

## Battle Over Budget Cuts and Tuition Hikes at CUNY

# “Students and Labor: Shut the City Down!”



Internationalist photo

Hundreds of CUNY students take to the streets, blocking traffic, marching from BMCC to City Hall on March 5.

The last eight months at the City University of New York have been dominated by a battle over cutbacks of state and city funding and increases in tuition for students. This is a big deal, since CUNY is the largest urban public university in the country, with over 240,000 students in degree programs on 19 campuses around the city, and another 270,000 non-degree students: over half a million in total. CUNY students are already paying through the nose for an education that should be free and open to all.

Even before the school year began last September, New York governor David Paterson, a Democrat, approved a plan for annual tuition hikes at the City University and State University of New York. We blew the whistle on that in the lead article of our last issue of *Revolution* (No. 5, September 2008). Then, after the financial crisis exploded, Paterson an-

nounced a mega-cutback budget including a \$300 per semester tuition increase at CUNY and SUNY. For the first time since 1965 the Democrats were poised to control all branches of government in Albany. The result, as we pointed out: “Democrats and CUNY Trustees Vow: Tuition Increases Forever!”

That doomsday budget touched off a series of student protests, which the CUNY Internationalist Clubs actively participated in organizing, as well as a couple of demonstrations by the faculty union, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC). On September 22, CUNY Contingents Unite (CCU), an organization speaking for adjunct and other “part-time” CUNY faculty and staff in the PSC, called a demonstration at Paterson’s office in Midtown Manhattan which drew several dozen protesters (see “Adjunct Rebellion at CUNY,” in *Revolution* No. 5).

On November 12, more than 200 students at Hunter College came out at the call of the CCU to protest the tuition hike and budget cuts, including many black and Latino students. (Two-thirds of CUNY undergraduates are non-white.) More than 20 students spoke from an improvised “soapbox” (actually a milk crate), telling what effect a tuition hike would have on them and their families. It was exciting, and many were quite militant. Chants included: “No budget cuts, No tuition hike!” “Education is a right, Fight, fight, fight!” “Whose CUNY? Our CUNY!” and “Lay off Goldstein!” the CUNY chancellor with his obscene \$500,000 salary.

There followed protests on December 8, December 16, March 5 and March 25. The biggest was March 5, when hundreds of CUNY students (many from Hunter, where a walkout and rally drew 300 participants) joined with a

contingent from the PSC and 75,000 city workers to protest the attempt to balance the state budget on the backs of working people. Students poured into the streets, marching from Borough of Manhattan Community College to City Hall chanting, “Students and labor, shut the city down!” echoing the headline of our March 5 leaflet. You could see and feel that together we had the power to do just that: shut down New York City.

The student/labor rally at Hunter College on March 25 was another important step forward, with endorsements and participation from a number of workers groups, particularly immigrant workers, transit workers and strikers from the Stella D’Oro bakery in the Bronx, as well as quite a few students. Many of the speakers who addressed the crowd of 200 emphasized that this was only the first step in

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## Marxists for Class Struggle, “Obama Socialists” for Tax Reform

# What Program to Fight the Crisis?

In any serious social struggle, differing political outlooks come into conflict, leading to different choices for action. This clash of programs is inevitable, and often crucial to the success or failure of the effort. All the more so amid the present conditions of imperialist war and worldwide capitalist economic crisis, as millions of workers lose their jobs, hundreds of billions are spent on the colonial occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, and governments dole out trillions of dollars to shore up the banks.

In the fight against budget cuts and tuition hikes at the City University of New York, the main dividing line has been over the attitude toward the Democratic Party. Many union officials and student activists focused on pres-

uring the Democratic governor and legislators in Albany, as well as in Washington. The CUNY Internationalist Clubs, in contrast, reject this program of pressure politics and look to militant protest uniting students and workers. In the last election, we declared: “Democrat Obama No Answer to Republicans Bush/McCain” (*Revolution* No. 5, September 2008). We pointed out that it is the precisely the Democrats who are pushing the attacks on public education.

Differences over these issues first came to the fore in a demonstration last September 22 outside the Midtown Manhattan offices of New York governor David Paterson called by CUNY Contingents Unite. The CCU is a newly formed organi-

zation of adjunct faculty and other “part-time” City University employees who are also members of the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), the union representing educators at CUNY. After repeated efforts to get PSC participation in the protest, union officials let it be known that they would not endorse because they didn’t want to embarrass Governor Paterson amid sensitive discussions with his office.

### Disruption in the Service of Democrats

Coming out of a mid-November meeting initiated by the CCU, activists from several campuses (including the CUNY Internationalist Clubs) formed a Student Coordi-

nating Committee. Together they organized for a December 8 protest outside the Board of Trustees meeting at Baruch College where the proposal for a \$300 per semester tuition hike was to be voted on. Thousands of leaflets were distributed on more than a dozen campuses, the event was publicized with tabling and at November rallies at Hunter College, Brooklyn College and LaGuardia and Bronx Community Colleges.

Shortly before the demonstration, it was discovered that someone else had quietly obtained permission from the New York Police Department to rally at the same time and place. An e-mail was received informing organizers that they would be allowed no more

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## Shut NYC Down...

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a long, hard fight, but that together, working people have the power to stop the budget ax murderers and tuition hikers (see excerpts from speeches on pp. 6-7).

So after months of student protests and a couple of demonstrations by the PSC, the state budget was approved in early April. The result: state aid to senior colleges and city funding of community colleges was cut by \$75 million dollars, but for the senior colleges' actual budget cuts were averted by funds from a big \$300 per semester (15 percent) tuition hike. CUNY officials are crowing that they were able to "restore" some \$18 million in cuts to the community college budgets from Paterson's original budget. What they are mum about is that funding of CUNY community colleges will fall even as enrollment goes up.

So the only reason there isn't a whopping cut in the CUNY budget next year is because they're soaking the students with the tuition increase. \$22 million of this is to go to the City University operating budget, another \$88 million will go straight to the state as a regressive tax on students, one of the sectors of the population least able to pay. (SUNY students are due to pay an additional \$155 million.) These aren't just numbers. *This tuition hike will mean thousands and possibly tens of thousands of students will have to drop out of school.* After a \$750 increase in 1995, CUNY enrollment dropped by 20,000 (from 1994 to 1998) and didn't recover to the previous level for eight years.

The dirty secret is that CUNY authorities got pretty much what they wanted out of this "crisis budget" – no major cuts in the operating budget – while students got shafted. In fact, the push for higher tuition came from the CUNY administration and Board of Trustees. And it was approved by the Democratic governor, the Democrat-controlled state senate and the Democrat-controlled state assembly. At bottom it is a *class purge*. It is part of the war on open admissions ever since action by student militants and the labor movement opened the gates of the City University to New York City high school graduates in 1969, instead of only an (overwhelmingly white) elite layer. The people who run the City University for the ruling class want to reverse that.

CUNY authorities are doing their best to replace many working-class students. While they claim that the impact of a tuition increase will be minimized by federal Pell grants and the state Tuition Assistance Program, most working students unable to take a full course load get little or no federal or state aid. Now the state government says it will "help" those students by setting up a state loan program – meaning that students will be saddled with huge loans that they will spend years paying off. CUNY figures it can do this because it is now attracting middle-class students who can't afford to go to Ivy League schools as a result of the economic crisis.

This is part of a *push for increasing privatization of public higher education*. Thus in the middle of the battle over the budget, CUNY announced with great fanfare that it had reached its \$1.2 billion fundraising goal three years early. Chancellor Goldstein said this was "because the reputation of the university has really been burnished over the past several years" – that is, after abolishing the remnants of open admissions in 1999. The kind of students CUNY wants to attract are those who will

contribute big bucks to an endowment after they start earning six- and seven-figure salaries. And those won't be poor and working students from the Bronx and Bushwick.

Yet low-income black, Latino, Asian and working-class white students are precisely who the City University should be serving. City College was set up a century and a half ago as the Free Academy of New York. While fighting tuition hikes and budget cuts, we in the CUNY Internationalist Clubs call for *open admissions* and *no tuition*, plus a living stipend to make it possible for poor and working-class students to attend university. Free public higher education should be a democratic right for all: *expropriate the private universities*. We also fight to *abolish the Board of Trustees*, replacing it with *student-teacher-worker control of the university*.

This cannot be achieved simply by mobilizing students, who can sometimes be quite radical, but who lack the kind of social power that workers have: to *stop* the production, transport and communications that capitalist society depends on. At various times during recent protests, people have raised calls for "student power." The CUNY Internationalist Clubs counterpose to this a call for students and workers to unite in struggle against the

capitalist rulers who oppress us all. The struggle against tuition hikes and budget cuts cannot be limited to CUNY. What we are fighting against is a broad-scale offensive against workers and the oppressed.

Thus in the recent demonstrations an Internationalist banner called to "Strike CUNY and NYC Transit." In a one-two punch, students (along with all working people) are simultaneously being hit by a transit fare hike. We call for *free public transportation* – rip out the turnstiles! Instead of slogans like "money for education, not war and occupation" – which treat the war on Iraq and Afghanistan as if it was a matter of budget priorities – we call to *defeat U.S. imperialist war* abroad and the bosses' war on working people "at home."

Likewise, the fight at CUNY cannot be isolated from national politics. Most of the left, along with the PSC faculty union and many student groups, supported Democrat Barack Obama for president. While noting that the election of a black president marked an important social change in the United States, whose capitalist economy was built up on the basis of slave labor, the CUNY Internationalist Clubs noted: "Democrat Obama No Answer to Republicans Bush/

McCain." In the CUNY protests, we carried signs declaring: "Obama's Budget Means More War – Break with the Democrats, Build a Revolutionary Workers Party!"

We have gone all out to mobilize against the current round of attacks, while emphasizing a basic point: we won't succeed in defending our interests by endless guerrilla warfare. It is necessary to mobilize all the exploited and oppressed in a fight for workers revolution. That has to be an international fight, as capitalism is a world system. In the convulsive events of 1968, student protests from France to Mexico directly intersected the struggle of the working class. Today, the upsurge in Greece and huge strikes in France hold lessons for us here.

What we're fighting for goes way beyond stopping the tuition hikes. Economic crisis and the reality of endless war are leading many students to ask some serious questions about the society we live in. We invite you to join with the CUNY Internationalist Clubs to help win new forces to the cause of international socialist revolution.

We print below the leaflet of the CUNY Internationalist Clubs issued on March 5 under the masthead of our publication, *Revolution*.

## Democrats Vote Mega-Billions for War, Trillions for Bankers – Working People Get Shafted

# Students and Labor: Shut the City Down!

### NO Cuts – NO Layoffs – NO Givebacks – NO Tuition Hikes – NO Fare Hikes!

Since September [2008], students at the City University of New York (CUNY), along with "part time" adjunct teachers, have been fighting against threatened tuition increases, budget cuts and layoffs. This struggle has reached a crucial point. Democratic governor David Paterson's budget for 2009-2010 includes a tuition increase of \$600 a year *or more* at four-year colleges, and \$300 at CUNY community colleges, which are already some of the most expensive in the country.

At a time when college enrollment is mushrooming as people lose their jobs, CUNY's academic departments are cutting budgets, laying off adjuncts and canceling some class sections. *This is a plan for the expulsion of tens of thousands of working class and poor students*, for whom CUNY is their only opportunity to earn a college degree. A \$300 per term tuition hike has already been ordered for the State University (SUNY). It's the same story across the country.

The battle is coming to a head as the state Senate and Assembly (both now controlled by the Democratic Party) are preparing to pass this cutback budget by April 1. Importantly, protests and anti-tuition-hike student groups have sprung up at a number of CUNY campuses. But it's going to take a lot more to fight this ruling-class assault. We need to mobilize real power to beat back the Democrats' attacks – the power of the organized working class.

On March 5, tens of thousands of city workers will hit the streets to oppose cuts. So will we. The demonstration at City Hall has been called by leaders of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), SEIU 1199, DC 37 and other city workers unions, as well as the Working Families Party (a skill for the Democrats) and various coalitions. They're calling it a "rally for New York." A UFT leaflet called for a "fair budget for

all." Like "we're all in it together"? No way! Do you see the Wall Street bankers "sacrificing"?

