



GSOC-UAW LOCAL 2110

MAKING A BETTER NYU SINCE 1998

The Union for Graduate Employees at New York University

To the students of Wits University, UCT, Stellenbosch, and the university currently known as Rhodes:

We are GSOC-UAW Local 2110, a union that represents the graduate workers of New York University (NYU), drawing on a membership of several thousand across NYU's various campuses. We as a union are committed to building a movement centered around social justice, collective action, and open democracy.

We have been following with great interest and admiration the struggles of South African students since the beginning of the year—starting with the emergence of the Rhodes Must Fall sit-in at the University of Cape Town and more recently with the large protests against outsourcing at Wits earlier this month. We fully support your demands to end tuition fee increases at Wits and for the decolonization of South Africa's higher education system. We are inspired by your courage, tactics, determination and refusal to back down even when faced by threats of repression. Your strike and occupation sends a powerful message to both the government and the university management which cannot be ignored. We as graduate workers also admire how you have managed to link the struggles of campus workers, outsourced by university management to highly exploitative companies, to your struggle, and the broad project in the student movement of building coalitions with feminist and queer organizations inspires our own work here in New York.

It is clear to us that access to affordable university education is under attack by government and 'educational' institutions across the world, including our own university, which has some of the highest tuition fees for undergraduates in the United States. We have seen governments over the last few years, from Greece to the United Kingdom, raise fees for universities and cut funding. This has resulted in a situation in which working class and poor students are excluded from university education. We have also seen heroic struggles waged by student movements against these cuts and the further commodification of education. Some of these struggles have won major victories, such as the student movement in Québec which managed to block major tuition fee raises in their universities in 2012 and the Chilean student movement which shook the foundations of the national government between 2011 and 2013.

The struggle for quality and affordable higher education is now taking place all over the world as governments seek to impose austerity, redirecting money away from higher education. At the same time, these governments continue to pursue policies that benefit the wealthy elite. University managers slash funding for key departments while raising their own salaries and pursuing strategies that focus myopically on improving their universities' international ratings instead of on the urgent needs of their own students and workers. The examples of Chile and Québec show not only that mass movements can quickly arise, but also that direct action can get results. Students can win and even reverse the neoliberal endeavor to commodify higher education.

We have heard from comrades in South Africa that the university management of Wits has done the same. They have raised their own salaries while black working class students have been forced to sleep in the library. In a country moulded by the legacies of colonialism and white supremacy and that suffers from some of the highest levels of inequality in the world, this is a scandal. We support your struggle and believe that your battle placing at the forefront values of solidarity, equality and social justice is key to the transformation not simply of higher education, but of the country as a whole.

Yours in solidarity,
GSOC-UAW Local 2110

Aluta Continua.