

7-DAY WEEKEND

Issue No. 1 • February 8, 2010

A generation of damaged goods • A successful university occupation in Mexico • Students vs. prisoners? • A message to the faculty • Social transformation from the ground up • The Kerr Hall occupation: a personal reflection

INTRODUCTION: THIS IS YOUR LIFE

MARCH 4TH WILL BE a collective day of action—a mass strike against the budget cuts. Some of us look to this day with excitement. If enough people participate, we can shut down campuses across California, forcing the administration and the state to negotiate with us directly. We'll overturn the tuition hikes, reverse the cuts and repeal the layoffs. Many students think, *isn't that impossible? haven't we been told there's no money?* But it is possible, and in the past few years, it's happened in other countries around the world, countries which are much less wealthy than ours (see below on the occupation at UNAM in Mexico; in later issues, we'll look at recent strikes in France, Greece and elsewhere).

A major reason it happens in those countries and not in ours is because in the US, we've lost our memory of taking action. We have no experience of friends or family members fighting back at work or in their neighborhoods. And we are too inundated with pop culture and TV news to learn about what's happening elsewhere in the world. So to most of us, the situation at California's universities is simply depressing. We are trying to figure out how we will adapt, *personally*, to paying more for college, taking out bigger loans, losing our jobs, not getting into the classes we need to graduate, and not being able to get jobs after we graduate.

Yes, it's starting to look pretty bad. Just last quarter, the UCs raised tuition by 32 percent in response to a cut of more than \$813 million to the overall UC budget (itself due to a multi-billion dollar fiscal meltdown in California). Public education is being decimated. The State of California has no money. And the governor and the state legislature have begun pitting various sectors of society against one another in an all-out fight for cash. Just a few weeks ago, Schwarzenegger offered the UCs and CSUs more money—directly at the expense of prisoners who already face harsh, overcrowded conditions.

Despite this depressing situation, we should take note of what we've already achieved. Last quarter, students and workers took it upon themselves to disrupt work and life on their campuses. Occupations at UC Santa Cruz set off a wave of occupations across the state. It is true that these disruptions did not, in themselves, constitute a force capable of reorganizing California's economy—that would require a struggle extending beyond the boundaries of the university, to all sectors of society. But it remains clear that our mass disruptions are already starting to scare those in power. What we need now is to intensify our acts of resistance, building towards March 4th and spill-

ing over beyond it. We need to get over our fear of the administration and the police. We need to get over our apathy—our collective lack of interest in collective action. We hope this newsletter will contribute to changing the culture around campus, starting a conversation about what we have done and *what we should do next*.



STUDENTS VERSUS PRISONERS?

“Choosing universities over prisons: this is a historic realignment of California’s priorities.” On January 6th, Governor Schwarzenegger asked the state legislature to reduce the amount of money it spends on prisons, so it can redirect those funds to colleges and universities. As he noted in his speech, the state’s priorities have gotten horribly “out of whack” over the years: 30 years ago, 10 percent of the budget went to higher education and only 3 percent to prisons; today, higher education gets 7.5 percent, while prisons get 11 percent of general funds.

What made the governor finally take note of this? In an interview after the speech, the governor’s chief of staff Susan Kennedy admitted that “those protests on the UC campuses were the tipping point.” By protests, she did not mean the teach-ins and die-ins. She meant the wave of occupations and other mass disruptions (including the storming of the Chancellor’s house in Berkeley), which—beginning on November 17th—brought riot police to UC campuses. It was these actions, and these actions alone, that finally

forced the governor to reflect on the state's "unhealthy" priorities.

Nevertheless, the governor's response will only make matters worse. The California prison-system houses 170,000 inmates in 33 prisons and 12 correctional facilities. It was built to hold half that number. In August, a panel of three federal judges ordered the state of California to release 43,000 inmates due to the low level of medical care and other conditions creating an "immediate [risk of] death and harm." The governor, of course, refused. The system is clearly over-burdened and under-funded, so how did the governor propose to reduce costs? He said that no prisoners would be released early, *even though most of them are in prison for non-violent drug-related crimes*. Instead, he proposed cost-cutting measures similar to those implemented at the university: downward pressure on staff salaries, further reductions in inmate medical-costs, and the construction of private, for-profit prisons to relieve crowding.