Now Democrat Obama's auto bailout would eliminate 50,000 auto workers jobs. Billionaire mayor Bloomberg, the ultimate Republican, is demanding that city workers pay 10 percent of health care premiums. The MTA is ordering transit fare hikes and service cuts. To defeat the attack on our right to education, to put a stop to Paterson's multi-billion-dollar cutbacks in health care and layoffs and to throw back Bloomberg's "givebacks," we need to link student protest with a powerful *class struggle* of the workers against the bosses and their parties.

### They Want to Kick You Out of CUNY

Let's begin by calling things by their right names. *Tuition at CUNY is nothing other than a tax on students*. All CUNY and SUNY tuition payments go to New York State's general fund, to be spent however the legislature pleases, which means prisons, cops and corporate subsidies. Now Paterson trumpets that "only" 80 percent of the new tuition hike will go to the state, with the remainder going to the CUNY administration, which pays campus cops a lot more than it pays adjunct professors who teach most of the courses.

Tuition is a particularly regressive tax, hitting poor and working people hardest. Maybe the ruling class considers it a *luxury tax*, for the "luxury" of getting educated. Or a *sin tax*, for the "sin" of going to school to learn. We in the CUNY Internationalist Clubs are not only against a tuition hike, we call for the *complete elimination of tuition* and for *living stipends for students* so they can afford to study. Impossible? Hardly. CUNY has already eliminated tuition for the students in its "honors" college, and gives them free laptops. These are the students CUNY authorities and the ruling class want.

Look at the numbers: *62 percent* of CUNY community college students come from households that earn less than \$30,000 a year. *44 percent* of them work at least 20 hours a week. *80 percent* of them are black, Latino or Asian. Those who can only afford to go to school part-time don't get state TAP

(tuition assistance). These are the CUNY students the authorities don't want, many of whom will be eliminated by this *tuition purge*. This is the latest episode of the *war against open admissions*.

In 1969, black and Puerto Rican student protesters audaciously took over City College, at the time 96 percent white, demanding that admissions reflect the composition of city schools. After two weeks of sharp struggle, the powerful city unions weighed in demanding that all high school graduates in New York be accepted at CUNY. Enrollment soared as hundreds of thousands of the children of New York City's multi-ethnic, multinational working class headed for CUNY. Remedial and bilingual classes were established to help the students who had been shortchanged by overcrowded, underfunded, and *de facto* segregated public schools.

But in 1975-76, the Wall Street banks established an emergency dictatorship board over all New York City government in order to gouge the workers to pay for another economic crisis. They shut down CUNY for two weeks when the faculty refused to work without pay. The president of CUNY called for five campuses to be closed – pointedly including Hostos and Medgar Evers community colleges, which served the oppressed Puerto Rican and black communities of NYC. Once the CUNY student body was majority non-white and poor, the "tuition" tax was imposed for the first time, like a poll tax, and has steadily increased ever since.

CUNY is run by an administration packed with ideological opponents of free public higher education and organized labor (see "Look Who's Trusteeing at CUNY" in *Revolution* No. 5, September 2008). CUNY's chancellor, Matthew Goldstein was promoted after eliminating remedial courses as president of Baruch. He then joined future Board of Trustees chairman Benno Schmidt, a notorious privatizer and union-buster imported from Yale, to finish off the remnants of open admissions by eliminating remedial courses at all CUNY four-year colleges in 1999. The bourgeois press hailed this in the name of upholding "standards."

This is the gang that has been pushing for tuition hikes since long before the eco-

## Revolution

Newspaper of CUNY students from the Internationalist Clubs, for the program of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, published in accord with the Internationalist Group, U.S. section of the League for the Fourth International

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Chucky the Staten Island groundhog chomped the NYC mayor in a photo-op.

economic crisis broke. The capitalists are not against public education in general, they just want it to serve their profit system. They're pouring billions into the City University capital budget, which is a bonanza for the construction companies. When the leadership of the CUNY faculty union, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), calls on the government to "invest" in CUNY, they omit that the bankers' government will invest on its own *class* terms, which has nothing to do with making CUNY accessible to working class and poor students, oppressed racial minorities, or immigrants.

Meanwhile they pay adjunct professors, who make up well over half the CUNY faculty (two-thirds in the community colleges), poverty wages, barely \$20,000 a year if they're lucky enough to get at least six courses. Now the administration is cutting back on the number of sections in what amounts to back-door layoffs and pay cuts. Students should wholeheartedly support the struggle of CUNY Contingents Unite, which advocates for adjunct faculty in the PSC, to *eliminate the two-tier academic labor system*.

### Reformists Help the Democrats to Rescue U.S. imperialism

What's needed is for student protest to become part of a class struggle against the Democrat-Republican regime of cutbacks and war. Yet many union leaders and various leftist groups seek to deflect the struggle by appealing to the Democratic party of budget cuts and imperialist war. There is the PSC tops' call on Paterson to "invest in CUNY." They are also pushing for the so-called "millionaire's tax," as is the International Socialist Organization (ISO) and other reformists with their calls to "tax the rich." There is nothing the least bit radical about raising state taxes from 6.85 percent to 10.3 percent on incomes above \$250,000 – the *New York Times* and other bourgeois spokesmen are all for it. And even if it passed, they'll still use the money to bail out the banks and screw working people.

Earlier, the ISO came up with a petition, being circulated by the Hunter Student Union, calling for Hunter College president Raab to "come out against tuition hikes and support student activities in opposition to the tuition hikes." Jennifer Raab was a political flack for Mayor Rudolph Giuliani who was appointed in 2001 over the opposition of even the tame Faculty Senate. She was praised by the right-wing *New York Observer* (24 December 2000) for her support for the 1999 Schmidt report, which she called "a blueprint for reform." Raab is part of the Goldstein team that's behind the plan to continuously raise tuition. To call on her to support student protests against that can only promote illusions.

City University students, staff and low-paid contingent faculty are not alone. Work-

ers throughout the city, particularly in the strategic Transit Workers Union Local 100 and health care workers, face cutbacks and job losses. Following a December 16 PSC rally outside Governor Paterson's Manhattan office, we marched to a rally of TWU members opposing layoffs and a fare hike. A student takeover of one or more CUNY campuses, backed by faculty and with significant labor support could galvanize whole sections of the city population to fight against budget cuts and a tuition hike.

In any fight you need to be clear about who are your friends and who's the enemy. From Albany to Washington, the Democrats are in control. They're voting hundreds of billions to continue the colonial occupation of Iraq and what the Obama administration is calling the "Afpak" war (in Afghanistan and Pakistan). The Democrats and Republicans unite to shovel *trillions* into the banks' vaults and bail out the Detroit auto companies, but they shaft auto workers, city workers, hospital workers, students and poor people, while staging *Gestapo*-like raids kidnapping masses of immigrant workers and locking up millions of blacks and Latinos.

Working people didn't cause the economic crisis, and we won't pay for it. The Wall Street panic and mass unemployment are caused by the nature of the capitalist system itself. Talk of "shared sacrifice" is sucker bait – don't buy it! To fight the exclusion of tens of thousands of students from the largest urban public university in the U.S., which has graduated more minority students than any other institution of higher education, we need to forge a fighting alliance with workers and all the oppressed. That is how to beat back the lords of capital and turn defensive struggles into a fight for power against the system of war, racism and poverty.

To win this struggle we need to break with the Democrats and build a revolutionary workers party. ■

## What Program...

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than one speaker, take it or leave it. On the day of the rally, as scores of students and adjuncts gathered outside Baruch, the mystery group congregated around a banner of International ANSWER, the antiwar front led by the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL). Although they claimed the backing of the University Student Senate (USS), there was no USS presence visible.

The key to this stealth rally was Democratic city councilman Charles Barron, who was, we were informed, the reason police permission was given. Although demonstration organizers had agreed that no politicians would speak, the interlopers insisted that Barron be the main speaker. In the face of opposition, Barron himself twice pushed a demonstrator to the ground. The ANSWER

crew then got police to threaten to arrest demonstrators if we continued to use our bullhorn to chant. They then gave Barron the mike. Barbara Bowen, president of the Professional Staff Congress, spoke on behalf of the union bureaucracy. After 30 minutes or so, the ANSWER spokeswoman announced that "the rally" was over and "anyone who doesn't want to get arrested should go home."

This was a brazen provocation using the threat of state repression to hijack the rally and turn it into an event for the Democratic Party. Such maneuvers are a trademark of ANSWER, which routinely parades Democrats before the microphones of "antiwar" rallies while the Democratic Party routinely votes for Bush's (and now Obama's) war budget. But the provocation didn't work. Well over 100 students stayed for another 45 minutes, cheering more than a dozen speakers, many of whom were black and Latina students, as well as speakers from Committee to Revitalize Asian American Studies at Hunter and unionists from the Transport Workers Union, and other unions, as well as several members of the CCU.

### "Tax the Rich" vs. Class Struggle

In the spring semester a new grouping of students and adjuncts came together to coordinate CUNY-wide action under the name of Ad Hoc Committee Against CUNY Budget Cuts and Tuition Hikes. There was a sharp debate over a petition initiated by the International Socialist Organization (ISO) and circulated by the Hunter Student Union calling on Hunter College president Jennifer Raab to "come out against tuition hikes and support student activities in opposition to the tuition hikes." Supporters of the CUNY Internationalist Clubs criticized this as creating illusions that Raab (a former public relations flack for right-wing Republican mayor Rudolph Giuliani) and the CUNY administration (which was behind the call for a tuition hike) could support student protest (see our March 5 leaflet, beginning on page 2).

Then at the March 5 city worker demonstration in which hundreds of CUNY students participated in response to the call of the Ad Hoc Committee another difference arose. The demo itself was the largest mobilization of labor in years, with some 75,000 participants, stretching more than 13 blocks from the tip of City Hall Park to above Canal Street. But while the focal point of workers' anger was the threat of thousands of layoffs by Mayor Bloomberg and Governor Paterson, rally organizers, principally the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) headed by Randi Weingarten, paraded leading Democrats including City Council speaker Christine Quinn across the platform. The UFT's main demand was for a "fair share tax" scheme.

Marching to the rally from nearby Borough of Manhattan Community College, hundreds of students enthusiastically took over the street and joined the Internationalist chant of "Students and Labor, Shut the City Down." This reflected the perspective of a *class* struggle against the budget cuts, layoff threats, and tuition and transit fare hikes. But a report on the March 5 protest in the ISO newspaper, *Socialist Worker* (13 March), "New York Labor Rallies Against Cuts," had a very different perspective. A box on "What You Can Do" declared, "No budget cuts! Tax the rich!... We demand Gov. David Paterson and State Senator Malcolm Smith support the Millionaire's Tax!" This call for tax reform is a program of collaboration with the Democratic Party. The ISO was pushing the same program as the UFT and PSC bureaucrats, and not for the first time.

In the abstract the ISO editorializes "Against Shared Sacrifice" (10 April), but in practice it mobilizes for the "Fair Share Tax Reform" proposal which is the concrete expression of the "shared sacrifice" policy put forward by top capitalists and Democrats. The

call to tax the rich is raised by multibillionaire capitalists like computer monopolist Bill Gates and the investor Warren Buffett. The *New York Times*, voice of the liberal bourgeois establishment, editorialized in favor of the "millionaire's tax." The idea that raising the state tax on those earning more than \$500,000 a year from 6.85 percent to 10.3 percent is somehow a blow against capital is positively ludicrous. Like the proposal to tax bonuses given to AIG and other Wall Street high fliers at 90 percent, it's just a Democratic ploy to give the appearance of "fairness."

Listen to the spokesman for the Working Families Party (WFP), the main group campaigning for the "millionaire's tax": "the Fair Share campaign insisted on 'real shared sacrifice.' Asking the wealthy to pay a little more, said one key ally, provides the thread to secure our social fabric – our schools, our health care system, our safety net – and in so doing demonstrates our belief that *we truly are 'in this together.'*" (The WFP is not really a party but a ballot line so labor officials can get their ranks to vote for Democratic candidates while holding their noses.) To refute the claim that such a tax on top salaries would induce the rich to leave the state, the WFP pointed to a Princeton University study showing that after taxes were raised in 2004 on those earning over \$500,000 a year, the number of "half-millionaires" in New Jersey actually *increased*.

