

Communiqués from the Valley

**Love letters from the emerging
Student-Worker movement in
California's Central Valley**

Introduction

We have a context and a precedent

What follows is a series of texts from the front lines of the emerging Student-Worker-Faculty movement of the Central Valley. Students everywhere are angry, outraged as they pay more and more out-of-pocket for less and less of an education. With classes being cut left and right, faculty being fired all around us, what choice do we have left but to fight? For ourselves, for our educations, and for our futures, if they even exist.

By compiling this publication we wish to illustrate the precedent of resistance set within the Central Valley. We see share our struggle with students who occupied and defended Wheeler Hall in Berkeley and the workers who occupied Republic Windows and Doors in Chicago last year. It is important to understand these fee hikes, class cuts, and lay-offs do not happen within a vacuum. The same forces that murdered Oscar Grant, started wars for oil, lead witch hunts against immigrants, and created the housing and financial crisis are part of the same class of people who are now behind the attack on public education. These people are stealing and ruining our lives and making the gulf between rich and poor much wider as low income and working students find it harder and harder to gain access to an education. This is a mandate of class war. We must choose a side. The protests and occupations occurring now must spread and grow larger.

Up the Students, up the Faculty, up the Workers.
Fuck the administration.

- Students and Workers

Further Reading and Resources

For the furtherance of our Struggle

Texts to Consider:

- Communiqué from an Absent Future:
<http://wewanteverything.wordpress.com/2009/09/24/communique-from-an-absent-future/>
- Occupation: a do-it-yourself guide.
<http://theimaginarycommittee.wordpress.com/2009/11/06/occupation-a-do-it-yourself-guide/>
- The Neoliberalization of Higher Education
<http://anticapitalprojects.wordpress.com/2009/11/18/the-neoliberalization-of-higher-education-whats-race-got-to-do-with-it/>
- A Brief List of Impossible Demands:
<http://wearethecrisis.blogspot.com/2009/11/brief-list-of-impossible-demands.html>
- Vision of the New University:
<http://wearethecrisis.blogspot.com/2009/11/vision-of-new-university.html>

Online Resources:

- <http://www.modest oanarcho.org/>
- <http://likelostchildren.blogspot.com/>
- <http://occupyca.wordpress.org/>
- <http://occupyuci.wordpress.com/>
- <http://ouruniversity.wordpress.com/>
- <http://uclaresists.blogspot.com/>
- <http://anticapitalprojects.wordpress.com/>
- <http://reoccupied.wordpress.com/>
- <http://wearethecrisis.blogspot.com/>
- <http://wewanteverything.wordpress.com/>
- <http://www.indybay.org/>

Roving Dance Party Against Fee Hikes at MJC

by an ex-student

Modesto Junior College, perhaps the cheapest institution of higher learning in the state of California, has recently had 180 classes cut from its roster. Fees have also risen from \$20 per unit to \$26, meaning that students are paying more and getting less: the constant refrain of the ongoing economic crisis. Meanwhile at California State University (CSU) Stanislaus, (the school that most MJC graduates go on to attend), the entire winter semester has been abolished and fees are being raised by 32%. While UC students at campuses like UC Berkeley and UC Santa Cruz have launched successful occupations at their schools and engaged in a variety of confrontational tactics – students in the Central Valley, (with the exception of students at CSU Fresno who walked out of their school in late October by the hundreds), have been slow to respond.

On Monday of this week, students at MJC walked onto campus to find that the entire perimeter of the school had been covered in flyers that read, “Dance Party Against the Fee Hikes!,” and encouraged students to bring music, friends, and party favors. The flyer ended by stating, “Strike//Occupy//Takeover.” This same slogan was then repeated in a larger poster, 11” by 17”. 1,000 quarter sheet flyers were then distributed the next day across campus and on the day of the dance party a banner was dropped from the art building that read, “Stop the Fee Hikes! Dance Party in Quad 2Nite, 8pm.” Graffiti in the bathrooms at MJC has also been appearing throughout the campus for weeks, calling for unity between staff, students, and faculty against the cuts and hikes. All this was organized in just a few days by a group of friends, many of which are former or current students at Modesto Junior College.

