

April CUNY Graduate Student Action Paper

The Graduate Center of CUNY was taken over by graduate students on the morning of April 16. There is clearly some irony in the fact that this happened the day after Tax Day. While New York's working and middle classes pay exorbitant taxes for declining services, high-income earners and corporate interests have been contributing *significantly* less since 1985, when most tax abatements and tax cuts for the wealthiest took place. And spending is at its lowest level in relation to personal income in ten years. In other words, we are feeling the effects of Reaganomics-type strategies on the state level.

These measures, among others, led to a state revenue decline of 5 to 7 billion dollars. In the upcoming year, New York State will face a deficit of 6 and 1/2 billion dollars. Governor Cuomo's proposal to meet this fiscal crisis calls for deep and devastating cuts to the public sector infrastructure: public education, health care, and social services.

ENDORSE THE BUDGET EQUITY PROPOSAL INSTEAD OF CUOMO'S

A statewide coalition of community organizations, labor unions, students, and elected officials have prepared and presented alternative budget proposals that call for increased taxes on those earning more than \$100,000 and some restoration of corporate taxes. This will produce at least \$3.5 billion per year in new revenues. In this way, the magnitude of the fiscal crisis would be greatly reduced at the state level. Priorities could be redefined away from corporate interests and towards maintaining and enhancing education, health care, housing, and mass transit.

Students have struck their campuses because the threat of massive student shutouts is real. In Fall 1990, three thousand qualified students were shut out of the university due to lack of CUNY resources to teach them, according to Administration figures. And the cuts that caused this situation pale in comparison to the ones that Cuomo now proposes.

The Governor's budget specifically proposes to cut \$80 million from the City University of New York. CUNY and SUNY students would pay a \$500 tuition increase. In addition, financial aid to students at CUNY would be cut by \$12 million. As late as last spring, Governor Cuomo had stated emphatically that CUNY should be free. CUNY's mission statement stipulates that tuition should not be charged. Tuition was instituted for the first time in the 1975-76 fiscal crisis. Enrollment dropped off sharply then.

The April CUNY students' strike started at the system's oldest institution, City College. From there, eleven other CUNY campuses were either shut down or had buildings occupied. SUNY Purchase, SUNY Stony Brook and the SUNY section of Cornell University were also occupied. The Graduate Center takeover is an expression of solidarity with those concerns.

Two of the main reasons why students at the Graduate Center acted urgently to shut down their campus in protest was their outrage at police intervention at other CUNY campuses and the realization that conventional channels of dissent had been exhausted.

Graduate students find themselves in a unique position: we are both students affected by these cuts and adjuncts who make our livings teaching CUNY undergraduates. Because of a system-wide lack of commitment to the public university as a vital institution, we are faced with decreasing resources to pursue our doctoral studies as well as increasingly dismal prospects for getting teaching jobs. Our full-time faculty become more overworked as adjunct positions are eliminated. The classes we teach are overcrowded. The library resources and hours are completely inadequate for serious advanced research and study.

THE PLEBISCITE ON THE STRIKE

The strikers brought their appeal outside at 4 p.m. to the gathered crowd of Graduate Center staff, students and faculty on Day One (Tuesday) of the takeover. We all debated the issue of budget cuts and whether the occupation should continue. We voted then to do so. We did it again on days two and three. Have you ever seen that many Graduate Center people in one place debating before? It is clear that having that vote of support was key in getting the Administration to the negotiating table on Friday morning. The Friday plebiscite will also take place at 4 p.m.

THE CUNY-WIDE STRIKE

The undergraduate strikers say that they are looking to us for leadership and need our help to continue. Our takeover has been in solidarity with their action against the budget cuts and tuition increases. We are formulating strategies to further the struggle both within the Graduate Center and as part of a CUNY-wide student strike committee.

Written by the Graduate Center Student Strike

PARTIAL LIST OF CUOMO'S PROPOSED CUTS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Programs that would be eliminated from State budget:

Regents' Scholarships, Nursing Scholarships, Empire State Scholarships, Liberty Scholarships, Noncredit Vocational Courses, CUNY Student Support Services, SUNY Hospital Subsidy, Dental Clinics, State Aid to John Jay and City Tech.

Programs scaled back:

TAP Grants, Bundy Aid, CUNY/Board of Ed. Partnership, SUNY Student Support Services, Child Care Centers, HESC Administration, Public Education Radio and TV.

Proposed cuts in city budget contributions to CUNY Community Colleges: \$22.5 million.