikes.

A group of students at the private New School occupied a study hall in a private building whose upper floors are leased by the university to protest high tuition and student debt. The occupiers have identified themselves with the Occupy Wall Street movement.

The New School occupation began last Thursday after the citywide Day of Action to protest the expulsion of Occupy Wall Street protesters from Zuccotti Park in Manhattan's financial district. The university has allowed protesters to stay as long as they do not exceed the fire code. On Tuesday afternoon, New School President David Van Zandt proposed that the occupiers move to an alternate location.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to CUNY students who had assembled at Madison Square Park in Manhattan before marching to Baruch College.

"We are protesting the budget cuts and tuition hikes across the CUNY system," one student, Jose Garcia,

said. “You have people who cannot go to school now because they introduced a new tuition hike after the semester had started. Classes started in August, then almost a month after school had begun they raised tuition another \$150. For some students who couldn’t pay, they had to stop going to school. There are horror stories of how people had to leave school.

“There has been a lot of “over tallying” in classes. This means that the classes are booked full and you have to go to the department to sign up because more sections are being closed down. Classes and sections are being closed down while a lot more people are going back to school because of the economy.

“This demonstration is to send a message to the Board of Trustees’ meeting tonight against tuition increases and budget cuts. There are plans to raise tuition \$300 a year for the next five years, and then to increase it \$500 a year each year thereafter. This is with no promise that Cuomo and Bloomberg will not continue to cut the CUNY budget.

“I think Cuomo is balancing the budget on the backs of students and cutting social programs. This is while he refuses to consider extending the ‘millionaire’s tax.’”

Another student, Zulai Romero, pointed out, “I think it is unfortunate that public institutions like CUNY and SUNY are heading toward privatization. CUNY used to be free. Tuition was put into effect right after open enrollment for lower income students was implemented. This was 1976, and it came after open enrollment was won with student strikes.

“As a person affected by the tuition increases and budget cuts, I am struggling. My ability to stay in school and get an education is on thin ice. I am being threatened by the continuous cuts and tuition hikes, and this is not what CUNY is supposed to be about.

“There is a disconnect between the students and the administration. There are fewer efforts to do anything in the interest of students. They are trying to divide Brooklyn College into smaller schools. They are putting new deans in who will probably be paid \$200,000 a year instead of putting these resources into the schools or to reduce tuition.

“I have very close friends who are working full-time, but they cannot go to school or stay in school. They are being forced to throw their career plans in the garbage because they cannot get an education at the most

affordable school in the city. I do think this is a class attack.”

Daniel, a grad student at CUNY’s Grad Center, explained, “In the immediate situation they are enacting what they call a ‘rational tuition hike.’ This means that they are going to raise tuition \$300 each year for five years. This demonstration is to oppose these tuition hikes and the budget cuts.

“In the larger picture, there is a continuing defunding of education and social programs that has been going on since before Reagan became president. It is going hand in hand with the privatization and corporatization of public services. Now that the crisis of capitalism has accelerated with the Lehman Brothers crash in 2008, they are using this as a pretext to intensify this process.

“I blame the Democrats and Republicans both for this. It definitely crosses party lines. Both parties are focused on running all the public programs on this corporate model. This is particularly true with education, where education is no longer a public right. Education is becoming a luxury commodity.

“I think what we are fighting for is to replace the corporate education model with a democratic education model. The real decision here tonight will be made by the Board of Trustees, which is appointed. They won’t listen to us or vote based on our interests. They will vote as they were appointed to vote.

“The solution to this involves a social and political revolution. This means it requires a complete reordering and rethinking of the values of this society.

“Occupy Wall Street is not and should not support Obama in 2012. The thing about Occupy Wall Street is that you can see it as a first step. The horizontal model allowed people to speak out about their situations. I see that there will be a next step that requires Occupy Wall Street or someone else to provide a long term organization that will build up trust between people.”



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