On Tuesday, we arrived on campus with about 10 people, and headed to go check out the “Vigil for Education,” which was happening right before the dance party was supposed to start. We were hoping that the other group would bring a good sized group of people out, and hopefully when it was finished, many would stick around for the dance party. We had seen no flyers around campus for the event and the wind was blowing heavily, making the idea of holding candles on a dark night in the middle of an empty quad that much more totally unappealing. When we arrived, we found about 10 other people standing around in a circle, giggling. They held no signs or flyers, there were no banners, and besides that fact that they were holding candles, there was nothing to let you know they were doing anything else than just hanging out. Several within the group announced their dislike for the dance party idea, and stated that they didn’t want to “chant and yell at people,” that by holding a vigil they would get “people to listen to them.” Other members within the group hid in bushes around those waiting for the dance party to start and tried to video tape us. Wendy Byrd, Director at MJC and a leader within the local chapter of the NAACP chapter, was also on the scene trying to ask questions of those there (in an effort to find out who the organizers for the dance party were), and also spent a lot of time talking to the security guards who were situated nearby watching the whole scene. People also complained to us that “masked men had run into class rooms, throwing dance party flyers everywhere,” (we can’t make this shit up folks!), had been putting banners up around the school, and had “super glued” flyers to various walls.

At 8pm, the student activists left. A boom box appeared and people began to dance. At this point about 20-25 people were in attendance. The group quickly made its way towards the Founders’ Hall, which is the largest class-

oom building on campus. Chanting, “Stop the Fee Hikes, Dance Dance All Night,” people moved in and out of buildings for about 30-40 minutes, inviting students still in class to come out and join them. A banner that the crowd carried read, “Strike//Occupy//Takeover.” Many came out and looked – but few actually joined us. Security followed closely behind videotaping the entire event, and then stated that they had called the police. At this point, the group handed out copies of a text that has been circulating on the internet, “Occupy the Crisis: The Emerging Student-Worker Direct Action Movement in California,” diapered and went in small groups off school grounds.

The student activists at MJC who organized the vigil disgust us – although we are sadly not surprised. They made no attempts at making gestures of solidarity with us, not even an acknowledgment of a set of different tactics but still shared enemies. For them, this is another student project to take pictures of and make videos for. For us, this is something that affects our lives. Their ideas for action are so weak and stupid they barely need to be critiqued. Holding candles in the dark that no one will see does nothing. It does nothing to raise consciousness or build power and it certainly does nothing to challenge those in power. Those that run this state would like nothing more if all we did was hold candles in the dark. It is only in conflict and action that we will find out how much power we do have to improve our material conditions. One thing is clear – the school administration and the activists were scarred of us, and wanted nothing to do with us. As well they should be; we clearly were better organized than they were anyway.

We understand the university system to be a part in the reproduction of class society. Like everything else within Capital, we do not wish to ‘reform’ the university, or make it more ‘democratic.’ Like our comrades wrote, “We wish to

push the university struggle to its limits.” We were excited by the possibility of an event spinning out of control of anyones hands; a constructed situation that put desire, confrontation, and human connection above the rule of the police and the university leaders. Tonight was a step in the right direction, although a very small one. We are still those that will never play by the rules of politics or activism– we make our own. Everyday we grow stronger and better organized. Share your hushed rumors about us between yourselves, for we plan to be so, so, so much worse.

- some of the bad seeds.

CSU Students Protest Outside President's House

On Saturday, November 5th, students, faculty, and workers took to the streets of an upscale neighborhood in Turlock California, located about 15 minutes south of Modesto, to protest outside of the home of CSU President, Dr. Shirvani. Shirvani makes around \$350,000 a year, and receives more in car and housing allowances than many professors make in a year. Faculty at the university have recently voted almost 90% in "No Confidence" of the President, and student outrage against him is at an all time high.

Faculty at CSU Stanislaus have faced job lay offs of up to 20% and many staff workers have also been laid off or have had their hours cut. For students, fees have risen by ten percent over the last couple of years every year, while class room sizes have risen and many classes have been eliminated. Shirvani has also outright abolished winter term, which for many students means a loss of access to certain classes that they need. This move was also opposed by about 80% of the students, according to certain polls taken.

This action was the most confrontational and militant yet by CSU Stanislaus students, as previous actions have included small sit-ins in early-mid November of the administration building, which resulted in closed door meetings between several students and the President. Nothing came out of these meetings but Shirvani re articulating that he will continue to make cuts and break down the public university system towards a more privatized one. Flipping the popular student slogan around, Shirvani has stated, "Education is a privilege, not a right."