There's nothing the least bit radical about this tinkering with tax tables. Don't get us wrong – we're not against raising taxes on the rich: if you ask us, it would be just ducky if those who sweat billions out of the labor of working people were taxed at 100 percent (don't count on it). But the bottom line is, the people who rule society today – from City Hall to the governor's mansion to the White House and Congress – are the capitalist class. When the capitalist government taxes, it does so for its own reasons, and when it spends money, its own class interests are paramount. Whether taxes are paid by the rich or the "middle class," they will go to finance imperialist wars, bailouts of the banks and the like. *That* you can count on.

To pretend that taxing the rich has anything to do with stopping tuition hikes and budget cuts is to buy the bourgeois *lie* that there is not enough money. Like calls for "money for jobs/education/health care, not for war," this depicts the fight as one over "spending priorities." It is not. It's all about *class interests*. As revolutionary Marxists, the CUNY Internationalist Clubs defend the working class, students and others against the attacks of the ruling class. If forced to, the bosses' government will find the money, if necessary by printing it, as it is doing now in vast amounts. And even if they have the money it won't stop them from raising tuition, a plan that was in the works even *before* the economic crisis broke.

What this is really all about is that the various reformist groups (both social-democratic ones like the ISO and Stalinoid ones like the PSL) pitch their politics to appeal to bourgeois "progressives." Sometimes that translates into support for populists like Ralph Nader, a rabid anti-Communist and immigrant-basher who the ISO backed in 2000 and (less enthusiastically) in 2004. Generally, though, it's about sidling up to the Democrats. This election year, with the vast popularity of Barack Obama, especially among youth, the ISO tried to appear as militant "yes we can" Obama supporters. To be fair, they were not the only "Obama socialists," although they were among the most shameless.

Now the ISO writes that, "After 30 years of Republican ascendance in Washington and the retreat of liberalism at every turn," Obama's budget was "a welcome blast of fresh air" (*Socialist Worker*, 3 March). "In its budget outline introduced last week, the new Obama administration proposes to raise taxes on the richest Americans, increase spending on programs for the poor," it

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# How Open Admissions Was Won in 1969 and Debates on the Struggle at CUNY Today

By Abram Negrete

The following is a response to a broadside against the CUNY Internationalist Clubs that was written by D.S., a leading local activist in the International Socialist Organization, in the form of a report on a meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee Against CUNY Budget Cuts and Tuition Hikes held after the March 25 student/labor rally at Hunter College. It has been edited for publication.

For the moment I would like to put aside some of the highly-charged claims and accusations made in D.S.'s polemic ("Notes on the March 25 Meeting," 27 March 2009), in order to focus on one of the fundamental issues to which he refers.

Early on during the post-rally meeting on March 25, I spoke to emphasize that in order to defeat attacks on the right to education at CUNY, it will be crucial to combine systematic organizing among students with a conscious effort to strengthen links with workers' and immigrant-rights groups. Particularly if campus struggles become more militant, it will be essential to have pre-existing and active connections with sections of the labor movement. Thus, Internationalist supporters, and Class Struggle Education Workers members, had gone all-out both to help mobilize students and to get endorsements from a range of groups including the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, Jobs with Justice, the Frente Unido de Inmigrantes Ecuatorianos, and many others.

Particularly significant was the vocal and visible presence of a contingent of Stella D'Oro strikers, together with six to eight transit worker activists, several members of the Jornaleros (Day Laborers) of Woodside, the lead organizer of DC 1707 (representing daycare workers and others), immigrant taxi, construction and deli workers, members of three groupings within the UFT [United Federation of Teachers], the Starbucks Workers Union, a spokeswoman for Domestic Workers United, and other workers.

There were over a dozen student and faculty speakers from Hunter (including the PSC's adjunct organizer). A number also came from BMCC, Baruch, Brooklyn, CCNY, Hostos, Lehman, Staten Island, the New School and other campuses. The rally was co-chaired by the lead organizer of the recent unionization victory among research assistants at SUNY-Stony Brook, and addressed by the organizer of the adjunct unionizing victory at Pace University. I pointed out that this is only a small beginning, but represents a real step in the right direction.

During the rally I noticed that many students, particularly "new" Hunter activists who had emerged in the period since the March 5 walkout, were excited and energized by the workers' presence and speeches – but that a number of the "long-term" activists appeared surprisingly uninterested. It occurred to me that this might be related to previously expressed differences over the perspective for having such a rally on March 25.

Thus, at the post-rally meeting, I was struck when a spokesman for the Hunter International Socialist Organization (ISO) explicitly argued, in response to my remarks, that strengthening links to labor should *not* be a central priority in the coming period. This statement then led into much of the ensuing debate. [Two members of Class Struggle Education Workers and an Internationalist activist from Hostos Community College] made concrete and pertinent points, including examples from Europe, Mexico and the United States.

All of them stressed the importance of linking up with the power of the working

class – and each stressed that this must be combined with mobilizing among students. In contrast, a number of participants in the meeting openly *counterposed* "student organizing" and "student leadership" to building links with the working class. As [several comrades] painstakingly explained, this is a road to defeat.

## How Open Admissions Was Won

At the March 25 post-rally meeting, I noted that in 1969, African American and Puerto Rican students launched the historic struggle whose 40th anniversary is being commemorated this year. These courageous students carried out a building occupation at City College, which sparked protests at other campuses, with demands focused on raising black and Puerto Rican enrollment and establishing black and Puerto Rican studies. I noted that open admissions was actually not part of the occupation's demands, but was eventually won through the intervention of powerful city unions.

This statement was challenged at the meeting by D.S., who in his "Notes" writes that I "argued at the meeting that open admissions would not have been won in 1969 if not for the action of unions." He states: "I see nothing in Chris Gunderson's history, which [Abram] cited as the source of his information, that indicates that unions had anything to do with the 1969 open admissions strike." I found these exchanges interesting, as I had been meaning for some time to talk to him about an article he wrote for the ISO's newspaper ("Resisting the Cuts at CUNY," *Socialist Worker*, 30 January), which described the origins of the open admissions policy without making any reference to labor unions or the working class.

Because history is central to political struggle, and because the lessons of CUNY's own history are so crucial to our struggles today, it is worth pursuing this aspect of the debate.

At the March 25 meeting I referred Brother D.S. to two sources. The first is Christopher Gunderson's paper "The Struggle for CUNY: A History of the CUNY Student Movement, 1969-1999" (available on line at [www.geocities.com/dillodistro/GUNDERSON.doc](http://www.geocities.com/dillodistro/GUNDERSON.doc)). Gunderson writes: "It is worth noting that Open Admissions was not among the demands" of the initial student occupation at CCNY. It is true that Gunderson, while making general statements about the need to "draw in other social forces including labor unions," does not address unions' role in the 1969 events.

This issue is discussed in the other source I mentioned at the meeting, in response to Brother D.S.: the indispensable book *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War II* (New Press, 2000) by Joshua Freeman, the CUNY Grad Center history professor who was also the author of the standard history of the Transport Workers Union (*In Transit*, Temple, 2001) and an outspoken defender of the 2005 TWU strike.

Noting the gross historic under-representation of African American and Latino students at CUNY, Freeman describes the 1969 occupations and the April 21 student protest where "white leftists" (his term) added the demand "Open admission for all." However, the CCNY faculty endorsed a "dual admissions" program in which "half of an enlarged freshman class would be chosen using existing, grade-based criteria, while the other half would be filled with students from designated high schools in poverty areas, who would not have to meet any grade standard." Instead, a "delegation from the Central Labor Council" headed by CLC president Harry Van Arsdale "suggested enactment of a master plan [guaranteeing higher education for all high school



CCNY student center ablaze on 8 May 1969 as students resist brutal police attack on campus occupation by black and Puerto Rican students.

graduates]...in 1970." (The bracketed phrase is part of Freeman's text.)

When the president of CCNY "suggested that CUNY could survive a drastic expansion only by imposing tuition, Van Arsdale, the United Federation of Teachers, and others successfully argued that to do so would make a mockery of the expanded access the new admissions policy was meant to provide." The next freshman class grew by 75 percent, with a large increase in white as well as black and Latino students.

The motives of Van Arsdale and other bureaucratic labor leaders were far from pure, and many of the city's unions were far from immune to the "racial backlash" of the Nixon years. Yet open admissions, in "giv[ing] something to working-class whites while increasing opportunities for nonwhites," had the effect of cutting *against* racism. This in itself, combined with the great benefits of the policy, was in the overwhelming *class* interest of all the city's workers. Noting that "open admissions represented a significant advance toward equal opportunity" and the ideal of education for all, Freeman calls it "one of the great triumphs of working-class New York." Its later dismantling at the behest of the city's racist rulers was a serious defeat.

It is instructive to look at the account of the origins of CUNY's former open admissions policy given by the authors of a famous study that definitively showed the policy's enormous benefits for large numbers of students: David E. Lavin and David Hyllegard's *Changing the Odds: Open Admissions and the Life Chances of the Disadvantaged* (Yale, 1996). Describing the "perceived conflict between merit and quotas [that] seemed irreconcilable" during debates on the "dual admissions" proposal, the authors note:

"[U]ltimately, a way out of the quandary was found in a proposal put forth

by the powerful New York City Labor Council, a coalition of major unions.... The Labor Council proposed that the only proper plan was one that would guarantee admissions to all.... Both within and outside the university, a consensus seemed to form around the approach of letting everyone in."

A previous book co-authored by Lavin (*Right versus Privilege: The Open-Admissions Experiment at the City University of New York* [Free Press, 1981]) gives further details. It notes that in June of 1969, "resolution of the [CUNY] crisis began to crystallize. Particularly influential in this process was the powerful New York City Labor Council and its head, Harry Van Arsdale." Particularly concerned that the children of Irish and Italian American workers (prominent in the skilled trades) be included in any outcome, "Central Labor Council representatives argued that the only proper plan was one that would guarantee admissions to all.... Only the open-admissions notion offered something to everyone and seemed to lay to rest the specter that increased representation of some groups would come at the expense of other groups."

Again, the bureaucrats' own motives reflected their job-trusting craft union outlook, but the *effect* of the intervention by the powerful city unions was to win a major victory for black, Latino, Asian *and* white workers and students.

## Why It Matters Today

So yes, it was precisely the intervention of powerful labor unions, representing hundreds of thousands of workers, that won open admissions in 1969. If ignoring or downplaying this aspect of CUNY history means willful blindness to crucial lessons from past struggles, pretending that we think that labor will spontaneously "ride to the rescue" to-

Revolution





**The power of labor: thousands of transit strikers rally in 1966 to protest jailing of Transport Workers Union leader Mike Quill. The TWU won the strike.**

day, or that we overlook the role of the labor bureaucracy, is simply disingenuous.

When we argue for strengthening bonds with labor, this does not mean orienting to the conservative labor *bureaucracy*, which subordinates the working class to the government and the ruling Democratic Party. (Current and would-be student bureaucrats play a similar role among students.) The workers movement is not equal to its current leadership. Those who identify the two often ignore the former, only capitulate to the latter – while chanting “Yes we can” in unison with those bureaucrats’ Democratic Party overlords.

Today, New York City is a potential powder keg of discontent among workers and oppressed communities throughout the city. Every day brings a new outrage against the working class. Moreover, the unions of today, though weakened by the relentless attacks of the past decades, have a far greater proportion of African American, Latino and Asian workers than was the case four decades ago. Additionally, enormous sectors of workers are not in any union at all – organizing the unorganized is a task that the labor bureaucrats, who play by the bosses’ rules, repeatedly prove incapable of accomplishing.

Today, the majority of New York City’s working class is of immigrant origin, and many bring valuable experiences and traditions of militant struggle from their countries of origin. It is no accident that most of those represented at our March 25 rally came from groups and associations of immigrant workers – as was also the case during the successful campaign we initiated against CUNY’s post-9/11 “anti-immigrant war purge” (see the Internationalist pamphlet *Defend Immigrant Students—Defeat CUNY’s “War Purge”!* [2001]).

