



CONTINUE THE FIGHT —

BUILD THE STUDENT UNION!

LONG LIVE THE
GRANDEIS
STUDENT
MOVEMENT

THE STUDENT UNION SUMS UP THE STRUGGLE OF 1974-75

In May 1975, the Brandeis Student Union was formed at a meeting attended by more than 400 undergraduate students. The general aim of the Brandeis Student Union is to be a defense organization for the students' rights. These include the right of all people to an education, the right of students to organize, and the right to have a role in budgetary and other University decisions.

This pamphlet has been written by the Union to sum up last year's struggle and explain the importance of building the Union. It is a call to all students to continue in struggle by joining in the building of the Union.

The struggle at Brandeis is not an isolated one but rather part of an international crisis, the burden of which is placed mainly on people of working class origins. As the present economic crisis worsens, prices climb, more and more workers are laid off and fired, and the living standards of middle and lower class Americans suffer.

The students of this country also form part of the same trends. As the economic crisis penetrates educational institutions, massive budget cuts are announced. Tuition rises, teachers and staff are laid off, and educational programs are cut. These economic attacks hit all students; students of working class and Third World origin are hit the hardest. But just as workers have united to protect their interests, students have also begun to build a new student movement to fight back on the economic front.

What is the actual context in which the student struggle has developed? In the fall of 1974, Brandeis had a total non-foreign undergraduate enrollment of 2612 students, of whom 981 or 37.6% were on financial aid; of the total, there were 218 minority students at the school, or 8.3%. The very fact that there are this many students from working class or Third World origin is a result of the people's mass movements over the last decade in the country in general, and the university in particular. But there has been a retrenchment over the last several years, and at the moment amounts to a major attack on the democratic right of education. Budgetary trends over the last three years show that student share of university costs here at Brandeis has gone up from 44% to 48%. It is clear that when this trend is coupled with the decline in real wages in the country over the last several years, the cost of education becomes a greater burden than most working people can bear. It is in this context that the student struggle should be understood, for otherwise it will be hard to figure out why so many students rose up in such a massive protest as to shatter the otherwise calm exterior of Brandeis.

STUDENTS INITIATE NEW TRENDS OF UNITY AGAINST RACISM, CUTS

The struggle had its beginnings in September 1974. The Dean of Admissions at Brandeis was quoted in the September 24, issue of *The Justice* as saying that he believed there was a "correlation between wealth and what we define as intelligence"--and that this "correlation" warranted a shift in financial aid and admissions policy. This attitude provided the ideological basis for the massive budget cuts that were announced later that semester by the administration. The Brandeis Third World Coalition consisting of the Afro-American, Latino, and Asian-American organizations on campus demanded the Dean's resignation. In a letter to *The Justice* on October 1, the Coalition stated that the Dean's statement contained "racist connotations, promotes racial and ethnic polarization, and increases social antagonism." The letter went on to say: "We feel that the administration has regressed in their commitment to preserve cultural pluralism at Brandeis, because the majority of students affected by these anticipated cut-backs would be those of the Third World." It is unfortunate that very few white students

spoke out in opposition to a racist statement by a high university official and to the shifts in policy that the statement indicated.

In early December, university president Marver Bernstein announced that due to financial exigencies there would have to be cuts in every department, including the termination of 26 faculty teaching contracts, 15 of whom were being dismissed over the recommendation of their departments. Included in the dismissals was Clinton Jean of Sociology, the only Black instructor outside of the African and Afro-American Studies Department. The Student Senate sponsored a convocation at which President Bernstein endeavored to explain the cutbacks. Instead he was faced by a large number of angry students, protesting both the nature of the cuts and the fact that students were allowed no input into the decision making process. Two days later, an organization called the Thursday Group was formed at a mass meeting of a hundred students. The Group had the immediate goal of obtaining information from the administration that would enable the students to intelligently evaluate the new policies. Much of this information had been promised by Bernstein at the convocation. Sixty members of the Group marched to his office the next day to request the information but were refused any information. The semester ended in a few days with frustration, but with the beginnings of awareness about the conflicting interests between the administration and the students.

During the winter break, students were notified of the decision of the Board of Trustees that room/board and tuition costs would rise \$650.00 for 1975-76, with a corresponding increase of grant aid to financial aid students of only \$325.00 (50% of the total increase).