As the recent article on the CFA (California Faculty Association) website stated (<http://restructuringcsu.wordpress.com/>), Shirvani is leading the forefront assault on education, that seeks to make it harder for working class students to go to college and will push out various majors such as art and philosophy, promoting instead more online courses and bigger class room sizes.

About 30 students protested outside of Shirvani's home for about an hour, and despite at the end three police cars showing up to guard the house (one of them being a CSU Police car - showing again that the university police are NOT NEUTRAL in this struggle), students remained loud and resolved. More actions like this and constant pressure are needed to stop the job lay offs of faculty and staff, the rising student fees, and the cuts to classes and services for students. As many students stated during Saturday, the time for working within the system and writing letters is over. More than ever we need unity between staff, faculty, and students, as we fight against our class enemies within the university.

We have no faith in the student government. They are an arm of the administration. We have no faith in the student leaders among the "movement" which seek to police and direct us - we are not children, we can organize ourselves. "Socialist" student cops are still cops. We have no faith in asking politely for our enemies to change. We will take, we will strike. we will occupy. We will takeover.

Hundreds Rally at CSUS, Storm President's Office

by a student

Today we found power. We found it in ourselves, and we found it in each other. We found it in our collective self on the quad of CSU Stanislaus. We found it again in MSR, when the administration hid behind the boys in blue rather than face us. And we found it once more when we got in.

Today, around 200 students, faculty, and staff walked out of their classes around 11:00 AM and met in the quad at CSU Stanislaus. After an hour-long rally, filled with speeches of discontent and enraging stories of the downward spiral of our university. 150 of us marched across campus to the Mary Stuart Rogers building (the administration building). Met with police barricades, we continued on towards the intersection of Geer Road and Monte Vista/University Way (arguably the busiest intersection in Turlock). After rallying there for fifteen minutes, we returned to the MSR building with 60 people to sit down in President Shirvani's office on the third floor around 1:00 PM. After another half an hour of discussion and wall-shaking chants, we left of our own accord.

Today was a victory. However, we are not without regrets. Today's numbers are unprecedented. This is likely the largest show of power the people of Turlock have ever manifested. At a university where normality consists not of radicals and hippies, but of nursing students and teachers, with no history of agitation or radical politics, we interrupted it, if only briefly.

That said: today we did not fulfill our desires. Today's action was rife with infighting and attempts at liberal remediation. Several individuals in particular showed up

to the initial rally with the intention of co-opting the mass of students to their own goals of “speaking truth to power” and establishing a dialog with the administration, in stark contrast to the wishes of those assembled. We fell short of our potential when we refrained from storming Shirvani’s office the first go-around, in fear of two police officers. We fell short when, at Geer and Monte Vista, we refrained from taking the streets, again for fear of police intervention. And we fell short when we allowed our energy to drain out in a matter of minutes after reaching Shirvani’s office. Diminished already, with no support or resources to commence an occupation, and no direction or energy to escalate, those of us who remained in MSR filed out in the spectre of what could have happened today.

But in that spectre lies the possibility for so much more. We learned several lessons today. We have the power to organize in significant numbers, even on a CSU in the middle of the Central Valley. We are not alone in our discontent; everyone on our campus, at other CSUs, at the Community Colleges, and the UCs, everyone is feeling the effects of this crisis, and everyone is angry. We have broad faculty support. Even at CSU, we find ourselves faced with the leftist squanderers and student cops that our comrades at the UCs faced. It is a disservice to ourselves, and our desires, to allow such elements to remain within our ranks unannounced. Most importantly, we learned that we have the power to create the conditions in which we could act out our desires for our campus. Until next time.

Solidarity to SF State! Solidarity to Wheeler Hall!
Solidarity to all of our comrades who are resisting at their campuses and workplaces across California and the world!
We want to take a minute and especially shout out to our comrades who came from MJC today; towards the liberation of not only universities, but community colleges!

A Note to Fellow Students and Workers of CSU Stanislaus

On December 9th, the students, staff and faculty of CSU Stanislaus gathered in the quad to voice their grievances against an administration that uses education as an opportunity to profit at the expense of the students. Throughout the course of the rally, attendees discussed the president's incompetence and effects the current wave of fee hikes and class cuts have had on our lives. It cannot be stressed enough that Shirvani and his administrative staff are not acting in the interests of students, teachers, and workers. Where we see an opportunity to make something out of ourselves, he sees an opportunity to increase the size of his wallet. And this is an approach that is being implemented more and more by those who control things. When the level of privatization in our society increases, the quality and depth of our lives decrease. When we take the time to look at the structures that operate around us, it is apparent that those that are set up to create profit for people like Shirvani are expected to be paid for by us, students and workers. They want us to pay for their crisis.