So rather than imagining that labor will automatically “ride to the rescue,” or “counting on” labor support somehow materializing, we have argued for going beyond campus bounds to actively establish and strengthen real links, *now*, with unionists and immigrant-worker activists throughout the city and beyond, as a crucial component of organizing a massive, militant response at CUNY. We have not simply preached this, but sought to practice it. Instead, while paying some faint lip service to the general, theoretical importance of labor, in practice (and often explicitly), the ISO counterposes a kind of student vanguardism.

It is striking that Brother D.S. ended his January 30 *Socialist Worker* article by writing: “The recent student occupation of the New School should provide an example to CUNY students of the kind of tactics that have been proven to work – and remind them of the history of struggles at CUNY for their and future generations’ education rights.”

I cannot help but be reminded of some would-be Marxists at the New School (I am not referring to the serious and dedicated activists but to others), who talked in general about “the proletariat,” but had no idea even as to whether the workers at the occupied cafeteria were organized in a union. When we approached the workers’ shop steward, it turned out they had a clause for respecting picket lines, and thus they stayed out of work. (See our leaflet “Inside the New School Occupation,” on page 12.) Making no attempts to get support from working people in the city, quick to red-bait those who were not enamored of student-vanguardist posturing, those particular verbal leftists proved all too vulnerable to the Kerrey administration’s maneuvers when the chips were down. In the process, those Marxists-in-rhetoric-only helped push through a settlement that many of the serious activists there have come to see as one more subterfuge from war criminal Kerrey.

Despite the courage of the students and supporters who participated in the sit-in (who were joined by a significant number of people from CUNY, comrade A., D.S. and myself among them), the brief, isolated occupation did not win a victory. Kerrey & Co. just doled out a few empty promises.

We cannot afford a superficial or light-minded approach to struggles at CUNY. This struggle is no game of words. Any real intensification of the fight at CUNY must be well-prepared and surrounded with already established, solid links of solidarity – between CUNY campuses, to others throughout the city and state, and to sections of the working class, immigrants and oppressed communities.

Student protests can, in periods of heightened social conflict, serve as an important catalyst for broader social struggles. This is what happened in France in May 1968, when university protests touched off factory occupations and a general strike of ten million workers. In Mexico that same year, the government managed to isolate students from the working class, drowning their struggle in blood during the Tlatelolco Massacre.

During the discussion on March 25, CSEW member I.D. gave powerful examples from recent history, including the Greek students’ occupation of the Polytechnic University in Athens. He stressed: “what we are debating here is a question of strategy and program.”

Hostos activist C.M. talked about the crucial experience of the Mexican UNAM strike of 1999-2000 – where we succeeded in getting the powerful electrical workers union to build a workers defense guard (see Internationalist pamphlet *The UNAM Strike and the Fight for Workers Revolution* [2000]).

The struggle is international, and holds

crucial lessons for all of us activists at CUNY. When I say we ignore them at our peril, I mean that literally.

The struggle of ideas reflects, and contributes to, the class struggle. A fashionable philistinism – sometimes decked out in postmodern garb, sometimes couched in New Left-inspired demagoguery against “ideological squabbles” – may try to dismiss it all with a haughty wave of the hand. But programmatic differences have practical consequences.

### “Students and Labor: Shut the City Down!”

As we all know, CUNY is not an elite university like NYU or the New School. At CUNY, the administration will not hesitate to unleash serious police violence against any militant-seeming action that it perceives as being isolated. The class approach is key to avoiding such isolation. Among other things, it means working actively to link up, now, to organizations and groups of workers, immigrants, African American, Latino and Asian communities, and others targeted by the cuts and hikes, together with activists at SUNY, NYU, the New School, Pace, F.I.T., Columbia and other campuses. The key is being able to mobilize real

power – the kind that the working class, with its ability to shut down productions and transport, actually has.

On March 5 and on March 25, hundreds of protesters responded with enormous enthusiasm to our chant, “Students and labor, shut the city down!” It is no exaggeration to say that this slogan has caught on like wildfire since comrade A.L. coined it at a militant rally outside the New School last December. Students can’t do it alone – but linking up with the working class, it can and must be done. Historical amnesia on labor’s role in past struggles only serves a program that puts labor on the back burner in the struggles of today. Conversely, the real history is an important tool for a class-struggle program actually capable of winning victories today.

The fact of the matter is that for huge numbers of working-class New Yorkers, defending the right to go to CUNY is a question of direct and clear class interest. Any strategy that fails to give “priority” to that fact is not only based on a counterposed class outlook, but is an obstacle to actually *winning*. Because we are serious about winning, we view this political debate as a crucial – indeed central – part of the fight. ■

## What Program...

*continued from page 3*

gushes. In a similar vein, a group that stuck with Nader in ’08, Socialist Alternative (SAlt), writes that “In a sharp break from political policies during the last 30 years, President Obama’s budget proposes repealing tax cuts for the rich, increasing spending on social services,” etc. (*Justice*, March-April 2009). There couldn’t be clearer proof that these groups are just masquerading as socialists, but are actually liberals, who hail Obama’s capitalist war budget as a “blast of fresh air” and a “sharp break” from the past.

So after March 5, the ISO, SAlt and other reformists threw their efforts into building a new Tax the Rich Coalition. “If the proposed federal budget can be based on raising taxes for the wealthy, why not in New York state?” the ISO asked. They unenthusiastically went along with the March 25 student/labor rally at Hunter, while doing nothing to reach workers and increasingly pulling back from bringing out students. Their coalition called a “Make the Rich Pay” rally at Paterson’s office on March 31, *after* the budget fight was all over. For them it was all about creating a “movement” that they can recruit out of rather than actually trying to stop a tuition increase that will force thousands of CUNY students out of school. And now the results are in: the millionaire’s tax passed, although only raising the top bracket to

8.97 percent. The WFP proclaimed victory. Are you happy, ISO, SAlt, PSL? We’re not. *The tuition hike stayed.*

With our limited forces, the CUNY Internationalist Clubs worked intensively to organize opposition to beat back the budget cuts, layoffs and tuition hikes throughout this period. Rather than looking to the bourgeois parties and the CUNY administration – who were behind these attacks on students, poor and working people – we focused on building links between students fighting the tuition purge, faculty fighting layoffs and workers fighting union-busting. In contrast to light-minded calls for “student power,” we looked to the power of labor, stressing that students, faculty and staff at CUNY can play an important role in building a working-class counteroffensive against the capitalist attacks. Fighting political illusions in the Democrats, we called to break with all the capitalist parties and build a revolutionary workers party.

*La lotta continua*, the struggle goes on, as Italian students and workers proclaimed after the “hot autumn” of 1969. Winning open admissions, free tuition and student-teacher-worker control of the universities won’t be easy. In fact, it will take nothing short of revolution to make quality higher education genuinely free and accessible to all, so that it really is a *human* right. We urge you to join with us in the CUNY Internationalist Clubs in waging this fight. ■



# Voices of the Student/Labor

The March 25 student/labor rally outside Hunter College drew students and adjuncts from several CUNY campuses, together with delegations from the striking Stella D'Oro bakery workers, *Jornaleros Unidos* (United Day Laborers) of Woodside, workers from the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), and members of the United Federation of Teachers, other unions, and many left and activist groups. The rally was co-chaired by Jackie Mariano (Hunter Student Union), Jim McAsey (Organizing Director, CWA Local 1104) and Sándor John (CUNY Contingents Unite and Class Struggle Education Workers). Below are edited excerpts from some of the speeches.

**Caitlin,  
Hunter student**

Budget cuts mean less money for schools, and that means we pay more. Now it's \$300 more per semester, then it's going to go up again. [Voice: Where's the money going?] We're not going to be seeing any of that money. We want free tuition and open admissions for everyone. [Chant: "Free tuition is a right, Fight, fight, fight!"] And we want a free transit system. Let's stand up for what we believe in.

**Carla France-Hamlet,  
Domestic Workers United**

Domestic workers are having their wages cut and are losing their jobs because of the economic crisis. We need students to be able to go to school. But how are workers going to be able to pay more, from the little they have in their pockets, for their children to go to school? I am a graduate of CUNY, I attended BMCC and Baruch. We want the right to go to college for all students.

**Jackie Mariano,  
Hunter Student Union**

Health care and education are receiving the biggest cuts in New York State. My mother is a nurse, and she just got laid off. We have to pay my tuition out of our pocket, because I don't qualify for financial aid. They're hiking tuition, and I might not be able to go to school next semester. I work part time to help my mother, and now my hours got cut from 23 hours a week to four hours a week. What do we want? Free tuition! When do we want it? Now!

**Joseph,  
Hunter student**

I got a flyer saying they're talking about cutting back TAP. And they're raising prices for school? We work in the city, but we can't afford to live in the city. We can't even afford to go into the city now, if we live in Queens or Brooklyn. And they're raising the MTA fare?



**Carla France-Hamlet, Domestic Workers United**



**Christine Williams, one of four transit worker speakers at the rally**

I'm in the Transport Workers Union, I work for the subway system. This morning, the

Metropolitan Transportation Authority voted to raise the fare and cut service. They're going to close over 150 booths and 15 bus lines, and various subway lines – and you're going to pay more for it! They're also going to raise the tolls on the bridges. How are people supposed to travel? This is crazy. The working class is not going to take this any more.

**Colleen,  
Hunter student**

I'm a senior in the QUEST program, and I've just started student teaching, five days a week. Since I'm also taking five courses, I have no time to work, and had to take out a loan because TAP [Tuition Assistance Program] doesn't give me anything. When I graduate, I won't get a job, because they're not hiring. So I'll have no way to pay back these loans, and would have to go backwards in life.



**Jim McAsey,  
CWA Local 1104**

I represent over 6,000 graduate student employees around New York State, who have been struggling for a contract for over two years. Thirty of our SUNY members came to the city today to protest at Governor Paterson's office. The labor and student movements must come together and fight as one. We face the same issues. This capitalist society will not survive without you. We need to come together and form one big movement. [Chant: "Students and labor, Shut the city down!"]

**Morgan Horowitz,  
Class Struggle Education Workers**

I'm an adjunct here at Hunter; most CUNY classes are taught by people like me. *Reader's Digest* recently called adjuncting one of the great economic opportunities of the future. We're making poverty wages, we're replaceable, and they like it that way. Now they're bailing out the banks. Did the banks help us before? ["No!"] After we lose jobs and houses, they get the banks back on their feet, and we're supposed to believe things will be all right. Meanwhile the Iraq war keeps going on, and the Afghanistan war; they fly over Pakistan and bomb that too; the Palestinians get bombed. That's the politics of the Democrats and Republicans together; they remain in power and we see the same thing. What's the solution? It's us in power. Workers struggle – that's how you do it.

**Kirstine, Revolution Film Club  
(Hunter College)**



Tuition increases and adjuncts' poverty wages are not really because of the economic meltdown. The Board of Trustees – these bankers, real estate owners, capitalists – have been trying to push students out since 1969 [when open admissions was won]. This is an attack on minorities, immigrants, working-class and poor people. I'm here to demand free education for all, no tuition and open admissions, from kindergarten to graduate school. Education is a necessity, a right, not a commodity. End control by the Board of Trustees and the mayor over our future and our education. Students, teachers and workers can run CUNY.

**Roy,  
Brooklyn College**

I want to tell you that Brooklyn College students are mobilizing, like others at CUNY. We have to get together and organize to shut this city down. I hate it when a governor and a mayor think they can solve this recession off the blood and sweat of workers, and when a city councilwoman [Christine Quinn] gives a State of the City address that doesn't say anything about CUNY at all, as if we don't even exist. How are we going to show them we exist? We're going to get our students and our workers, and we're gonna shut the city down!

