

## BALANCE AND SUMMARY: MARCH 4th DAY OF ACTION

Unión del Barrio

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### **San Diego**

March 4<sup>th</sup> 2010 was a historic day in the defense of public education specifically and in the struggle for self-determination and socialism in general. Students, educators, parents and workers mobilized across California demanding an end to the systematic attacks on public education and a re-assessment of the state's financial priorities. This article is offered as both a summation of our participation in the day's events in San Diego as well as an exercise in criticism and self-criticism with the goal of strengthening our specific struggle for education and our general struggle for socialism and self-determination in our lifetime.

### Importance of Mass Demonstrations

To begin and as we look to move forward in our struggle, it is important to understand the political function of mobilizations such as the March 4<sup>th</sup> day of action. Marches, strikes, rallies, and other mass demonstrations are schools of political struggle. While these popular manifestations of political will at the mass level often have minimal immediate impact on the political orientation of the state, without these types of mobilizations it would be next to impossible to develop the revolutionary class consciousness of students, educators, workers and community members. With no practical experience in politics aside from voting, how could students, educators, workers and our communities in general gain the confidence to break away from the established political parties of the ruling class? And with out these schools of political struggle, how could we gain the experience necessary to organize our own revolutionary party or to lead our own struggle for self-determination and socialism. We should be clear that the March 4<sup>th</sup> day of action was one such school of political struggle.

### Evaluating March 4<sup>th</sup>

Having addressed the long-term importance of March 4<sup>th</sup>, we should ask ourselves to what degree was the day's events successful and how is success to be measured? As suggested earlier, the success of a mass mobilization such as the one organized March 4<sup>th</sup> should not be measured by its immediate impact on the state's political actors. The success of the March 4<sup>th</sup> day action should be measured by the events effect on participants. Specifically, do participants have a greater sense of clarity regarding what they are struggling for and how they will resolve their struggle victoriously? Another useful indicator for gauging the success of March 4<sup>th</sup> in particular and mass demonstrations in general relates to the organizers themselves. Did the experience of organizing the March 4<sup>th</sup> day of actions enhance their abilities to lead a process of political struggle or did the event burn people out without developing organizational understanding, and skills? These are the tools we should use when evaluating the degrees of success or short-coming with regard to March 4<sup>th</sup>.

It is our belief that many, if not all, participants during the day's action left the event with more information then they originally possessed with regard to the current conditions of public education. As well as our shared struggle to not only defend our right to education but to enhance our educational experiences. The speeches and literature made available during the day's events reflected the political diversity of participants and covered a broad political spectrum ranging from liberal to revolutionary. Our membership clearly articulated the position that the struggle for public education cannot be separated from the struggle against capitalism and that a dignified future can only be had by winning the right to self-determination and socialism. While our presence and message was clear, due to the size and collective nature of the entire event we cannot say that this anti-capitalist/ anti-colonialist political line was uniformly upheld. Therefore, with regard to March 4<sup>th</sup> as a school of political struggle we celebrate the day as a partial victory. In addition to celebrating the growing class consciousness among students, educators, workers and our communities in general, we are both critical of those who insist that political solutions can be found within either of the two ruling class parties and self-critical of our inability to win more progressive and revolutionary forces to our political perspective. We are similarly critical of those participants and organizers who choose to defend public education as it exists in it's current form; serving as the ideological vehicle by which to indocrinate young people to serve the interest of capitalism. Public education in it's current form is the primary tool that our oppressors have to colonize (confuse), conquer (divide), and neutralize (pacify) Raza and other oppressed people into serving thier intrests. This is why we call for more than just the defense of public education; we call for a relevant, working class, Raza Liberation Education. We are also self-critical of our participation during March 4<sup>th</sup>. With regard to march participants in general and the event's organizers in particular had we been

able to win more of these people to our revolutionary perspective championing self-determination and socialism, the event's function as a school of political struggle would have been greatly enhanced. Despite the lack of ideological clarity surrounding the event, we applaud the event's organizers for providing such a large venue for political expression outside of the two party system. Special recognition is due to the Education for All Coalition based out of City Community College campus.