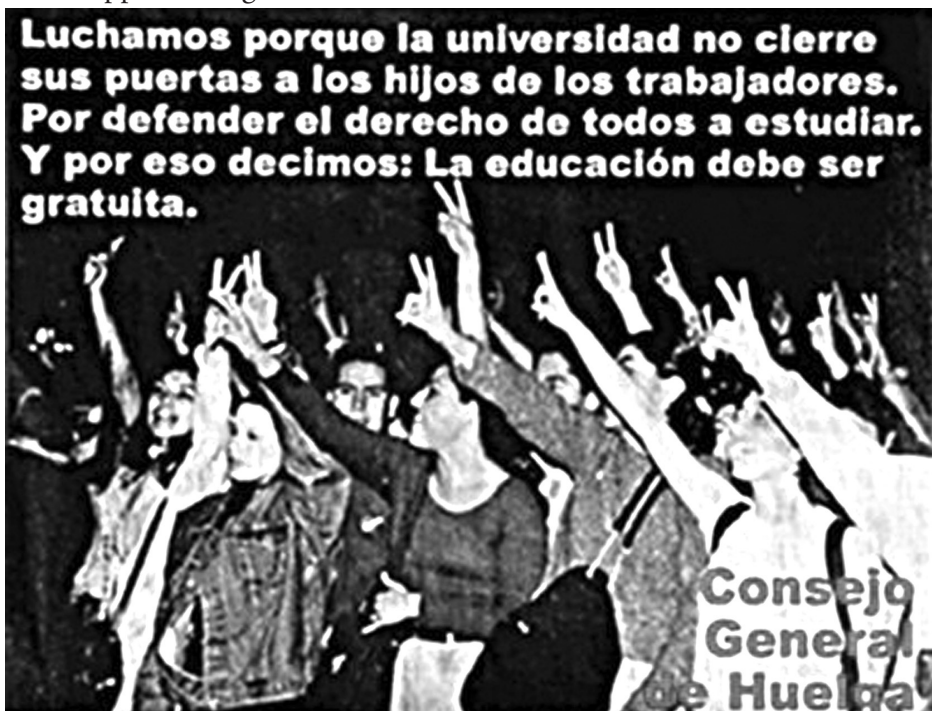
This "solution" is dangerous for our movement. If we continue to disrupt campus activities, the state will be forced to respond, but if—in our demands—we pretend that this crisis is a crisis of the university only, we risk getting what we need at the expense of other, less privileged members of society. Indeed, as the governor made clear in his speech, the state will not solve its problems by raising taxes. What government would raise taxes in the middle of a protracted crisis? Instead, the state will continue to cut social spending: on parks, on health care for the poor, on prisoners, on state employees and on students.

We cannot allow ourselves to be pitted against one another. But what possibilities exist for solidarity between us? In the 1960s, black people rioted against the commodification of ghetto life, while white and black workers rebelled against being reduced to cogs in the factories. Students occupied university campuses and formed councils, while inmates took over prisons to demand better conditions. These fractions failed to merge. How will we?

OCCUPATION IN MEXICO, 1999-2000

The story of the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (UNAM) presents us with a real-life history of "what could have been" at the University of California—what could be, if we organize ourselves to bring the university to a standstill. The students at UNAM occupied their campus—shutting down the school for more than nine months—to fight for a free and open education. They won their immediate demands, but failed to transform society. How long could we last...?

UNAM is the largest university in North America, with over 250,000 students. The university's main campus is in Mexico City, but there are satellite campuses located throughout the country. For as long as it has existed, UNAM has been virtually free to attend and open to everyone who wanted to learn. The fact that it is free has some basis in the founding document of the Mexican state: after the Revolution of 1910, free education was written into article three of the constitution. It is not clear, however, whether that article applies to higher education.