**Sándor John,  
Class Struggle Education Workers**

If you think CUNY doesn't care about this protest, the potential it represents, take a look at all the cops they have lined up inside Hunter right now. When we talk about the class struggle, the power of workers, we're talking about defeating the arrogant CUNY adminis-



**Jackie Mariano, Hunter Student Union**

Internationalist photos



# Protest: Education Is a Right!



Internationalist photos

tration. It's going to take a struggle, and that's why we organize to bring workers out here. I was a telephone worker for nine years in California, and we had to go on strike to defend our health benefits. Our class-struggle tendency had a chant that we brought to hundreds of workers then: "Picket lines mean don't cross." [Crowd picks up the chant.] People may laugh about no cookies, but what's not funny is scabbing. The labor movement needs to stop those scabs. We're not going to win that strike by just asking people not to buy a cookie, but by the unions stopping transport of those scab products and stopping them from getting on the supermarket shelves. [Chant: "Victory to the Stella D'Oro strike!"]

## Jerry, one of three Stella D'Oro strikers who addressed the rally

I'm proud to be here. We're here to support you; we're in this together. I've worked there 27 years. The new corporation [Brynwood Partners] decided to take over, but we didn't give in. There's 135 union members, and *not one of us* has crossed the picket line. And I want to say: no more hikes! [Chant: "No contract, no cookies!"]

## Andrew Hackman, Lead Organizer, AFSCME DC 1707

It doesn't start just with you all, it's also starting with our children. It's affecting children as young as five in schools and day-care centers. I wanted to come out to support you guys. I myself am a student too,

and this is a major concern. The transportation that we take – it's a problem. Education for the youth – it's a problem. Where does this stop? We must come together and unite.

## Antonio, immigrant worker

The rights of students are under attack, and so are the rights of the workers. I heard today that 9,000 state workers are threatened with layoffs. No matter which politician is in office, Democrats or Republicans, they are attacking us. In 2005, the transit workers virtually shut the city down. We need to do that, to shut the city down – students and labor – in order to defeat these attacks.

## Chis Crews, New School activist

The struggle at the New School and our occupation in December, as well as the NYU occupation earlier this year, and signs of solidarity between students at CUNY, SUNY, NYU, Columbia and other schools: all this is very encouraging to me. But a larger struggle is going on both in New York and nationally – even internationally – and seeing students and workers united here today is a great example of these various movements connecting together in a larger struggle. When we rise and struggle together we are far more powerful, and far more of a threat, than when we struggle alone.

## Stephanie, member, United Federation of Teachers

I'm a teacher in East Harlem and a Hunter alum. Every morning I come to school, look into the eyes of my 27 students, and think about the conditions they already face on a daily basis, and now we face cuts in the budget. CUNY is the only option for most of my students to go to college. What will they do now? The mother of one of my students who has severe asthma had to beg to get a second nebulizer so he could have one in school. What will happen if their health care is cut? As it is we are already in a crisis situation. They say "shared sacrifice." We've already sacrificed as much as we possibly can. We need to be sitting in, we need to be rallying, we need to be out there telling them that we won't take it one more minute.

## Mischa Lefebvre, Starbucks Workers Union

Paying at least six hundred bucks a year more at CUNY is utter bullshit. I'm a student at Queens College and a member of the Starbucks Workers Union. We're not just looking at what's going on at Starbucks, or just at CUNY, or just with transit workers. This is all of us. They're trying to make us complacent worker-bees. Take the damned school! Stand up and fight for your rights!



Andrew Hackman, DC 1707, AFSCME

## Laura, Hunter Student Union



I'm a student here at Hunter, on the seven-or-eight-year plan. [Laughter.] Things have been bad enough at CUNY for years now. We have to wait in line for broken printers; we have to walk upstairs because escalators are broken all the time; we can't get the classes we need – we have plenty of reasons to fight back already. We need to be prepared for a long fight. This is an attack against all working people. We should be prepared to take over the schools and fight for what we need.

## Aubeen Lopez, Hunter student, CUNY Internationalist Clubs

It's good to see students out here today allied with labor against these attacks on the working class. Governor Paterson and the Democratic Party, along with Barack Obama, are attacking working-class education throughout the country. They want education to be only for a privileged few, whereas we are fighting here today to make it a right. Instead of getting an education, they want the working class

to fight and die as cannon fodder in their imperialist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We call for mobilizing students and the power of the working class – to defeat these attacks on the working class, to defeat the war in Iraq, to defeat the attacks on the Afghan peoples by U.S. imperialism. We say: Students and labor, Shut the city down! Above all else, we need to break with the Democratic Party, which is behind these attacks. We have another chant: Democrats, Republicans – Strikebreakers, war makers! [Crowd picks up the chant.]

## James Hoff, editor, CUNY Grad Center Advocate

What's happening here today is really important, and I want to congratulate the people who organized this rally. It's great to see students and workers coming together; it's really important. We're all getting screwed by this so-called budget crisis. But this crisis has been going on for decades in New York City. Whose city? Our city! Whose streets? Our streets! Whose school? Our school!

## Chris Williams, Vice President, Pace University Union of Adjunct Faculty

Yesterday Barack Obama told us to be "patient." The bankers have already been paid off; they're never the ones who get told to be patient. The average wage for adjuncts at Pace is \$2,500 per course. One student in my class pays my wage; no health care, no pension. Bloomberg was recently valued at \$16 billion. He alone could pay off the city's \$14 billion debt, and he'd still be a billionaire. We need to organize and fight for what is rightfully ours. We do all the work in this city; we should reap the benefits, not those people down on Wall Street. ■



Sara, Stella D'Oro striker



# Mobilize the Power of the Working Class to Free Mumia!

## Mumia Abu-Jamal's Life is On the Line

By Charlie Morán

On April 6, the United States Supreme Court refused to hear Mumia Abu-Jamal's appeal of his 1982 conviction on the grounds that blacks were excluded from the jury. The effect of this refusal is to let the decision of the U.S. Third Court of Appeals stand, upholding Mumia's conviction but invalidating the death sentence. Last October, the high court also turned down an appeal by Mumia of the decision of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court denying him a new trial because the prosecution had convinced witnesses to lie on the stand in order to get a conviction. The U.S. Supreme Court has still not ruled on an appeal by the Philadelphia District Attorney has separately appealed to the Supreme Court to reinstate the death sentence.

Thus the life of Mumia Abu-Jamal, an innocent man convicted in a frame-up trial presided over by a racist judge who acted as a prosecutor for the police, is in great danger. Many of Mumia's supporters hoped that federal courts would rectify this abomination. Last May, when the Third Circuit Court of Appeals turned down his appeal, some saw a glimmer of hope in the dissent of one member of the three-judge panel. But the Supreme Court refusal to hear an appeal based on the exclusion of blacks from the jury shows once again that there is no justice in the capitalist courts, particularly for a black man targeted by the police. Predictably the racists in Philadelphia are cheering. It is necessary to protest this outrage.

Mumia is the former Black Panther spokesman and world-renowned radical journalist who has been behind bars for the last 27 years for a crime he did not commit, falsely accused of killing police officer Daniel Faulkner in December 1981. The racist Philly police and prosecutors had been after Mumia ever since the late 1960s and early '70s when he was a spokesman for the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. They hated him for his courageous reporting of cop abuse, particularly on the persecution of the MOVE group, for which he became known as the "voice of the voiceless."

Mumia was framed and found guilty in a 1982 trial presided over by the racist Judge Albert Sabo in Philadelphia, a former sheriff and lifetime member of the Fraternal Order of the Police (FOP), who vowed in the hearing of a court reporter that he would "help them fry that n—r." The 1995 "post-conviction relief" appeals hearing was held before the same "hanging judge" Sabo who had witnesses for Mumia arrested on leaving the stand, and jailed one of Jamal's lawyers. But the only thing Mumia is guilty of is being a black radical in racist America – a country whose society was founded on the backs of black slaves.

Defenders of the Philadelphia police have tried to deny (and some liberals have questioned) that blacks were excluded from the jury. This was refuted by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, which wrote in a 14 May 2007 article:

"The trial prosecutor – who had a history of excluding blacks from jury service, having excluded three times as many blacks as whites between 1981 and 1983 – used his peremptory challenges to exclude 10 of 14 blacks from Abu-Jamal's jury, as compared to only 5 of 25 whites. The prosecutor's actions in Abu-Jamal's trial were consistent with his office's broader discriminatory approach in all criminal trials as established by a statistical study of the Philadelphia County District Attorney's office which demonstrates that between 1981 and 1997, prosecutors struck 51% of black poten-



Mumia Abu-Jamal

tial jurors but only 26% of white potential jurors. The District Attorney's Office jury-selection training tape – which explicitly advocates the exclusion of black potential jurors – indicates that the over-exclusion of blacks from Abu-Jamal's trial and Philadelphia criminal juries in general was a matter of office policy, and not merely a random outcome."

–"LDF to Argue Prosecutors Discriminated Against Black Jurors in Abu-Jamal Case"

As revolutionary Marxists we understand that it is often necessary to do battle in the capitalist courts, but we warn against illusions that these instruments of bourgeois repression are somehow neutral. Mumia's case is not an isolated glitch in the "justice" system. His case is the Sacco and Vanzetti case of our times, or that of the Scottsboro Boys. Both cases reflected the broader political climate. The case of Italian immigrant workers and anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, who were executed in August 1927, grew out of the "red scare" following World War I. The case of nine black youths – Charlie Weems, Ozzie Powell, Clarence Norris, Olen Montgomery, Willie Roberson, Heywood Paterson, Eugene Williams and Andrew and Leroy Wright – arrested in Alabama in 1933 while riding a freight train, was symptomatic of the "lynch law" justice under Jim Crow segregation in the South.

In both cases, there were sharp divisions over defense strategy. While liberals looked to the courts for salvation, the communists looked to mobilize working-class support against the frame-up trials. The involvement of the Communist Party (CP) through its legal defense apparatus, the International Labor Defense (ILD), was key to building the mass opposition that turned the Sacco and Vanzetti case into a cause célèbre worldwide, and which ultimately prevented

the execution of the Scottsboro youths. The intervention of the CP was decisive in making the connection of class and race which the liberals refused to touch.

James P. Cannon, who would become the founder of the Trotskyist movement in the U.S. after being expelled from the CP, was the first national secretary of the ILD. In an article he laid out the policy of the class struggle that we of the CUNY Internationalist Clubs follow today in fighting for Mumia's freedom:

"The Sacco-Vanzetti case is no private monopoly, but an issue of the class struggle in which the decisive word will be spoken by the masses who have made this fight their own. It is, therefore, necessary to discuss openly the conflicting policies which are bound up with different objectives.

"One policy is the policy of the class struggle. It puts the center of gravity in the protest movement of the workers of America and the world. It puts all faith in the power of the masses and no faith whatever in the justice of the courts. While favoring all possible legal proceedings, it calls for agitation, publicity, demonstrations – organized protest on a national and international scale. It calls for unity and solidarity of all workers on this burning issue, regardless of conflicting views on other questions. This is what has prevented the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti so far. Its goal is nothing less than their triumphant vindication and liberation.

"The other policy is the policy of 'respectability,' of the 'soft pedal' and of ridiculous illusions about 'justice' from the courts of the enemy. It relies mainly on legal proceedings. It seeks to blur the issue of the class struggle, it shrinks from the 'vulgar and noisy' demonstrations of the militant workers and throws

the mud of slander on them....

"The conscious proletarian elements with whom we identify ourselves unconditionally, are for the first policy. The bourgeois elements, and those influenced by them, are for the second."

–James P. Cannon, "Who Can Save Sacco and Vanzetti?" *International Labor Defender*, January 1927, in *Notebook of an Agitator* (1958)

As a result of the work of the ILD, and of the International Red Aid to which it was affiliated, there were workers' mobilizations around the world demanding freedom for the two immigrant anarchist workers, including a strike in Buenos Aires (see "The International Struggle to Save Sacco and Vanzetti," in *The Internationalist* No. 27, May-June 2008)."

Today, many of those who looked to the federal courts to save Mumia are putting their hopes in the new government of Democrat Barack Obama in Washington. At a strategy meeting in Philadelphia on April 11, it was decided to petition Attorney General Eric Holder to initiate a federal civil rights investigation into Jamal's case (copies of petition to be sent to the president himself, Vice President Joseph Biden, Homeland Security secretary Janet Napolitano and Michelle Obama, among others). The petition drops the earlier calls for a new trial, which themselves showed illusions in the "justice" system, and does not call to free Mumia. What they have not done, at least so far, is to call a protest against the Supreme Court's outrageous decision.