The second evaluation tool with regard to March 4<sup>th</sup> pertains to the organizers and the development of their leadership skills. Logistically, the day's main events were well coordinated. The same cannot be said of the rally at SDSU. At SDSU, the action plan seemed to be abandoned as only one of three on-campus marches materialized (ahead of schedule too) and the route completely missed the heart of campus. This short-coming is primarily a result of the relative lack of experience among the general student body with regard to the organization of independent political events. Regarding both marches downtown and at SDSU, adequate sound systems were available at two of the three rally locations (SDSU and the Centro Cultural), while sound at the third and final location (Downtown) was too low for the size of the crowd present. Transportation was addressed in good order (MTS was contacted and provided additional trolley cars) and the volunteer security force ensured that the event progressed without incident. While the crowd size was difficult to estimate we propose that about 1,500 participants were present at SDSU and close to 5,000 at the Centro and Downtown. Over all, the organizers of the main event proved adept in their completion of the monumental task of coordinating a citywide march and two rallies. We are encouraged by the thought of organizers from both the main event and the SDSU event learning from their mistakes and improving their organizational skills in the future.

Regarding the Frente Universitario en Lucha contingent made up by members of Unión del Barrio, MEChA de SDSU, the Association of Raza Educators, Lincoln High Parents for Social Justice, and other organizations, over 200 people were mobilized for this event. Our contingent displayed the highest level of organization including a separate security group for contingent participants, visual clarity in the form signs, banners and flags, and food and water for all contingent participants. Additionally, our contingent was one of the largest single contingents in the San Diego March 4<sup>th</sup> event. Our presence and level of organization would not have been possible without the participation of an advanced political organization like Union del Barrio as well as the organizational experience of our community base consisting of high school and university students, parents and educators. While we witnessed the advance of organizational skills among all participants in the Frente Universitario en Lucha contingent, the development of organizational skills outside of our contingent is difficult to gauge and should be reflected upon by all March 4<sup>th</sup> organizers and participants. A major self-criticism we have regarding leadership development pertains to the relative lack of delegated responsibilities within our contingent. While all Frente Universitario en Lucha participants helped to build the size of our contingent and some even assumed additional responsibilities (the Parents for social justice provided food and water for all 200 people and many SDSU MEChA members volunteered for security), in the future we hope to more evenly distribute responsibilities between Union del Barrio members and our base of community supporters. We recognize and greatly appreciate the organizational and leadership skills developed among our community supporters and know that no victory can be won without the community's support and participation in revolutionary leadership.

#### Addressing Critical Short-Comings

In addition to our criticisms and self-criticism of the event's organizers and participants we would also like to provide specific recommendations to improve our shared struggle for education as we advance towards a future of socialism and self-determination. The principal weakness of this day's events was the lack of foresight and clear political principle. Because March 4<sup>th</sup> actions were not tied to a projected campaign of political struggle, the event lacked ideological clarity (or principles) and has left participants in an organizational limbo now that the day of action has passed. These shortcomings should not over shadow the many first steps and partial victories won that day. Also, these shortcomings should be understood as the product of relatively isolated student activism. The original idea for a statewide day of action was the product first and foremost of students (at UC Berkley) reacting to the financial condition of their education. It wasn't until after March 4<sup>th</sup> had been established as a day of action that outreach efforts were intensified to build a broader community base for the event including parents, educators and workers. Why is this important? Because students generally organize around dates and events rather than campaigns based of political principle and measured by short-term, medium-term, long-term goals, this event was politically short-sighted from its inception and paved the way for many of the obstacles currently facing the student movement in terms of political and ideological direction.

To rectify this error in the immediate future, we offer the following recommendations. We recommend that all activists join an

organization. Accountability and organization are the building blocks of victorious political struggles. Students, or anyone for that matter, can preach unity, if they are not part of an organization.

Secondly, organizations committed to defending public education should coalesce around an advanced political line that call for the end to capitalism- which comodifies this basic right- with clearly stated political principles. Student organizations alone and in general have demonstrated the inability to build lasting, broad bases of community, and worker support for their mobilizations. Furthermore, advanced political organizations can help provide the political and organizational experience necessary to project a long-term vision and work plan that will ensure that momentum gained from a particular issue is tied to an overall strategy to defeat imperialism, or at least weaken it where it is most vulnerable.

Finally, we recommend that March 4<sup>th</sup> activist and organizers work to advance our shared struggle in their own cities, towns and communities in concrete ways. It is easy and tempting to focus all of our energy inward amongst other activists and organizers across the state who are already engaged in the struggle but we must continually broaden our base of support and leadership in our own communities. An important opportunity to continue our shared work of raising consciousness, improving organizational capacity and building alliances is the struggle to build the May 1<sup>st</sup> actions in commemoration of International Worker's Day. Unión del Barrio calls on all March 4<sup>th</sup> participants and organizers to build May 1<sup>st</sup> in their cities, towns and communities as part of a long-term struggle for socialism and self-determination in our lifetime.