At the same time as this massive increase was announced, Dean of the College, Marguerite Robinson put together the "Student Task Force on Budgetary Reform", a token effort by the administration to feign student participation in the budgetary decision making process. The Task Force was powerless since the major decisions had already been made by the Board of Trustees and the administration. The Task Force's only function was to recommend which areas could be even further cut.

STUDENT GROUPS UNITE IN COALITION TO FIGHT CUT-BACKS

In February 1975, the beginning of second semester, the Third World Coalition appealed to all student organizations to join together in a Campus Student Coalition to fight against the budget cuts. Steering Committee positions on the Coalition were offered to representatives of the Afro-American Student Organization; Grito, the Latino students association, the Brandeis Asian-American Students Association, the Women's Coalition; the United Farmworker Union Support Committee; the Waltham Group; the Student Senate; the Brandeis Chapter of Mass. PIRG (Public Interest Research Group), and Brandeis Hillel.

All but three of these organizations accepted the invitation. Many members of Mass PIRG supported the Coalition, but felt that they could not formally join for technical organizational reasons. Brandeis Hillel decided against joining by a close vote, but many of its members participated actively in the Coalition's work. The Student Senate refused to join, taking the position that it was the representative student body and a new organization was superfluous. The Coalition felt that the Senate had done nothing to oppose the budget cuts and that a new mass-based organization was needed to defend student interests. In fact, the Senate had more aggressively pushed the Administration's line, and was going to put itself squarely in opposition to the new trends developing among the students.

The Campus Student Coalition, which operated through mass, democratic meetings, adopted three demands of equal priority:

1. 100% compensation in grant to all financial aid students for the \$650 increase in university costs.
2. A roll back of all academic cuts, including the rehiring of all dismissed faculty that had been recommended by their departments. This demand also included the maintenance of the budget of the Transitional Year Program (TYP) at existing level. (This was a program started in 1969 as a compensatory program for students whose high school background did not adequately prepare them for college. It had started with a budget of \$200,000, which had been reduced to \$82,000 by 1974-75. The Administration proposed to cut that down to \$35,000 for 1975-76, which would have destroyed the viability of the program.)
3. There should be no campus workers fired or laid off to meet the above demands. (This demand was adopted because students involved in the Coalition felt that the students' demands should not be granted at the expense of another vital segment of the university--the support staff workers.)

The activity of the CSC was focused toward the March 13, Board of Trustees meeting when the budget would be finalized. During the two weeks preceding that date, the Coalition held a series of meetings, each attended by 300 people, at which the demands were worked out and strategy was planned. The Steering Committee met with Bernstein and other administrators several times to explain the demands. The Coalition also organized pickets, rallies and marches to demonstrate the seriousness of the demands and the support for them among the students. The CSC also held a referendum to determine the extent of student support: with a thousand students voting (more than in Student Senate elections), the CSC's demands were supported by 75%.

At the March 13, Board of Trustees meeting, several hundred students demonstrated outside while representatives of the CSC appeared before the Board and explained the position of the students. The CSC wanted the university to keep the commitments it had made to its students and the larger community. However, the Board decided to accept Bernstein's recommendations and approved the budget, thus rejecting all the demands to the students.

That evening the CSC held a mass meeting to discuss the Board's rejection. At the meeting, two tactical lines emerged; one was that of continuing to press for the demands through persuasion, while the other suggested that only active confrontation could reverse the Board's decision. There was considerable confusion, and the meeting ended with no definite direction. During the next month the CSC continued to seek support toward a new direction. As a means of checking student support, there was a call to boycott Kutz cafeteria for lunch one day; 55% of the students supported the boycott.

During this time, a group of rank-and-file Coalition members formed the Progressive Students' Caucus. The Caucus was organized to assist in building the Coalition on a forceful basis, that would reject the myth of the "benevolence" of the Board of Trustees. Towards that end, the Caucus carried out an investigation into the financial and corporate connections of the Trustees. They issued a leaflet urging students to "unite in support of the just demands of the CSC". Calling on students to "fight pessimism" and build a "new, strong unity", the leaflet detailed how the university yields a profit to those who control it, and how it would be naive to expect that they could be persuaded by gentle means.

Through these months, the CSC had tried to explore contacts with students on other campuses who were struggling on the same front. In late April, students at Brown University in Providence struck classes for a week and then occupied their administration building. The CSC called for solidarity with students at Brown, and in that spirit, picketed Usdan Student Center while a delegation of CSC members went to Providence with statements of support. The occupation ended in two days with a major victory for the students there.