Similar appeals were made a decade earlier to Bill Clinton's attorney general, Janet Reno, to no avail. Clinton was a strong supporter of the FOP. To think that the federal government will come to the aid of Mumia, falsely accused of killing a cop, is to fundamentally misunderstand the nature of the Democratic Party and the Obama government, which staunchly uphold the racist injustice system. Obama himself as a candidate sought to squelch protest over a New York City judge's decision dismissing charges against the killer cops who gunned down Sean Bell in a hail of 50 bullets. Now Obama is escalating the bombing of Afghanistan and Pakistan, while extending the murderous U.S. occupation of Iraq.

Millions of people have rallied in support of Mumia all over the world. The Internationalist Group and the League for the Fourth International along with the CUNY Internationalist Clubs have called for workers' mobilizations to free Mumia. In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, our comrades of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil twice initiated statewide work stoppages by the teachers in Rio de Janeiro demanding Mumia's freedom. Also, on 24 April 1999 dock workers of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) shut down all ports on the U.S. West Coast proclaiming, "An injury to one is an injury to all, Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!"

Mumia's life hangs in the balance. The lessons from the Sacco and Vanzetti and the Scottsboro cases must be applied to wage a genuine struggle to free Mumia: that there must be no illusions in the bourgeois courts of injustice (or the Democratic Party in government), and that we must seek to bring the power of the working class internationally to bear to win the freedom of this courageous fighter. The United States is unique among advanced capitalist countries in maintaining the death penalty, which here is a legacy of the slavery that remains intact because the oppression of African Americans is woven into the fabric of racist American capitalism. It will take a workers revolution to abolish the racist death penalty and finally achieve black freedom. ■

**Internationalist Group marched with hundreds in Philadelphia in May 2005, demanding freedom for Mumia.**

Internationalist photo





## In Defense of NYU Student Protesters

On February 18, students at New York University sat in at the campus cafeteria for 40 hours, with demands ranging from solidarity with Palestinian students in Gaza, "fair labor contracts" for campus employees and allowing teaching assistants to bargain collectively, to liberal calls for "socially responsible investment." The NYU administration of John Sexton said it would negotiate, then had a "snatch squad" of cops grab the student negotiators. Supporters of the Internationalist Group mobilized for protests outside the occupied facility, and met administration repression with the call: "Expel Sexton! Abolish the administration - for student/teacher/worker control of the universities!"



AP

## Inside New School...

*continued from page 12*

more political demands and those more narrowly focused on the relatively small change of "student space" and campus governance. On the second day, it came to a head over the question of Kerrey's war crimes. The debates over these differences that arose are not just a sideshow, but come out in any hard-fought struggle. It's important to understand why this is so, in order to be able to draw lessons that are crucial in the heat of struggle and can help us achieve real victories in the future.

Among the New School activists themselves, there were significant political differences. Some of the most vocal were from the Radical Student Union (formerly the New School chapter of Students for a Democratic Society), who with some exceptions had been markedly reluctant to launch the occupation. Others were student government bureaucrats narrowly preoccupied with campus governance. And then there were a fair number of anarchists, with different shades of opinion amongst them, some of whom were quite serious and militant while others pretty much had their heads in the clouds.

A comrade described the situation at the outset:

"The first night of the occupation was extremely interesting. As supporters of the Internationalist Group and CUNY activists we were outsiders there, but like others from CUNY we became a real part of what was going on inside. There was a lot of political debate on that first night. One of the things we proposed was that they call on students to send letters of solidarity to the Vietnamese village of Thanh Phong. And they adopted that. We also got a statement from our comrades in Mexico [appended to this article], who had been part of the huge student occupation of the National University (UNAM) in Mexico City. This had a big impact, as students were really excited to get support from abroad. "People were staying up all night, in an intense atmosphere of political debate. We argued against the illusion that capitalist exploitation (i.e., investment) can be made 'socially responsible.' There were debates with anarchists about the differences between Marx and Bakunin, and the Kronstadt uprising of 1921, and the Spanish Civil War. We asked some of the more sincere anarchists questions like this: 'If you're against all authority, let's apply that to this situation. You've taken over the cafeteria. What are you going to do if anti-strike people want to come in here, are you going to keep them out?' Hell yes, they said. 'And what if you succeeded in taking over the whole

campus, would you let strikebreakers in?' Hell no, they said. 'Well, isn't that exercising authority?' They were non-plussed. And what if workers took over the whole city?' So we went back to some of the basic points made by Engels in his article 'On Authority' [1873], where he challenged the anarchists."

There was comic relief: some of the anarchists called themselves the Autonomous Faction of Non-cooperation Against the Division of Labor. Our comrade remarked, "It reminded me of a scene from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, where King Arthur comes across some peasants who say 'we're an autonomous anarcho-syndicalist commune, and we don't recognize the authority of the king,' at which point the king can resolve the question rather quickly by cutting their heads off."

Together with several other CUNY activists, we emphasized that the success of an occupation at any campus depends on broadening the struggle, to mobilize other forces. This is even more crucial when the protest breaks out at a small, elite campus like the New School. Of immediate importance were links to CUNY, the largest urban public university in the country, where students, adjunct faculty and others are fighting tuition hikes, budget cuts and layoffs. We also sought to bring in support from sectors of the powerful New York labor movement (see appended appeal). In the wake of the Wall Street meltdown, many sectors of workers are looking for a way to fight. But to link up with them in real class struggle, you need a revolutionary party rooted in the working class.

### Two Small Lessons in Class Struggle

Given the "consensus model" of decision-making, even the simplest tactical decisions often took a dangerous amount of time. As one participant wrote, "deliberation often took hours when there was an immediate concern at hand" (Tim H., "Rules of Thumb Learned by an Occupant of the New School in Exile," 19 December 2008). Even something so simple as posting people to defend the cafeteria's side entrance could not be "consented," and we joined anarchists and others in taking this kind of measure despite agitated cries of "Why, why?!" from some of the liberals.

On the first night, one of the most hotly debated issues was the claim that the New School security guards were "friends" and "allies" of the student protesters. This was pushed heavily by reformists, who reacted angrily when we and some of the anarchists challenged this absurd and dangerous idea. Some "learned" pseudo-Marxists piped up with disquisitions on how "the security guards are paid an hourly wage, so they are therefore members of the proletariat" – sheer

## All Out to Win the Stella D'Oro Strike!

One hundred thirty-six bakery workers at the Stella d'Oro cookie factory in Kingsbridge, the Bronx, have been on strike since 13 August 2008. The members of Local 50 of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers (BCTGM) Union walked out when the bakery's new owners demanded pay cuts, an end to pensions, cuts to health care, no more sick days and cuts to vacation time. From the auto industry to government jobs, the bosses are using the economic crisis of their capitalist system to grind down the workers and take back what few benefits that unions have won. Brynwood Partners, an investment firm that bought Stella d'Oro in 2006, specializes in squeezing extra profits by busting unions. The workers are fighting back and it is essential that all of NYC labor rally to their cause.

Students from CUNY have taken part in pickets and rallies throughout the strike. Along with other left and labor tendencies, the CUNY Internationalist Clubs have brought contingents of students and faculty to support the workers. In turn, the Local 50 bakery workers showed their solidarity with our fight against tuition hike and layoffs, as they have with other struggles.



Internationalist photo

While various leftist groups have been pushing the labor bureaucracy's call for a consumer boycott of the cookies made by scab labor, supporters of the Internationalist Group in the UFCW (supermarket workers), PSC (CUNY professional staff) and other unions have sought to mobilize *labor action* to prevent the distribution and sale of the scab products. Labor can win this battle the class-struggle way, by building mass pickets that no scab would dare to cross.

nonsense, as what cops and security guards "produce" is repression in the service of the bosses, as shown anew in every workers' strike or protest against racist police terror.

Soon enough, social reality clashed head-on with liberal illusions, when the security guards violently assaulted students in an attempt to break up the occupation, slamming them against walls and hurling a Latina woman activist from CUNY to the ground. Then they called in the NYPD to tear down part of the barricades and try to smash their way into the cafeteria, arresting one protester and brutalizing others.

As "Rules of Thumb" notes:

"Some of the RSU members were friends with [one of the security guards], buddying up with the guy and even inviting him in at points. But what happened on the last night when we propped open a fire door and let in scores of supporters and students? This very same security guard who was 'just a fellow worker' was seen tackling students trying to get on the right side of the barricades."

Some protesters learned from this experience, while others stubbornly refused to allow social reality to interfere with their cherished liberal illusions.<sup>1</sup> This underscores the importance of clearly understanding *who your real allies and real enemies are*, in any struggle. Illusions get you hurt, and can bring defeat. And *political debate is crucial* in order to clarify these and other vital issues.

The pedantic "discourse" of academic quasi-radicalism proved equally hollow

<sup>1</sup> The final "Agreement with New School President Bob Kerrey" (19 December 2008), which ended the sit-in, includes the demand "Staff and security guards will be compensated for all time lost over the course of the occupation," to which Kerrey responded, "This is not necessary. They have been compensated." No surprise there – repression is their job.

when it came to approaching the actual workers who were scheduled to report to work in the cafeteria on the morning of the second day. Some students said, "If they come in, we should invite them to be part of our struggle, and then they can decide not to be exploited, and to give away food for free!" After explaining that having a boss means that you can't just "decide" to do things like that on the spot, we asked if the cafeteria workers have a union.

A comrade related what happened next: "Not a *single one* of these radicals, anarchists, supposed Marxists and so forth knew whether they did or not. So we got on the phone to a union organizer at 1:30 in the morning, who told us that workers from the same food contractor [Cartwell] are unionized on some campuses. When the first cafeteria worker arrived that morning, one of the more quasi-of the quasi-radicals sidled up and muttered, 'You don't want a bunch of kids asking you about unions, right?' That got a predictable shrug of the shoulders in response.

"So with one of the most serious guys, who did press work for the occupation, I went over and said, 'How are you this morning? We wanted to know if you guys are in a union.' Turned out the answer was 'yes,' UNITE-HERE Local 100. 'Do you have a shop steward?' 'Yes we do, I'm the shop steward.' We asked, 'What can we do so the workers have some kind of protection so they don't have to work in here during the student sit-in?' He said, 'It's no problem. We have a clause in our contract, we don't have to cross a picket line.' When we reported this to the students, they were jubilant. Problem solved – by a little thing called class, class struggle and class organization."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> This episode is also related in a perceptive account of the sit-in by New School student Chris Crews.



In this way, a lot of things began to become more concrete. The second evening was interesting, because many people from the New School, CUNY, NYU, Columbia, as well as neighborhood residents and others, came to a big demonstration outside 65 Fifth Avenue. Things heated up as a large part of the crowd surged into the street, ignoring the NYPD's odious steel "protest pens." Comrade Aubeen from Bronx Community College started a chant, which totally caught on: "Labor and students, shut the city down!" "Soon hundreds of people were marching from Fifth Avenue onto Fourteenth Street, chanting that slogan, which reverberated with the Republic Windows occupation, the protests in Greece, Spain and elsewhere – and somebody managed to get a side door to the New School open. So a bunch of us rushed inside and re-joined the sit-in."

### Dénouement

That night, it became clear that a political shift was underway. As a comrade wrote in an on-line posting:

"On the second night, both outside and inside the sit-in, some of the organizers began to literally 'shush' mentions of Kerrey's war crimes and try to drown out chants about it. This led to a big but ultimately inconclusive debate on why that was happening. In the end, priority was given to issues of 'student space' and campus governance, which were much less politically charged, especially at such an elite and exclusive school. This decision, never explicitly justified or voted on to my knowledge, had a real social and political content, as did shifting attitudes to the active participation by people from CUNY who quite literally put bodies on the line to defend the sit-in."

