

Defend the Quebec students!

Statement by Jerry White, Socialist Equality Party candidate for US president

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Just across the US border in Quebec, Canada, a critical struggle is being fought that deserves the attention and support of workers and young people in the United States.

For nearly three months, tens of thousands of university and CEGEP (pre-university and technical college) students have been boycotting classes and staging demonstrations to oppose the provincial Liberal government's plans to raise university tuition fees by 75 percent over the next five years.

Students have marched in the streets of Montreal and other Quebec cities to defend public education. Many have dubbed the movement as the "Maple Spring," identifying their struggle with the revolutionary upheavals that erupted in Tunisia, Egypt and other Arab countries last year.

The political establishment has responded with repression, outlawing protests and using the police to terrorize students with pepper-spray, tear-gas and baton charges. Meanwhile, the Canadian news media has poured scorn on the students, insisting that they are hopelessly naïve if not mentally imbalanced to believe a college education should be a basic right.

As for the American news media, it has censored any reports of the mass protests taking place just a few hundred miles north of New York City. The last thing the corporate-controlled media and big business politicians in the US want is for American students to emulate their Canadian counter-parts or join them in a common fight to defend their futures.

The right to public and post-secondary education is under attack in every corner of the globe. Since the financial crash of 2008, capitalist governments have slashed budgets, raised fees and promoted free market

policies that are making education available only to the privileged few.

In Europe—where university education had long been free or low-cost—students in the United Kingdom faced down police violence in 2010 to protest the tripling of fees. A year earlier German and Austrian students marched and occupied lecture halls to oppose budget cuts. In Chile, hundreds of thousands of college and high school students have been engaged in a bitter struggle to defend the right to an education.

In the United States, the Obama administration has carried out a savage assault on public education and teachers. College students are being hit by budget cuts, rising tuition rates and crushing levels of debt. Even if they manage to graduate, it is getting ever more difficult to find work, let alone a job with a living wage. A recent report noted that 50 percent of all recent college graduates were either unemployed or underemployed.

Every capitalist politician in the world—whether from the Liberal, Conservative, Parti Quebecois and New Democratic Parties in Canada; the Democrats and Republicans in the US; or the Socialist and conservative parties in France—insists that there is not the money to sustain, let improve, public education and other basic social services. This under conditions in which trillions were found to bail out Wall Street and global banks, and to fund the endless wars in the Middle East and Central Asia.

The advances in science and technology and the globalization of economic life have made it possible to produce more wealth than at any time in history and to address the complex social and environment problems confronting humanity. But under capitalism, the

rational allocation of resources is impossible because all economic decisions are subordinated to the profit drive of a tiny minority.

The greatest indictment of the capitalist system is that it is condemning an entire generation of young people to a future of ignorance, poverty and war.

The fact that the political establishment responds to the Quebec students' demands with police violence and utter contempt underscores the fact that nothing can be won by appealing to the powers-that-be and their political representatives.

A fundamental change is possible only by breaking the dictatorial grip of the financial aristocracy over economic and political life and carrying out a complete transformation of the structure of society. To do this requires turning to the great mass of working people who are being driven into struggle by the same austerity measures and attacks on jobs and living standards.

Wherever their struggle is known there is enormous sympathy for the Quebec students. Fearing that this struggle can be a catalyst for a far broader movement of the working class, every effort is being made by the political establishment to cordon off the students from the working class. To take forward their fight, the Quebec students must break through this isolation and fight to mobilize the working class, the only social force capable of carrying out a revolutionary change.

A turn to the working class, does not mean any support for the trade unions and social democratic parties like the NDP, which have spent decades betraying workers and collaborating with the corporations and the government. The needs and aspirations of workers cannot find any expression through these pro-capitalist and nationalist organizations, which are run by upper middle class careerists who are thoroughly hostile to the working class.

A turn to the working class means a political struggle to lift the deadweight of capitalist politics from the shoulders of the working class and to build a mass political movement to fight for socialism.

As presidential candidate of the Socialist Equality Party in the 2012 US elections, I call for the mobilization of the working class across North America against the dismantling of public services and all job cuts and concessions.

The fight to secure the most basic social rights of workers and young people, including the right to a decent education and livelihood for all, requires a political struggle to establish a workers' government. Only by taking political power can the working class in Canada and the US reorganize economic and political life along socialist lines, by placing the banks and basic industries under public ownership and running the economy on the basis of human need not profit.



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