Nevertheless, UNAM has charged virtually no tuition for years. Periodically—and especially after the Mexican debt crisis of 1982—the government has tried to charge for attending the university: once in 1986 and again in 1992. In each case, large and disruptive student movements were able to prevent any increase in fees. In 1987, the administration tried to institute a more selective, competitive admissions process. But they underestimated student commitment to UNAM's egalitarian mission: mass demonstrations effectively overturned their efforts. The largest student strike at UNAM occurred in 1999. That year, the federal government cut university funding by US\$30 million, ostensibly in response to falling oil revenues. The administration saw this temporary crisis as an opportunity to introduce a permanent fee increase—from a nominal two cents per term to about US\$90 per term.

While small by US standards, these higher fees would have made it impossible for the poor to attend UNAM.

On April 20, 1999, students and supporters occupied many of the facilities and schools of the university. The takeover came quickly after the administration announced its General Regulation of Payment, which would require that all students pay tuition. Student support for the strike was relatively strong at first, but in late April, counter-strikers appeared on the main UNAM campus. These counter-strikers were defeated, however, by a May 12 rally to support the strike in which *100,000 protestors representing students, faculty, staff and labor unions marched to the historic Zocalo in downtown Mexico City*. In early June, the Rector backed off of his initial demand for tuition payments from all students and stated that only those who could afford to pay would be required to do so. Students rejected this offer, since it was unclear who would make such determinations. A few weeks later, the Rector tried again, stating that tuition payments would be voluntary and that strikers would be immune from university sanctions. Again the students rejected the offer. In July, the spring semester officially ended and the administration offered to discuss demands, but only if the occupation were ended. Still the students refused.

As the occupation wore on, the strikers were radicalized. They no longer wanted only to restore the status quo, without fees or entrance exams. They called for real autonomy—democratic self-management without fear of the repressive apparatus of the state police. But these more expansive demands failed (as we would expect, since it is impossible to really transform society without a generalized social insurrection, reaching beyond the students to other workers). On February 6, more than 9 months after the strike began, 2,400 federal police raided the main campus and detained more than 400 striking students, putting an end to the occupation. However, because of their collective struggle, the students won continued freedom of access to the university.

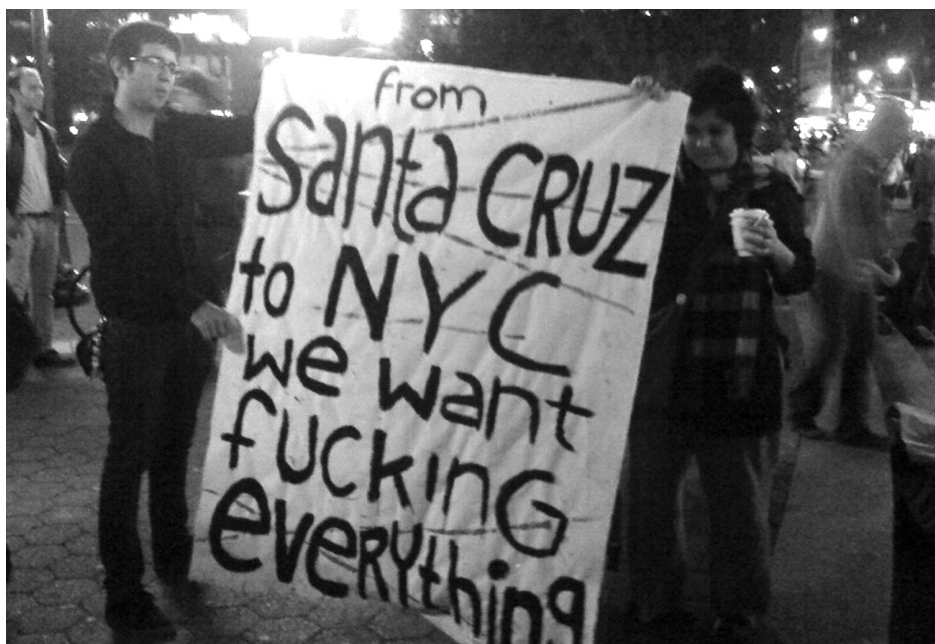
One student summarized his position so clearly that it is worth quoting him in full: “The media obviously omits a lot of things. They make the students look like villains for ‘kidnapping’ the University, but let’s not forget how our ‘intelligent’ government, from the very beginning, began to cut back funding for the public universities so that they could pay the bankers. There is no doubt that this is a national issue, and that the students have to pay a price to sustain accessible schools. The fact is that this is a country where the majority of people are poor and cannot pay.”