Additionally, we invite all those concerned for the future of Public Education to attend the upcoming Association of Raza Educator's (ARE) 4th Annual Conference to take place on Saturday May 15th at Lincoln High School in San Diego (see ad in this issue of La Verdad). Under the theme: Striving for True Praxis to Reclaim Public Education, ARE seeks to promote the unity of critical pedagogy, organization, and direct action, as a response to the growing oppression and wretchedness facing the great majority of Raza communities. It is a space where the most progressive, radical, and analytical educators have come to discuss, dialogue, and struggle, around the goal of finding ways to counter the hegemonic imposed pedagogy that oppress and stifle the intellectual development of whole nations, women, and workers. The conferences aim to advance (through the workshops and dialogue) the practice of a pedagogy that will remake the world and its current social relationships; where a few control all the wealth, while the great majority live in misery and poverty.

### Conclusion

The limitations encountered are not fatal to our movement but must be addressed. Without understanding the importance of mass demonstrations as schools of political struggle, without the participation of advanced political organizations with clear political principles, without long-term goals and without a concrete base of support and leadership outside of college and university campuses, it will be next to impossible to organize and mobilize ourselves in a manner which will ultimately win our right to an education in particular, as well as self-determination and socialism in general.

In closing, we are proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with the courageous students, youth, children, women, and men who made March 4<sup>th</sup> a truly historic day in defense of public education. We hope that you find this summary and reflection helpful in the development of our shared struggle and we look forward to many more shared victories. For self-determination and socialism in our lifetime;

### **Los Angeles**

The massive protests organized throughout California and the rest of the empire (U.S.) on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010 came as an inevitable storm pushing the state, country, and various universities to look at how their budget cuts and policies were really affecting students. Nowhere were students' voices more powerful than in Los Angeles. The planning for the March 4<sup>th</sup> action in Los Angeles came from a coalition of students, educators, and unionized teachers who were tired of all the cuts in classes, jobs, and resources. Though there was a strong UTLA presence at the planning meetings, the students' voices were loud and clear. It was the students that led the actions of March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

The action in Los Angeles was among the biggest in the state drawing thousands of students, teachers, and community members from all education levels and walks of life. For the most part the march was peaceful though somewhat unorganized (certain logistics had not been worked out). However, to the public eye, March 4<sup>th</sup> was the loudest student call for justice in

educational accessibility. Though multiple actions took place on that day, Los Angeles had among the largest organized student run and led contingent because it was a space that the students struggled for despite walls that were put up by educators determined to decide the program, marching route, times, and speakers by virtue of their age. The students however kept their ideas strong and ensured that their plans were considered and implemented. The students of Los Angeles were united as one political force for a free and accessible education.

A few miles North in the San Fernando Valley, a separate action took place at California State University, Northridge. This action brought together approximately 4,000 people and was organized by the Students for Quality Education (SQE) and the California Faculty Association (CFA), both of which form part of the Valley Ed Coalition. The rally and protest at CSUN was very well organized and students from the local high schools were brought to campus to rally and march for education. Community members and K-12 teachers were invited to the action as well. The objective of the march was to raise the peoples' consciousness with regard to the privatization of education. At the end of the march students decided to execute an action of civil disobedience at Reseda and Prairie. In a reactionary display of state violence, the police started to push students. While it is true that the civil disobedience action lacked organization and coordination, the police repression is an expression of the inherently unjust system who's only response to students demanding an education is the use of brute force. Once the civil disobedience started the police did not hesitate to do what they do best; to oppress students or anyone who desires the empowerment of people. One professor Dr. Olsen was pushed and hit in the face by the LAPD. A CSUN student tried to help her but he was arrested and beat up. He was charged with resisting arrest though several witnesses refute that claim. Officially five students were arrested at 7:15pm. After being arrested the students report that they were taken to the CSUN police station and 3 students said that they were kept on their knees for at least 20-25 minutes. They were charged with "Failure to disperse at route." All the students reported to their court hearing at 8:30 am on Thursday March 24. The charges were not dropped and there will be a future court date.

The attacks by the LAPD were not spontaneous since they need the authorization of the University to enter campus. A day before 2 helicopters were part of a car pursuit that ended at CSUN the helicopters were allowed to park on top of buildings. Union del Barrio members who are also CSUN students believe that the helicopters arrived on campus to set up for the following day.

On March 5th a press conference was organized and led by students from BSU, MECHA, and SQE. 200 students marched to the office of the dean to demand an interview. They were denied. Currently, CSUN students along with a couple of Union del Barrio members will be participating in a hunger strike from May 5<sup>th</sup>- May 12<sup>th</sup> against the budget cuts and the denial of thousands of otherwise eligible students to the university. The students of Los Angeles will not stop until education is free and accessible to ALL. Who's Universities? OUR Universities!