STUDENTS OCCUPY PEARLMAN!

The victorious action at Brown served as a spark for students at Brandeis, who felt that the conditions were right to escalate the struggle here. As leaflets circulated around campus saying: *BROWN WON; WE CAN TOO!*, a multi-racial, multi-national group of 31 rank-and-file CSC members, calling itself the Student Action Group, occupied Pearlman Hall, the Sociology building! April 29th thus marked a new, militant stage of the struggle! The S.A.G. issued a list of eight demands, similar to the demands of the CSC, but also including a demand that Asian Americans be recognized as a minority by the university. The occupation went on for six days; the students defied threats and an injunction until negotiations were carried out in good faith by the administration.

During this period, students in and out of the building organized themselves in a very disciplined manner. Inside Pearlman, there was a constant series of meetings, where the struggle was reviewed in both short and long term perspective. There was regular communication with the outside support. On the outside, there was a massive mobilization of forces: a constant picketline of up to 500 people; a regular and disciplined security force working around the clock; an organized supply line with the inside, and constant political work on the campus, including a series of teach-ins. The first night there was a celebration and teach-in on the victory of the Vietnamese people which took place the same day. On May 1st, May Day, a teach-in was held to clarify the struggle and to report on the negotiations. And finally, on May 4th, a memorial rally was organized to commemorate the Kent State Massacre five years earlier. All these events put the Brandeis movement in its larger, historical context, and kept the support and enthusiasm at a high level.

Throughout the occupation, letters and messages of support began to pour in. Statements of support were sent from struggling students at many colleges and universities across the country, such as Brown, Harvard, UMass, Boston College, CCNY, CUNY, Columbia and Wayne State, etc., as well as from prominent personalities such as State Representatives Julian Bond of Georgia and Elaine Noble of Massachusetts. Clearly, the just character of the students' struggle was being widely recognized, especially by masses of other students. Students at several other schools were simultaneously involved in similar actions, too.

Finally, after being forced by the tremendous mass support for the Pearlman occupation, the administration and the S.A.G. came to an agreement, which was a very significant victory for the students. The TYP budget would be increased to \$62,000, which would keep it as a viable program; the money would not come through layoffs or firings; Bernstein agreed to urge the responsible faculty committee to recognize the Asians as a minority; he agreed to reverse the trend of decreasing grant-to-cost ratio for students on financial aid from 1976-77 onwards; minority student recruiters would be hired to more effectively recruit minority students. In addition, by this time, 9 of the 15 instructors had already been rehired. The original demands may not have been met in full, but these are indeed tangible concessions that have been wrung from the administration. This victory, therefore, has to be judged in its proper historical

context, as part of a struggle that has just begun.

But beyond the economic results of the struggle, two other victories were won: over the course of the struggle, the beginnings of strong, multi-national unity were forged; and second, students recognized the need for a *permanent defense organization* to defend themselves. The agreement reached provides a concrete thing to unite students around: without continuous student vigilance, the victory of 1975 can turn sour. To defend our interests in the future as well, we need a permanent mass organization that stands up to fight for the students. And that is exactly what the Student Union is!

In mid-May, the newly formed Union adopted the following Statement of Purpose. While work is presently going on to determine the organizational, strategic and tactical positions for present and future work, this Statement of Purpose best sums up what the Union is:

"The experience of past student struggles points to the necessity of organizing students on a continuous basis to defend their interests. For this reason, the Student Union is being formed to be the permanent defense organization of students at Brandeis."

The Student Union will endeavor to defend student interests on a continuous basis through negotiated agreements with administration, faculty or any other sectors. The Union will fight for student rights and interests and ensure that adequate agreements are reached and implemented. It will carry out research and educational programs. The Union considers higher education to be a basic democratic right.

It will be run on a democratic, rank-and-file basis and will ensure the fullest conscious participation of all members.

The Union will take the initiative in organizing a national defense organization of students beginning with an appropriate regional unit."

The Brandeis Student Union is still in its formative stages. We plan to hold a Founding Constitutional Convention sometime early this Fall. You are urged to give the Union life and to make it effective!

LA LUCHA CONTINUA —

CONSTRUYÁN LA UNION ESTUDIANTEL !