Sound familiar? OCCUPY THE UCs!

MESSAGE TO THE FACULTY

Professors have a “material interest” in fighting the budget cuts, regardless of whether or not their own positions are endangered by the cuts. That is because, as we all know, people do not go into teaching for the money, but rather because they love to teach, to research, to participate in scholarly life. We have to face the facts, however, about that life. Students are learning less and less—and not only because of the degeneracy of American culture. Three-quarters of students work while they are in school. It is almost impossible to achieve a high level of concentration, in or out of the classroom, when one’s mind and body are racked by work. Classes are getting bigger. Students have less interaction with their professors, and thus, they have less emotional and intellectual investment in what they learning. This situation has to be transformed, and it will be transformed **ONLY IF WE FIGHT**.

Last quarter, some students experienced a transformation for themselves, when they participated in occupations in order to fight the budget cuts. When students entered these occupations, they shed their identities. Undergraduate and graduate students spoke freely to one another, without regard for who had “more” of an education, or “higher” degrees. That’s because, in the context of a struggle, none of that matters. No one has an exceptional position, the one “right” answer, so we figure out what to do *together*. Most people experienced this openness as a freedom unlike any they had experi-



enced before. All the discussion sections in the world are scant preparation for a real discussion, in which our bodies and beliefs are at stake.

Why is it, then, that professors were unable to participate in the occupations at that level? When they came into the occupied spaces, professors did so only as professors: they came in order to teach us something. Professors tried to bargain with administrators on behalf of students. They tried to convince students to be more mindful of the consequences of their actions. And when they showed up to support us for the final confrontation with the riot police, professors did so as “faculty observers” (to separate themselves, presumably, from the “student participants”). We say this not to criticize the faculty, but to point out what seems symptomatic in their actions. After all, when the riot police finally appeared to disperse the Kerr Hall occupation, they did not care who was a professor or who was a student. They cleared everyone out with equal force. In the end, it was a professor dear to us all who was hurt the most—he was taken away in an ambulance after he fell off a ledge.

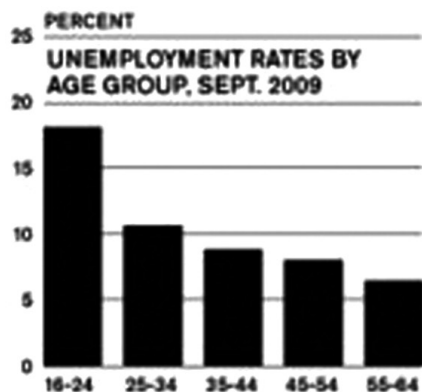
All of this is to say: *faculty are already participating in the struggle as individuals, even if they do not recognize that fact.* This struggle is not simply an opportunity to “learn something.” It is not “preparation” for some future experience, in which the stakes would be “real.” By acting as if these ruptures in our everyday experience are not also ruptures in the fundamental hierarchies of the university, professors prevent themselves from entering the struggle as individuals, equal to everyone else. They prevent themselves from speaking freely, without regard for how their age or status might unduly “influence” the youth. This is what we need, more than anything, from the faculty—to speak, young and old, student and professor, as equals.