At one point Kerrey appeared in the hallway right outside the cafeteria, and we were told to stop chanting "War criminal" – "that's not the issue right now." A young New School student came up, asking "What's going on? I want to know more about this." He got up on a chair and said, "Do people want to know more about Kerrey being a war criminal?" Most said "Yes." So a discussion started about this, but some of the RSU organizers quickly shut it down. The International Socialist Organization (ISO) had a few people there, and one of them became very vocal in demanding that the discussion on Kerrey be reopened. But when our comrades started to talk about it again, we were shut down right away.

As the hours went by on the second night, the administration and campus cops escalated their pressure tactics. Heat in the occupied cafeteria became sweltering, the NYPD brought in more loads of cops ostentatiously showing their plastic "zip-tie" handcuffs, and a line of goons in blue, headed by the smirking chief of New School security, sealed off the toilets inside the building.

In the early hours of the morning of December 19, student negotiators and other leaders of the sit-in (which like any protest

did have leaders, despite pious claims to the contrary) began pushing hard to end it. It is by no means clear that the sit-in could have continued for much longer, but the way and political basis for its ending were significant. No more endless discussions on "process"; no more three-hour debates on details. They decided to ram through a "settlement," and did so in about twenty minutes flat.

Responding to on-line discussion on these events, one Hunter activist wrote:

"[U]ltimately the negotiators, who were members of the RSU, dropped the demand for Kerrey's resignation.... It was also members of the RSU who had won many people over to light[en]ing it up on the war criminal [issue], to the objections of some other radicals, particularly anarchists, at the New School as well as some CUNY participants....

"The dropping of this demand essentially made the victory a victory of extending privilege at New School. The demands in the main won were 'representation' on a committee to select the new provost and 'representation' on another committee to invest the school's money – this was essentially in line with the RSU's program to have 'socially responsible investment.' There was no demand won which really had any universal appeal....

"So was it all for nothing? No, right now the students of the New School are in struggle about what road and way they're moving toward in the future."

– Freddy B., "A Critique of Practice at the New School" (26 January)

While we have plenty of disagreements with the author, an SDS member who describes himself as a "neo-Maoist," we would certainly agree with his assessment that "Left in [and] of itself this 'victory' will be a defeat, another moment in which the system and Kerrey have saved face." Thus, when various groups – notably the ISO – present the outcome as a victory in their routine, facile way, this not only covers over what actually happened, but does a real disservice to those who were fighting hard to actually *win*. To organize for future victories, it is essential to "say what is," and distinguish frankly between what is and is not a genuine victory today.

### La lucha continúa

In fact the "settlement" that Kerrey and the student negotiators signed consisted of empty promises that settled nothing. The struggle to *drive out the war criminal Kerrey* remains a crucial pending task. So does the fight to oust Vice President Murtha and war-and-torture profiteer/Treasurer Millard – together with broader and deeper struggles against the ways the New School, like virtually all private and public universities today, is ever more subordinated to the "corporate model" of education for profit.

Large numbers of students and others increasingly discontented with the "status quo" – whose true name is *capitalism* – were inspired by the courageous decision of New School students to carry out an occupation on their campus. (Stu-

dents at New York University have followed suit – see accompanying article.) At the City University of New York, whose Board of Trustees includes some of the richest and nastiest capitalists in the city, successful tactics require systematic preparation and a winning strategy for massive, militant mobilization closely linked with the power of labor sectors that face the same vicious cuts and hikes that we do.

One of the early fliers issued by some New School occupiers ended, "With solidarity and love from New York to Greece

and towards the coming insurrection" ("Only the Beginning," undated). To move towards making this real, serious activists will find that drawing the lessons of this struggle – as weapons for those to come – requires intensive, no-holds-barred debate and study of the great issues of revolutionary strategy, from the Paris Commune, the Russian Revolution, and the Spanish Civil War to today. Shoulder to shoulder with you in this fight, the CUNY Internationalist Clubs invite you to discuss the revolutionary program needed to topple all the war criminals and tyrants of capital once and for all. ■

## Solidarity from Mexico with New School Occupation



Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas

**Hundreds of union Mexican electrical workers participated in worker-student defense guard in July-August 1999. Thanks to workers' support, strike was able to resist the government for ten months and prevented the introduction of tuition. Our comrades of the Grupo Internacionalista pushed for formation of the defense guard.**

17 December 2008

*Compañeros* [comrades]:

With this message we send you greetings of solidarity from Mexico. The news about the courageous action that you have undertaken, by occupying the New School for Social Research facility, is already spreading around the world. You should know that in this struggle, you are not alone. In Mexico, throughout the last ten years, there has been a whole series of struggles by teachers, education workers and the students themselves against the continuous attacks that the bourgeoisie, its government and its parties have launched against public education. In Oaxaca just two years ago, the elementary-school teachers took over their schools and began a strike that turned into a social struggle of enormous proportions when the bloody governor Ulises Ruiz tried to take down a *plantón* [occupation of the city center] through a huge deployment of the police.

Ten years ago, tens of thousands of us students at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM—National Autonomous University of Mexico) began the winter by occupying the campus of our university. So starting in April 1999, we were on strike, fighting against the attempt to impose tuition at the university. We fought so that, in reality, the already small proportion of sons and daughters of workers able to attend the university not suffer a *de facto* expulsion [because of having to pay tuition]. We also insisted that for the democratic right of education to be real, it is not enough for education to be free. We Trotskyists of the Grupo Internacionalista stressed that it was necessary to fight for a living stipend for students, together with the abolition of the university administration (*rectoría*) and its immediate replacement by a university government of students, workers and faculty.

Our key experience in this struggle was the formation of worker/student defense guards which, at critical moments, guarded

the occupation in order to prevent an announced military attempt to eject the students who were occupying the university. Hundreds of electrical workers and university workers joined our barricades at campuses of the UNAM system. Thanks to this support from workers, the strike was able to hold on and stay strong for ten months, until 6 February 2000, when the newly-formed Policía Federal Preventiva (Federal Preventive Police) was used for the first time, with the forcible eviction of the strikers from University City [the enormous main UNAM campus in the south of Mexico City]. A thousand of us who were participating in the assembly of the Strike General Council were imprisoned. However, our tenacity bore fruit, since despite the repression, the university authorities were unable to impose tuition. Today, UNAM continues to be a university with no tuition, where do you not have to pay to study.

Today, our *compañeros* at the university and its preparatory schools continue to confront the rage of the reactionary administrations which have reactivated shock groups [thugs] called *porros*. In March of this year, students at the College of Sciences and Humanities-South campus [one of UNAM's preparatory schools] occupied their school for a week to protest the coordinated actions by the *porros* and the authorities at their campus. Through this action, they achieved the sacking of the bloodhound [repressor] who was in charge of campus "security." The massive mobilizations of students were key to this victory, together with the support of the campus workers, who are members of STUNAM (Union of the Workers of the Autonomous National University of Mexico).

Because of all this, *compañeros*, in the midst of your cold northern winter we send you our very warm greetings in the struggle. J. Santamaría, for the Grupo Internacionalista.



Brandon Jourdan

**Frame from video shot by Brandon Jourdan showing man thrown to the ground and arrested for shouting "shame on you" at the cops, April 10. Police arrested two dozen protesters in second New School occupation.**



## War Criminal Kerrey...

continued from page 12

**Kill the people we made contact with, or we have to abort the mission.... We were instructed not to take prisoners.**" The *New York Times Magazine* article cites Kerrey on how his commanding officer, a "classic body-count guy," made it "quite clear what he wanted.... He wanted hooches [huts] destroyed and people killed." Now that the backlash against the two-year-long Times/CBS investigation is in full swing, Kerrey states in self-justification that "this was a Viet Cong village," so "gender and age distinctions" didn't matter (*Newsday*, April 30).

Like Captain Medina and Lieutenant Calley, leaders of the much bigger massacre at My Lai about a year earlier (where the victims – women, children, elders, babies – numbered between 400 and 600), Bob ("Kill 'Em-All") Kerrey is not only a mass murderer, but a liar as well. He got a medal for killing children – the Bronze Star – and never breathed a word about what really happened until two years ago, when the reporters from the *Times* and *60 Minutes* had already pieced together most of the facts. Now Kerrey is lying in high gear, claiming that he was engaged in a full-blown firefight with his defenseless victims! A month after the Thanh Phong massacre Kerrey and his killers did encounter armed fighters of the National Liberation Front of Vietnam, and at that time Kerrey got part of his leg blown off by a hand grenade. Grotesquely, this cold-blooded murderer asserts in the *Times* story that his *restraint* in executing more unarmed peasants in that second incident is what led to his unit's defeat and his wounding!

Now that the story has hit the headlines as the result of a years-long investigation by the *Times* and CBS, an obscene and heavily-financed campaign is underway to deny what happened. This too is normal procedure every time the truth begins to seep out from one of the countless crimes that make up the bloody history of the American empire. A year and a half ago, when an extensive Associated Press investigation was published on the U.S. massacre of hundreds of civilians at No Gun Ri during the Korean War, Army brass moved heaven and earth to claim it never happened. Their whitewash campaign failed miserably.

As Kerrey lashes out with increasingly open viciousness against those who exposed his massacre, he is now, incredibly, baiting the establishment media as Commie collaborators, saying: "The Vietnam government likes to routinely say how terrible Americans were. The Times and CBS are now collaborating in that effort." This cynical attempt to take a page from Joe McCarthy's book – and deny the enormity of U.S. crimes in Vietnam – gives the lie once again to those who present Kerrey the executioner as "another victim." Make no mistake: he was not some poor guy drafted and sent to a place he didn't want to be. Bob Kerrey was commander of an elite unit trained precisely to carry out assassinations.

In response to the revelations, some point out that above Kerrey were bigger mass murderers who lived high on the hog ever after, such as Robert McNamara, and Henry Kissinger. (Kissinger attended a fancy dinner party for Kerrey at Le Cirque right before the Thanh Phong revelations broke.) In other words, like other war criminals before him, Kerrey was "just following orders." Liberals repeat the time-worn refrain that "Vietnam was a mistake." In fact, some of those same mass murderers retrospectively said the same thing, and Richard Nixon wrote a book titled *No More Vietnams*. They say this only because they lost!

Like his superiors, Kerrey was part of U.S. imperialism's failed effort to defeat the



**War criminal Kerrey (third from left) receiving medal of honor from imperialist war criminal in chief Richard Nixon, May 1970.**

Vietnamese Revolution. The peasants and workers of Vietnam struggled for half a century to rid their country of Japanese, French and U.S. imperialism and the murderous puppet regimes that served these overlords. With immense courage and determination, they resisted and defeated the American imperialists – and this was a great and inspiring victory for the exploited and oppressed the world over, from South America to South Africa, from Europe and Japan to here in "the belly of the beast." While liberals and reformists tried to cut the losses to the imperialist order, revolutionaries called for victory to the Vietnam Revolution, saying "All Indochina Must Go Communist!" and "Two, three, many defeats for U.S. imperialism!"

Making direct war on the entire population of Vietnam and killing between two and three million people, the American ruling class, Democrat and Republican, starkly showed itself to be a depraved and barbaric barrier to human progress. Tens of thousands were tortured and executed by the "Operation Phoenix" assassination program, while horrifying numbers perished at the hands of U.S. Air Force pilots, such as Senator John McCain, who rained down hundreds of thousands of bombs containing TNT, napalm, phosphorus and poisons to kill people and animals, as well as chemical defoliants to kill crops. These butchers dropped more tons of explosives on Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos in eight years (1965 through 1972) than had been expended in all the previous wars of human history *combined*.

As American bombers blew up hospitals and incinerated villages from the air, specialized kill squads like Kerrey's Raiders – the Vietnam War equivalent of the SS *Einsatzgruppen* in WWII – were "inserted" to terrorize, assassinate and massacre the population on the ground. The imperialists



**Phan Tri Lanh, survivor of Thanh Phong massacre reported: "They lined them up and they shot them from behind."**

unleashed thousands of Kerreys in their war on communism – officers who drove their men to keep the body counts high. This meant systematically fostering a culture of death, inculcating deadly racism against the Vietnamese (and all Asians) with dehumanizing epithets like "gooks" and "dinks." Kill-crazy commandos collected strings of "VC" ears, and the military brass handed out rewards – citations, medals, weekend passes and even Stateside leave – in exchange for mass murder. Today, the orchestrators of the "pity the poor war criminal" campaign seek to reduce Kerrey's victims to non-persons once again, to blot out and "dispose of" their memory once and for all.