We should recognize something here: that unity creates power. Becoming aware of our role in this struggle is vital to keep up the momentum that gets things done. Coming together to act on our anger gives us a vehicle to realize our collective desires. What we accomplished today as an organized force was something that is not experienced by regular people in today's world: the creation of our own power. It is important to understand that by acting, and by acting with each other, even if we were present for different reasons, we can take back control of our lives.

With love and solidarity,

-Some students and workers from the Central Valley

It's Not Cheap Books Nor High Grades; What We Lack is Life

As it stands, we're all fucked. With tuition hikes and the latest cuts in the higher education budget, we are graduating only to end up in a jobless market with a shit load of debt. We're confronted everywhere with a shared incapacity to respond and fight back. We're allowed to exhaust ourselves, appealing to an administration that knows very well how to ignore us, or involving ourselves in activist groups like PIRG that exist only to quibble over details.

Look, we've been really patient. Putting up with the daily humiliations and complete isolation while we write essays and take tests so that we can be properly formed into the perfect white collar worker. Are these our lives? We are working shit jobs longer, harder, and cheaper to, in the end, earn an increasingly useless piece of paper, mounting debt, and, in this job market, a spot at the same service industry counter-top.bus-tub/POS we thought -- *we were led to believe-* we were working away from.

Last month, facing shared conditions, students all over California raised a collective middle finger and said **"Srsly, yo? FUCK this."** University buildings were seized and occupied, Regents meetings were sotrmed and disrupted, and the general ennui of student life was cast off in a struggle whose aim was escalation. Cali is steppin' up, now it's our turn.

- excerpt from an anonymous flier circulated online

Notes on the Struggle

by a student from the valley

We don't have to tell you, dear reader, that shit is fucked up. If you're reading this, you're likely a victim of the budget cuts. Whether it's the fee hikes, the class cuts, the layoffs and furlough days, or just the drudgery of every day life that's got you down, one thing is clear: we are done with it all. We are done playing victim, we are done paying for their crisis. Our only way forward now is to fight back!

Our enemies will tell us that they are not to blame for the crisis we are facing, and that we should instead take our struggle to Sacramento. Politics only serve to advance the interests of the rich, and we refuse to participate in a realm in which we have no power, and no chance of winning. Rather, we struggle here at home, where we are the power, where we are the crisis, where we can leverage ourselves against our enemies. In spite of the state cuts, the administration is choosing to cut Winter Term of their own accord. We are losing over ten percent of our faculty, and hundreds of classes, all so that Shirvani can pad his own pocket, hire more administrative staff, and contract with private companies to move more and more of our education into online classrooms where they don't need to hire an actual professor. As if this was good enough for us!

In our movement, liberal or progressive efforts will fail to accomplish anything but token compromises from the administration. We saw this in President Shirvani's initial meeting with the group Right to Education. In their frustration at achieving so little, leftist organizers and liberals will inevitably blame those of us who choose to take action for their own failures, under the false logic that they will be conflated by the administration with the more rowdy tendencies. This is a really, really dumb idea. In actuality, the diversity of tac-

tics in our movement only serves to strengthen everyone's position, except for that of the administration. Those of us who are more confrontational can rely on the fact that we are not the only ones acting, and can really pursue our desires. Those who are more passive can go to the administration, and say "look, if you don't negotiate with us now, more and more students and faculty will turn violent. We don't like violence either, but it's going to happen if we don't get what we want." The administration does not wish to work for us, but through a wide variety of tactics we can force concession from them.

Towards this end, we must reject the symbolism of liberal protest which seeks to "speak truth to power," and substitute our collective desires to see this shit turned upside down. If we wish to see Shirvani and his cronies cave, we must disrupt business as usual at CSU by creating a situation which is so untenable, so uncontrollable, that they have no choice but to grovel at our feet. This is a call for students, faculty, and workers. This is a call to strike from work and school, to take what is ours, and to occupy what is not (yet).

STRIKE // TAKEOVER // OCCUPY - a student

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