

Students have the right to eat!

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (United States)
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As 2017 begins, students across the United States are confronted with a basic problem to their continuing education and livelihoods: they do not have enough money for food.

Hunger on campuses is skyrocketing. Nearly half of all college students—48 percent—are food insecure, meaning they had difficulty obtaining food over a thirty-day period during 2016. Some 22 percent go hungry—nearly 4.5 million students every month, according to data presented in “Hunger on Campus,” a report from the College and University Food Bank Alliance.

These figures are four times the national average. They do not include the 3.9 million youth aged 10 to 17 that struggle to get enough to eat, nor the 2.9 million more children who suffer hunger.

Significantly, holding down one or more jobs and receiving financial aid does not spare students from food insecurity and hunger. The majority of students who are food insecure—56 percent—work between five and thirty hours per week. A larger majority—75 percent—receive financial aid, including the 52 percent who receive Pell Grants and the 37 percent who took out student loans.

Sixty-one percent of food insecure students used a food aid service such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly known as food stamps, in the past twelve months. Even having a campus meal plan did not alleviate food insecurity, with 43 percent of those with access to campus food services suffering some form of food insecurity.

More and more, students are forced to choose between funding their education and filling their stomachs. A quarter of those who are food insecure are forced to drop a class in order to have sufficient funds to buy food. More than half do not buy a required textbook. Four-fifths have missed a class, study session, or club meeting—or have never done an

extracurricular activity—because they do not have enough money to eat.

Food insecurity among students is associated with other social problems, including the proliferation of unaffordable housing and homelessness. Nearly two-thirds of food-insecure students struggle to pay rent, mortgages, and/or utility bills over a 12-month span. Fifteen percent were homeless for some part of that time frame. In total, 31 percent of college students have a hard time finding both adequate food and housing.

And how would they? Tuition costs continue to surge, while students’ wages—and those of their parents—stagnate and decline.

Average in-state tuition at public universities is \$9,650, while tuition at private universities is \$33,480. The total student loan debt in the United States exceeds \$1.3 trillion, an average of more than \$30,000 for each of the 44 million people that have borrowed money to go to school. Since the 2007-2008 school year, the average annual tuition at four-year public colleges has gone up by \$2,333, or 33 percent. Since 2006, the cost of textbooks has increased 73 percent, forcing students to spend an average of \$1,200 a year.

At the same time, the social programs that helped the previous generation of young people attend college have been gutted. The maximum amount awarded for a Pell Grant, for example, currently only covers 30 percent of the average tuition at four-year public universities, down from 70 percent in 1980.

The increasing costs of higher education are even more extreme at certain universities. The total cost to attend New York University, which has an enrollment of 50,000 students, is more than \$70,000 a year and more than four times what the university cost in 1990. And while NYU conducts multi-million-dollar real-estate deals with Wall Street moguls and monarchies in the Persian Gulf, it bans the International Youth and Students for Social Equality from forming a club on

campus based on the claim that the university doesn't have enough money.

None of this is the outcome of mistaken policies.

When he ran for the presidency in 2008, Barack Obama won the support of millions of young people by promising “change we can believe in.” His allies among pseudo-radical organizations on campuses promoted the illusion that he would end the wars in Middle East and improve living conditions. His first order of business, however, was to bail out the financial swindlers who caused the Great Recession that has wiped out good job opportunities for a generation. He carried on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and created new ones in Libya, Yemen and Syria.

Indeed, while they plead “there is no money” for college education, Republican and Democratic politicians alike find endless billions for war and police repression, bank bailouts and tax cuts. Each year the NSA alone spends more than \$52 billion dollars on domestic and international spying, while \$100 billion is spent on increasingly militarized police forces. The Pentagon's new budget for 2017 is \$619 billion. More than \$4 trillion has been spent over the past 15 years on the “War on Terror.” Between 2007-2009, over \$13 trillion was provided to bailout the largest corporations, banks and other financial institutions.

Why should society be this way? Why is it that the most “advanced” country in the world kills or turns into refugees millions of youth abroad while starving millions of youth at home? This is the result of the capitalist system, where a tiny handful of Wall Street speculators and corporate executives have control over every major policy decision.

In opposition to capitalism, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) asserts that an education, food and housing are among the social rights of every young person and student, along with the right to an interesting and well-paying job after graduation. These rights, along with all the rights of the working class, are incompatible with capitalism.

To achieve these rights, the IYSSE calls for the transformation of society from capitalism to socialism—to a society organized on the basis of human need from one ruled by the profit drive of the superrich.

The immense social inequality that has emerged over the past half-century—where the richest one percent controls more wealth than the bottom fifty

percent—must be reversed and the wealth of society placed under public ownership to be used for the social interests, including free higher education. The large companies and banks must be run and controlled democratically, with the explicit goal of employing people and ensuring that blights such as hunger and homelessness, among all ages, are things of the past.

The creation of such a society requires a fight for socialism, both on the campuses and in the workplaces, cities, and towns. The struggle that students and youth face on campuses—the bankrupting of education—is bound up with the broader questions of austerity, dictatorship and war that the working class as a whole faces. Students must turn away from all the campus organizations—the phony radicals and the identity politicians—that in one way or another are tied to apron strings of the Democratic Party. The turn now is to the working class, unified across lines of nation, race and gender.

The younger generation faces a choice: it can endure a lifetime of hunger, poverty and war, or take up the fight to change society. The IYSSE, the student and youth organization of the Socialist Equality Party, is building a leadership and organizing this struggle. We call on young people to join the IYSSE, study its program and history, and take up the fight for socialism!



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