

Wisconsin budget cuts target higher education

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The University of Wisconsin system faces a new round of cuts as a result of the budget passed by Republican Governor Scott Walker last year, likely leading to another sharp increase in tuition.

Just before the winter holiday period, the governor announced cuts of \$123 million across the state, including \$46.1 million for the UW system over the next six months. This comes on top of \$250 million in cuts to UW over two years included in the budget that passed in June. The nearly \$300 million in cuts to Wisconsin's public universities will surely not be the end of the push for austerity.

The newly announced cuts will be enacted in the spring semester and will also result in reduced class offerings, increased class sizes, diminished student services, and more delays in maintenance on campuses throughout the state.

The unemployed and the socially marginalized have also been severely affected and will continue to see a diminution in already inadequate social services. This week, the state announced a new one-week waiting period for unemployment benefits, reducing income for all newly unemployed persons by up to \$363. The move is expected to save the state \$45 million a year.

The cuts to the UW system are part of \$123.2 million in discretionary budget cuts written into the 2011-2013 state budget. Among other reductions in social programs are \$9.4 million from the Department of Corrections, \$18.6 million from the Department of Health Services, and \$8.3 million from the Department of Children and Families. An additional \$51.1 million in discretionary cuts are already planned for next year.

Last year's budget also initiated a process that will result in the breaking off of UW-Madison from the rest of the UW system, one step toward effective privatization of the most prestigious public university in the state.

The Democrats in the state are seeking to posture as

critics of the governor's proposals, but they in fact fully support moves to force workers and youth to bear the burden of the state's budget deficit, including through attacks on higher education. Democratic governors throughout the country are pursuing just as draconian cuts, if not worse, and the entire process is being overseen by the Obama administration.

In 2003-05, Democratic Party Governor Jim Doyle slashed funding at the UW system by \$250 million, the same amount included in Walker's original budget. This led to an increase in tuition at the public university system by more than 30 percent in just two years.

During the mass protests in Wisconsin against Walker's budget in February and March of last year, the Democrats and the union bureaucracy insisted that they did not oppose the cuts themselves, only the attack on "collective bargaining" included in the law. Their aim was to divert growing anger in the state, while ensuring for the union executives a continued role in enforcing attacks on the working class.

The moves made by the Walker administration were seen by those who turned out to protest and occupy the capitol in Madison as part of a larger attack on the living standards of workers throughout the world, with many connecting their struggle to the contemporary struggles of workers in Egypt and Greece. At the same time students organized walkouts at public schools throughout the state, and mass protests occurred on nearly every UW campus.

After a failed stunt involving several state senators fleeing the state, the Democratic Party worked to channel popular opposition into efforts to elect Democratic candidates in off-year and recall elections. In August, efforts to end Republican control of the state senate failed when state Democrats were defeated in four out of six recall races.

The Democratic Party is currently in the midst of a drive to gather enough signatures to trigger a recall of

Governor Scott Walker. While the recall campaign has exposed the overwhelming popular hatred of Walker, any Democrat who would replace him would be committed to enacting equally severe cuts to public education and social services.

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