

November 2, 1936

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THE MEMBERS OF THE  
COMMUNIST PARTY AND YOUNG COMMUNIST LEAGUE  
AT THE CITY COLLEGE  
WISH TO PRESENT

A SUGGESTED PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

for the ceremonies on the occasion of American Education Week

MEMBERS OF THE FACULTY, PARENTS AND GUESTS, STUDENTS OF THE COLLEGE:

We are assembled to celebrate American Education Week, an occasion most suitable for the presentation of our work at the College to the public at large. Far be it from us, however, to use the testimonies and exhibits of past and present achievements to lull ourselves and others into a fatal complacency; rather be it our aim to face boldly and candidly those problems upon whose solution our continued progress depends. In every case we are faced not so much with a discussion or clarification of educational objectives, of programs and curricula, but with the problem of resisting the degradation of education itself by the attacks of the same predatory forces responsible for mass unemployment, mass misery, and the dangers of war and fascism. I am frank to say that our own College and the ideals for which it stands are being throttled by strings operated in Wall Street.

Our required percentage for admission (80%) is the dictation of financiers, not educators. The discrimination against women at our 23rd Street Center by admitting them on a numerical proportion basis is financial not educational policy. The totally inadequate library facilities, the deplorable lunchroom and cafeteria services, the wretched sanitation conditions prevailing at the College—all these follow from devotion to Mammon, not Minerva.

Yet these are only lesser indications of the manner in which we at the College are made to bear the burden of the economic crisis. Our teachers have suffered wage cuts, despite the fact that the mass of them are miserably underpaid and kept from advancement by a set of technicalities designed more with a view to keeping the payroll down than rewarding good teachers. City College has the unenviable record of having been run at the lowest per capita cost in the world; yet people worried and distraught about their jobs and the conditions of work cannot be expected freely to develop their talents as teachers and scholars.

Our students, inspired with an exceptional devotion to learning and truth, fearlessly active in every just and progressive cause,—our students are compelled for the most part to give a large portion of their time to outside jobs as a means of subsistence. The Federal NYA appropriations have been highly insufficient, both in the number taken care of and the amount paid.

Finally, our teachers and students suffer greatly from overcrowded classrooms: overburdened teachers and undertaught students. We need more room; and properly to take care of all who want higher education (without imposing purely eliminatory rather than selective entrance requirements), we would need several more buildings.

With things at such a pass the spokesmen of wealthy interests in this City come forward with the **proposal of a \$75 tuition fee** in addition to those intolerable and unnecessary fees which our impoverished students already bear! Such proposals, making wealth the basis of "equal" educational opportunity, attack the true foundations of American democracy. And indeed is it not clear why, the status of teachers and students being as described, both groups are fitted into a hierarchic and undemocratic academic system? The greater majority of teachers have no voice in College administration, and students find themselves the more free to speak the less important the issue.

The most encouraging signs in the recent past have been the constant growth of organized movements among students and staff designed to struggle against educational retrenchment, for genuine academic freedom, against fascism and war. It is in this direction that true progress lies: who so blind as to believe that the fate of our College is not bound up with the issue of these struggles, who so untrue to himself and his ideals as to fail to participate? As the progressive forces in this country and throughout the world move forward unitedly to combat reaction, it becomes the duty of every honest and conscientious educator, of every student, of every intellectual to join in an organized way, for the advancement of their common cause. On this occasion, I can conceive of no higher duty for myself than to summon you to this end.