TOO FEW JOBS FOR TOO MANY PEOPLE

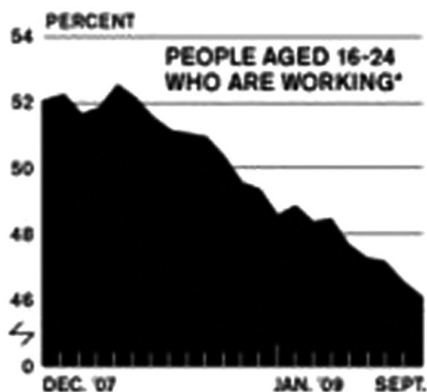
We have been told that the crisis of university can be solved—by putting pressure on the Regents, by asserting student and worker power at the state level, etc. But what about the crisis of the university graduate? The statistics are bleak. In the US, the unemployment rate for 16-to-24 year-olds has climbed to more than 18 percent. Studies suggest that people who experience periods of youthful joblessness tend to get stuck in jobs that are “beneath their capabilities.” They come to be seen by employers as “damaged goods.”

We are becoming a generation of damaged goods. Perhaps we should have skipped college altogether and gone straight to the job market. It is now clear

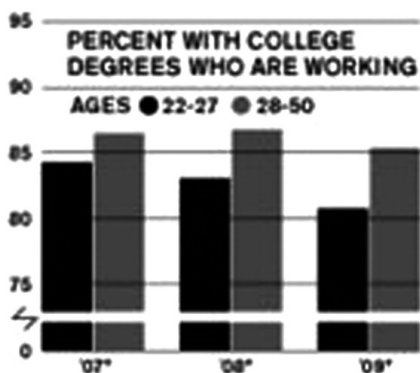
Higher unemployment rates...



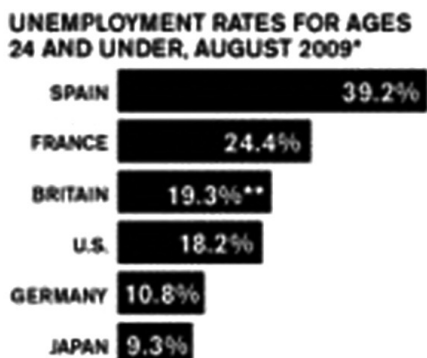
...declining odds of employment...



...including among the educated young...



...and young people around the world



that, by the time new jobs arrive, there will be waves upon waves of graduates competing for them. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the economy will not generate any “new jobs”—that is, enough to bring the unemployment rate back down to its pre-crisis level—until December 2016. With more people competing for fewer openings, wages will fall. *Business Week* reports that, for each percentage-point rise in the unemployment rate—and unemployment has already risen five points since the end of 2007—those who graduated during a recession earned 6 to 7 percent less in their first year of employment, with effects lasting over a decade.

We print these statistics not merely to notify you of our unhappy futures. On the contrary, this concerns us here and now. If we can all expect below-average wages over the next decade, shouldn't we also expect to pay less for our university degrees? The standard relationship between tuition

and wages has clearly broken down. The Regents assume we can pay more and more for our educations—and therefore take out bigger loans—because we will be able to repay our debts with higher lifetime earnings. But when we get out of school, we will find that the job opportunities have already evaporated, that we are earning less than those who graduated before us. So why does tuition continue to rise, when our future earning expectations are falling? How can we mortgage futures that no longer exist?



This is not simply a student issue, since it will outlast our financial aid packages, our scholarships, and whatever help our parents give us. Nor is it even a national issue, since global youth—from Spain and France to Iran and China—are facing the same employment gap. This is a matter of life: how we will to continue living hinges on what we do about it now. When they tell us what it will take to “save the university,” we should ask, what will it take to save us? We know only this: tactics of disruption will have to spread, from students to young workers—and the young unemployed. As we are beginning to see at the university, it is only through collective acts of disruption that we constitute a force so severe we cannot not be ignored.