Many draftees, enlisted men and even some officers returned from Vietnam so horrified by the atrocities they witnessed or participated in that they turned against the U.S. government and sought to publicize these crimes. At the National Veterans' Inquiry held in December 1970 in Washington, D.C., dozens of vets testified about U.S. war crimes, stressing that mass torture and murder were the official policies of the U.S. war machine in Vietnam. As Charles David Locke, who served in the same Army company that committed the My Lai massacre, put it, "what happened at My Lai is not a special thing; there's nothing special about it" (quoted in James Simon Kunen, *Standard Operating Procedure: Notes of a Draft-Age American*, 1971). The massacre at Thanh Phong proves it. Bob Kerrey was decorated for carrying out this slaughter, and for 30 years he let the lies in the citation stand. Meanwhile, like John McCain, he used his service as a decorated imperialist killer to become a successful imperialist politician.

For years after its humiliating defeat in the jungles of Southeast Asia, the U.S. government bemoaned the "Vietnam syndrome": massive suspicion at home regarding American military adventures abroad. The doctrine of "human rights" imperialist interventions pushed by liberal Democrats seeks to overcome this, as do disinformation campaigns that present as "wars against drugs" the massive counterinsurgency operations designed to shore up United States domination of its neo-colonial "backyard," such as Plan Colombia. Today, they talk of putting Slobodan Milosevic on trial in The Hague. But the people who would be trying him are the biggest terrorists and war criminals in the world today! When the Clintons and the Bushes talk about "democracy" and "human rights," it means they are seeking to extend by force the controlling power and privilege of the U.S. capitalist class worldwide.

We say *Bob Kerrey should be brought to justice before a court of his surviving victims in Ho Chi Minh City*. But to avenge the crimes of the Kerreys and their masters, from Democrat Johnson and Republican Nixon to the CIA chiefs and Pentagon carpet-bombers who have brought death and destruction from

Baghdad to Belgrade, Seoul to San Salvador, will take a workers revolution. Only then will the wealth and resources of this country be used for the needs of the working people worldwide rather than the bloody and ruthless pursuit of profit.

The U.S. imperialists were defeated in battle by the courageous fighters of the National Liberation Front and Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam). In hailing their great victory, we of the Internationalist Group stress the debt of gratitude and solidarity that the workers and oppressed everywhere owe to the Vietnamese, who showed it was possible to defeat the most powerful and dangerous ruling class on earth. But today the imperialists are whipping themselves up into a new war frenzy. In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and amidst increasing rivalries between competing trade blocs, they want to reclaim for capitalist super-exploitation all the countries where capitalism was kicked out: Cuba, Vietnam, North Korea and above all China.

While apologists for capitalism call these countries "communist," Marxists understand that socialism and communism – a society based on plenty, not scarcity – can only be established on an international scale, after the workers in the most developed capitalist countries overturn their "own" ruling classes. The overturn of capitalist rule in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, Vietnam and elsewhere dealt a huge blow to the imperialist order, but remained outside the central core of the world capitalist economy. After the victorious Russian Revolution led by Lenin and Trotsky in 1917, the imperialists went all out to crush communism and they haven't stopped to this day. The backwardness of Russia and the pressure of this unending war gave rise to Stalinism, whose anti-Marxist dogma of "socialism in one country" reflected the outlook of a privileged, nationalist bureaucracy seeking accommodation with the capitalist powers.

This bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet workers state paved the way for its ultimate destruction spearheaded by George Bush senior's man in Moscow, Boris Yeltsin. Today, counterrevolution threatens Vietnam (together with China, Cuba and North Korea), as capitalist investors make increasing inroads symbolized by Nike sweatshops. Against protectionists who seek to turn U.S. workers against their brothers and sisters in Asia, Latin America and elsewhere, we fight to unite the workers of the world against their common capitalist enemy. The fight for a world free of exploitation and oppression is the fight for world workers revolution. This means defending Vietnam, Cuba, North Korea and China – target of the recent U.S. spy plane provocation – against imperialism and counterrevolution. To prevent their remaining gains from being destroyed and their countries from being turned once again into colonies of the West, the workers of these countries must throw out the Stalinist bureaucrats and establish governments of workers democracy and revolutionary internationalism.

Above all, the fight against imperialism requires building a revolutionary workers party here in the heart of the capitalist system. We Trotskyists, who carry forward the politics of Marx and Lenin, stress that until this system is destroyed there will be no end to war, no end to exploitation, no end to racist terror like the police murder of Amadou Diallo and siege against black Cincinnati. Enemy No. 1, with its thousands of Bob Kerreys, and trillions of dollars of advanced weapons of mass destruction, is U.S. imperialism. The force with the power to defeat it forever is the international working class led by an international party of socialist revolution. Only when this revolution is victorious will humanity be free of the terror and oppression represented by the likes of Robert Kerrey. ■



## Inside the New School Occupation

The following article is based on remarks at a January 20 Internationalist study group by two CUNY Internationalist Clubs comrades who participated in the New School sit-in last December. In the face of Bob Kerrey's determination to continue his despotic rule at the university, student activists carried out a new occupation on April 10. Kerrey called in the New York Police Department, which arrested 22 students, who face an array of legal charges as well as suspension and threats of expulsion. After an NYPD spokesman denied that cops had used pepper spray and brutal violence on several of those arrested, a video – posted even on the New York Times web site – proved this cover-up attempt to be a bald-faced lie. We demand: Drop all charges and disciplinary actions now!

For 38 hours, beginning on the evening of December 17, 2008, student activists carried out a widely-publicized sit-in at the New School, a prestigious private university in lower Manhattan. Blockading themselves into the cafeteria of the historic 65 Fifth Avenue building, they declared that they were inspired by the recent factory occupation by workers at Republic Windows and Doors in Chicago, together with protests against police brutality in Greece. The occupation took place shortly after the faculty voted “no confidence” in the New School’s high-handed President Bob Kerrey, who had just fired the fifth university provost in seven years.

Protesters demanded the resignation or removal of Kerrey, Vice President Jim Murtha, as well as Treasurer Robert Millard, whom they had discovered to be the chairman of a military contractor (L-3 Communications) directly linked to the U.S.’ torture prison at Abu Ghraib.

As one Internationalist comrade noted in a discussion of the occupation:

“The New School is a very privileged place, and this did have effects in the course of the struggle, but the fact that there was an occupation was very exciting to a lot of students at the City University of New York and elsewhere, and quite a few of us went down to join in, participating both inside and in support activities outside. The fact that the sit-in occurred in the midst of exam week was quite significant, as this means maybe you’ll flunk or have other serious problems. So the occupation electrified a significant portion of students in New York City....

“We have some background regarding the New School, for two reasons. About ten years ago we did a lot of intensive work in a union organizing campaign among undocumented Mexican workers in the delis right around the New School. We were on picket lines at two delis right across the street from the 65 Fifth Avenue building. At one of them, a friend who is a union organizer was bitten and had his skin broken by one of the thugs the employers’ association had hired to intimidate people.

“Not long after that campaign, it was revealed that the new president of the New School, Bob Kerrey, a former Democratic Party senator from Nebraska, was a war criminal. As an officer in the Navy SEALs, a terrorist death squad of the U.S. armed forces, he had personally led the annihilation of many of the inhabitants of the village of Thanh Phong in the Mekong delta during the Vietnam War. And we crashed out a leaflet, ‘Drive Out War Criminal Bob Kerrey,’ and spent a hell of a lot of time down there, trying to get the faculty and students to take action



New School in Exile

against this unspeakable man. So when the students took over the cafeteria there, we were excited that one of their demands was that finally this war criminal Bob Kerrey had to go.”

Just getting rid of the top administrators would not in itself change the nature of the university, but the link to war crimes from Vietnam to Iraq was one of the most political aspects of the struggle, with the broadest significance and appeal beyond the bounds of the New School itself. Then there were demands relating to relatively narrow issues of “student space,” not unimportant for people who need to study there, but a lot less significant from a broader standpoint. Others included disclosure of investments, and a number of liberal nostrums like “the creation of a Socially Responsible Investment committee” and appointment of a student as a voting

member of the board of trustees – an empty figurehead position that has long existed at CUNY and other schools. Kerrey himself appointed 26 out of the 60 trustees at the New School – and we made the point that there, as at other universities, you can’t even begin to talk about a genuinely democratic way of running things until the board of trustees is abolished and replaced by an elected student/faculty/worker self-administration of the school. Further, to fight the private universities’ role as bastions of class and race privilege, they should be nationalized, with open admissions and no tuition.

### The Primacy of Politics

In the course of the occupation, there was a series of struggles over what direction it should take. These were reflected in

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## Drive Out War Criminal Bob Kerrey!

He Should Be Brought to Justice by a Court of His Surviving Victims in Ho Chi Minh City!

The following article was put out as a leaflet by the Internationalist Group in 2001, when news reports of Bob Kerrey’s war crimes first came out, and reprinted in The Internationalist No. 10 (June 2001). It was reissued this past December in conjunction with the student occupation of New School University.

The president of New School University is a war criminal. Covered up for 30 years, the war crime was the work of “Kerrey’s Raiders,” a U.S. Navy special forces (SEAL) unit commanded by Lt. Robert Kerrey. Trading on his reputation as a “war hero,” Kerrey went on to become a U.S. senator, a leading liberal Democratic presidential hopeful, and this January was named president of the prestigious New School. Now the truth has been exposed that he is a mass murderer of women and children. Today, an orchestrated campaign from liberals and conservatives alike seeks to carry out damage control. But the facts clearly show: **Bob Kerrey is guilty as hell!**

On 25 February 1969, Kerrey ordered the massacre of at least 13 to 20 civilians, primarily women and children, at Thanh Phong, a tiny peasant hamlet in the Mekong Delta. “They ordered everybody out from the bunker and they lined them up and they shot them all from behind,” testified a survivor, Pham Tri Lanh. The gung-ho lieutenant did what he was trained for and what was expected by his superior officers. Mass murder was no aberration; it was policy.

### Remember My Lai!



WGBH

**Standard Operating Procedure: civilian victims of U.S. imperialism's massacre at My Lai, some of whom were tortured and raped before being murdered.**

In their “rural pacification” program, U.S. forces sought to herd the peasants of Vietnam into “strategic hamlets,” akin to massive concentration camps. Gigantic areas outside these camps were designated “free-fire zones.” Officers were ordered to take their men out and kill anything that moved – men, women, children, old people

and livestock. Meanwhile, the CIA-designed “Operation Phoenix” sent death squads to murder suspected Viet Cong members and “VC symps.” As a SEAL commander Kerrey’s mission was to lead assassination raids into the countryside, a key part of the U.S. government’s dirty colonial war in Southeast Asia.

As noted in a *Newsday* column (April 29), “the Seals, save for the U.S. pilots bombing from chariots at 50,000 feet, were the most cold-blooded of the American assassins. Throat-slitting...was the way the Seals sought to rule the night.” Kerrey’s most experienced commando, Gerhard Klann, told television reporters for “60 Minutes II” how Kerrey himself personally took part in the murders at Thanh Phong. Kerrey joined in as his unit slit several victims’ throats and then machine-gunned another group of unarmed women and children they had “captured,” including a baby. “There were blood and guts spattering everywhere,” Klann is quoted as saying. Klann’s account was consistent with those of Pham Tri Lanh and two relatives of the victims, and on April 28 another Vietnamese witness, Bui Thi Luom, confirmed the massacre. In fact, Pentagon records show the massacre was reported back in February 1969 by an old man from Thanh Phong village.

Kerrey has claimed it was the fog of war, his memory was clouded (until he got other members of his death squad to get their stories together and back him up), the women and children somehow grouped together, all got shot from a distance of 100 yards... But the whole shifting mass of falsehoods is torn away by Kerrey’s own words: **“Standard operating procedure was to dispose of the people we made contact with....**

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