

October 7 Day of Action at University of California

Dyne Suh

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Santa Barbara, CA — Public education advocates worldwide mobilized on the International Day of Action to Defend Public Education on October 7th. Waves of student protests around the world from Guatemala, Liberia, Indonesia, Ukraine, India, the European Union, to the United States coast to coast voiced resistance to capitalism on the education front.^[i] It is no secret that public education systems all over the world are under attack. Many industrialized nations have outsourced production in the global capitalist market. No longer manufacturers of products, many of these industrialized nations have turned to selling education in the form of mass-produced degrees and college-educated commodities.

In addition to all this, Regents of the University of California system had the nerve to raise tuition fees by 32% in November 2009, which went into effect this school year.^[ii]

Fed up with these trends, students, workers, and faculty called for a Day of Action to Defend Public Education, reminiscent of the March 4th Day of Action protests in response to the 32% fee increase.

HIGHER EDUCATION'S COLOR DIVIDE

At the University of California Santa Barbara, students gathered in front of the library at noon on October 7. One explicit fact was that the students gathered at the Arbor were disproportionately People of Color for a university that has a 51% White student population. Students of the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), who are the most financially disadvantaged students in the university and thus most directly affected by the fee increases, had played the biggest part in organizing the rally, though they were not alone. Middle-class students whose parents earned too much to receive financial aid but still not enough to pay for their children's college educations also came forward to speak about their struggles with overwhelming student loans. Other financially self-reliant students who worked for the university came forward to detail their hours and wages being cut by the same university that raised their student fees. One undocumented student paid over \$20,000 as a freshman living on campus out of her own pocket to attend UCSB last year, but had to transfer to Santa Barbara City College, a community college, because she could not afford out-of-state tuition again, especially with the fee increase. Many students attending the rally raised their hands when she asked if they knew a person who experienced the same.

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Workers and faculty members spoke out in solidarity with the students against the privatization of education, commodification of college degrees, and California's disinvestment from its youth and investment into the prison industrial complex. "California hasn't had its priorities straight," one student speaker declared. "The state has spent more of its budget on prisons and locking up the youth for petty crimes instead of trying to make teachers, lawyers, and doctors out of us." The rally was so quickly fired up and buzzing with energy from the speeches that the organizers decided to start the march earlier than planned.

MORE AND MORE AN ELITE PRESERVE



Students at UCLA demonstrate outside Chancellor's office

Although the University of California remains highly ranked amongst US universities, its fees have been substantially higher than other state-funded public universities in the United States. Until the 1960s, University of California had been virtually free to California residents. From the 1970s on, admission to the UC system has become increasingly exclusive.

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The SAT college admissions test, a better indicator of family income as opposed to any illusory definition of intelligence, has been mandated for entrance since the United States' Eugenics movement in the 1930s. Meanwhile, preparatory courses for the SAT have become a 4-billion dollar a year industry that is only accessible to people who can afford to pay tutors at least \$100 per hour. In addition, UCs have been accepting a higher rate of out-of-state and international students at fees that only the wealthiest can afford. Overwhelmed in-state students juggling multiple jobs have been forced to drop out of UC and enroll in community colleges.

In the meantime, the financial resources of the UC have+ polarized into the hands of the few, to the extent the UC president was able to purchase a 16-room mansion requiring 12 phones and an elevator just for his wife and him.[\[iii\]](#)

Despite huge fee increases, classes have been cut and workers and faculty have been laid off. [\[iv\]](#) Despite the fee increases, class sizes have grown while the number of classes has diminished, decreasing the quality of education students are receiving. Despite the fee increases, limited availability of courses force students to pay tuition past four years because they cannot complete their majors without them.

WORLDWIDE CONNECTIONS

Despite the passions expressed in the march, many activists felt disappointed as the chants died down. During the initial rally, students were frustrated that the majority of students on campus passed by without a glance. Many students were sitting on the grass eating their lunches, nonchalant to the speeches a few feet away. Despite cries through speeches addressing the passersby, "this affects you!" most carried on.

The protest at UC Santa Barbara did not interrupt business as usual. It did, however, promote consciousness and let frustrated students all over the world know that they were not alone. For many students, the October 7th Day of Action was the very first protest they had ever attended, and likely not the last. Although police appeared on the scene fifteen minutes prior to when the rally was scheduled to take place, they did not interfere. The protest was very well mannered, even described as a parade rather than an act that would smoke out the regents, so to speak, and force them into a dialogue with their agitated students.

Immediately following the march, activists were already brainstorming ideas for the next steps. Thanks to the Internet, the Day of Action October 7th became an international event. As consciousness continues to grow on an international scale, resisting capitalism in one form on the education front, there is great hope in this future generation's capacity to mobilize globally against the international capitalist system.

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[i] “Global Wave of Action for Education on Google Map,” last modified October 22, 2010, <http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&msa=0&msid=102498168047913324455.000491b82737f3ef2b27d&z=2>.

[ii] “2009-10 and 2010-11 undergraduate fees and financial aid,” last modified November 18, 2009, <http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/article/22416>.

[iii] “UC President’s Housing Raises Ire and Expense,” last modified August 27, 2010, <http://www.baycitizen.org/education/story/uc-presidents-housing-raises-ire-and>.

[iv] “UC regents award huge pay increases to execs while furloughing staff,” July 23, 2009, <http://www.upte.org/about/press/2009-07-23.pdf>.

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