THE LAST REMAINING REASON

Organizing for March 4th is proceeding apace. We have been reaching out to students, many of whom do not even know about the March 4th general strike. We have been handing out information about the self-destruction of California’s public universities. People are signing petitions. They are pledging their participation on March 4th. Undoubtedly, this is important

work—the long, slow process of growing from a few hundred people to tens of thousands. In Mexico, when students occupied the National Autonomous University, 100,000 people came out to support them, and they won their demands—even if they lost their struggle to transform society. We are far from even that point. How do we get there?

Something is missing in all the out-reach we have been doing this quarter. It provides students with information, but how does it grow their collective power? How does it help us break out of this suffocating culture of passivity? Last quarter, we began to organize ourselves without representatives or leaders. People said it couldn't be done, but we did it—we occupied buildings on campus, setting off a wave of occupations across the state. We used these spaces to organize our struggles, but also to meet one another—to talk, to eat and to dance together.

That is what is missing this quarter: collective action. It was these actions, these actions alone, which forced Sacramento to reconsider its position: what does it say about a state that spends more money on prisons than on higher education? What does it say about a state that calls in the riot cops to beat up its children? But the occupations were more than just a means to fight the budget cuts. They were also an end in themselves. In the occupations, we discovered our collective power and overcame our fears.

Now, in February, there are more than a thousand of us across the state of California. We found each other; we are learning from one another. We are spreading tactics of sabotage and disruption throughout the state. We are beginning to spread them beyond the bounds of the university. But how are we going to reach more students, here at the university? When 250 people



spontaneously occupied Kerr Hall, I walked around the campus, talking to everyone I saw: “Kerr Hall has been occupied; this has never happened before in the history of the university; come check it out before the cops get here!” People were unimpressed. They had some excuse, of course, as if I were a teacher asking them why they didn’t do their homework. Some bothered to feign excitement, but they obviously had no intention of coming to see for themselves.

This passivity, this anti-social mentality, is the last remaining reason why the tuition hike has not already been overturned. How are we going to get past this point? Perhaps the fault lies in a choice of targets. We occupied the administrative building to shut down the university. It probably had a minimal effect in that direction (although most of the administrators, if they do any work at all, probably work from home). Precisely because we occupied an administrative building, we failed to interrupt and transform the daily lives of most students, who float from dorms to classes to dining halls to dorms—worrying about their grades, worrying about their jobs, worrying about their families, worrying about their futures, but always alone or with a few friends, never with a group large enough to actually force a change in this self-destructing institution. Maybe it is time to take over and transform our living spaces directly. It need not be any big production. How easy would it be for a few friends to interrupt dinner at a dining hall for a little theater production, to throw an unsanctioned party in a dorm, to end class abruptly and start a discussion, or even to distribute a newsletter? *It is amazing what twenty-five people can do if they do it together...*

This quarter, let’s organize with our friends to make a ruckus around campus—to interrupt people’s daily lives, to involve them in a collective project—TO HALT the functioning of the university, TO OVERTURN the budget cuts, TO END this miserable society of unemployment, debt and servitude.

KERR HALL: A PERSONAL REFLECTION

“Attach yourself to what you feel to be true. Begin there.”

Much of our social existence is dependent on our isolation from one another—on our ability to inflict alienation on ourselves. We spend hours in our dorm rooms on facebook, while literally hundreds of other people sit a few feet away doing the same thing. We gentrify our collective broken-heartedness. What is it that keeps us from entering into meaningful relation-



ships with those around us?

When students took Kerr Hall on at around 3pm on November 19, 2009, it occurred to me that I wasn't going to make my 4pm class. As administrators began to filter out of the building, an older gentleman in Vans caught my eye. I walked up to him slowly and said, "I just wanted to let you know, I probably won't be in class." His response surprised me: "Oh, okay... I'll put the presentation online." Among the numbness of everyday life, this was a moment that made me actually feel *something*.

We were only in Kerr Hall for seventy-two hours, but life in the occupation took on a kind of rhythm. When we were hungry, there was food spontaneously cooked by students (many of whom felt that was the limit of their ability to participate). More food flowed in from dining halls, dorms and dumpsters. When there was a decision to be made, we made it together. When there were no decisions to be made, we sat around and talked.

When I was scared, there was someone to hold my hand. It was 5am when the riot police came to Kerr Hall. The seventy of us inside the building were suffering from sleep deprivation and paranoia. As we watched our friends on the outside get smacked with batons, I realized my own fear of authority. I turned to the girl next to me, someone I had met hours before, and said, "I'm freaking out. Can I hold your hand?" She grabbed my hand and within minutes, nearly everyone around us was holding someone's hand, regardless of how fiercely we disagreed with each other's ideas or tactics.

We became connected by the reality of what we had done. In the university, where it seems that everything is preparation for something else, something that never arrives, Kerr Hall reminds us that we exist—together.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Jan. 15—Indigenous activists and their supporters gathered at the Central Valley Miwok Tribe's sole piece of property, a foreclosed house in Stockton, CA to prevent sheriffs from evicting the tribe.

Jan. 19—In Nsukka, Nigeria, at least two students and a policeman were shot and 22 vehicles were burned when hundreds of university students took to the streets to protest fee hikes. Rioting students looted stores and stormed the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor's residences.

Jan. 20—Four students tried to occupy the vacant Hibernia Bank building in downtown SF in conjunction with a demonstration against the foreclosure crisis and the treatment of the homeless. The students released a communique intending to bridge the gap between student protests and other struggles around precariousness. They hung a banner reading "You take our homes, we take your banks" (*see below*) before tripping an alarm and getting arrested. They were released the next day; all charges were dropped.

Jan. 20-21—Meeting at UCSF, the UC Regents tried to claim ownership of the March 4th strike by suggesting that they stand "with the students" in demanding more money from the state treasury. At the very same meeting, they approved \$3 million in pay raises for 38 upper-echelon UC executives.

Jan. 24—Tenants in Warsaw, Poland occupied a housing office in response





to city plans to gentrify their neighborhood.

Jan. 28—Parents in Lanarkshire, Scotland occupied an elementary school slated to be closed, the latest in a series of school occupations that have taken place over the past year.

Jan. 29—An Aptos resident was arrested after barricading himself inside his home to resist eviction.

Jan. 30—Police in Fresno evicted an encampment housing roughly 100 homeless individuals. Police told them they would be evicted from any new camps as well, but most of them, having nowhere to go, set up again in a vacant lot a block away.

Jan. 31—Police in SF attacked a benefit party, which was raising money for fines and legal fees associated with student protests and occupations. Under an alleged “noise complaint,” 11 people were arrested. Many were beaten up both in the streets and later in their cells. All but one were released within 24 hours. The last, a person of color, was charged with multiple felonies. Sound equipment and computers were also seized and destroyed by the police.

Feb. 2—In Holland, students occupied the main building of the University of Utrecht, against an administrative decision to stop publishing the paper version of the school newspaper. This is to be the first in a national wave of actions, fighting budget cuts in education.

Feb. 5-7—Students held a study-in at UC Davis (*see above*), keeping the Shields Library open over the weekend (it had been closed due to budget cuts). Before the event, however, and in response to the planned study-in, the chancellor announced that he would preemptively open the library. Students responded “the library will be open all weekend, *because we opened it!*”

UPCOMING EVENTS

Feb 8-11: AFSCME's week of action at UCSC

Staff and students will gather at the dining halls to demonstrate against cuts to dining-hall custodians' hours and to discuss how to continue our struggles in solidarity.

11:30am-1:30pm — Monday College 8, Tuesday College 9,
Wednesday Crown College, Thursday Cowell College

Wed., Feb. 10: UCSC General Assembly

6pm @ Kresge Town Hall

Wed., Feb. 17: Student-Worker Forum

5pm @ Kresge Town Hall

**NO SCHOOL
MARCH 1-5
EDUCATION STRIKE**

**look for the next issue in a week or two
around campus and at**

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accepting submissions (about 500 words) at

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