

P.O. Box 471 Cooper Station  
New York, N.Y. 10003  
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TO ALL ORGANIZERS

Dear Comrades,

Enclosed is a report on a conference organized  
to protest the Bakke decision in California.

Comradely,

*Mike Zárate*

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YSA National Office

## REPORT ON BAKKE CONFERENCE

On January 15, more than 400 students gathered at the University of California, Berkeley campus for a statewide conference sponsored by the Bay Area Coalition Against the Bakke Decision. The conference, which was organized to defend preferential admissions for Black, Chicano, Asian, and other minority students in the UC system, called for February 25 as a target date for regionally coordinated protest actions to demand, "Reverse the Bakke Decision! Extend and Defend Minority Admissions!"

The conference was built two weeks prior to January 15, and had it not been for the fact that many campuses were still closed for winter vacations, it could have been larger. The 400 students who did attend reflect the bitter opposition many students in California feel to threatened attacks on preferential admissions. The conference size points to the potential of building a very broad and large campaign against these attacks.

### Background

This particular fight stems from the court decision in the case of Allen Bakke, a white male engineer, who, after being denied admission into the University of California Davis Medical School, charged that he was discriminated against because he was white. Bakke sued the UC, stating that minority students "less qualified" than he, were admitted to the Davis medical school through special admissions, and therefore, preferential admissions through special admissions is "racism in reverse."

On September 16, the California State Supreme Court ruled in favor of Allen Bakke, and special admissions were declared "unconstitutional."

Response to the Bakke decision was immediate. Articles and editorials appeared in campus press, in particular Chicano press such as La Gente in Los Angeles, Chispas in Berkeley, and Voz Fronteriza in San Diego. A few student governments such as the Cal State Los Angeles student government passed resolutions condemning the decision. Along with student organizations, local chapters of national organizations -- such as the NAACP, the Coalition of Labor Union Women, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, and the National Conference of Black Lawyers -- passed similar resolutions and condemned the decision as a racist attack on the right of Black, Chicano, Asian, and other minority students to an equal education.

Black, Chicano, and Asian law students at UC, Berkeley put out a joint statement that read, "It must be remembered that the Bakke decision is not a legal decision, rather it is a political decision....It could be extended to school desegregation cases, housing, and any number of areas where preferential treatment has been given to minorities to remedy the effects of a racist society."

The Bakke decision has received national news coverage as well. The New York Times ran articles on the case last fall, and the case was also covered on national television. Dissenting Justice Thurgood Marshall has made statements to the press that have been picked up in cities across the country.

#### Breadth of protest

The Bakke decision is viewed by the rulers of this country as a national test case for a drastic reduction in the number of Black, Chicano, and other minority students who attend college across the country. The explosive character of this issue can be seen by the number of prominent individuals who have already spoken out against it. At the January 15 conference, speakers included Rodolfo Acuna, a well-known Chicano historian and activist; Lehman Brightman of the United Native Americans; and Carol DeBerry, president of the East Bay Coalition of Labor Union Women. Endorsers of the conference included Robert Chrisman, publisher of Black Scholar magazine; James Bell of the Hastings Black Law Students Association; and noted Black sociologist, Harry Edwards of UC, Berkeley.

In their January 22 issue, Black Panther gave favorable coverage to the conference and encouraged Blacks and other minority students to participate in the February 25 regional actions to protest the Bakke decision. James Bell was quoted by Black Panther as saying, "This decision is just the beginning....The rug's about to be yanked out from under us all."

Of the 400 students who attended the January 15 conference, approximately 250 were Chicano, 50 Asian, 40 Black, and 60 white. Women made up 40 percent of the conference. Chicano, Black, Asian, and feminist organizations were also represented.

Chicano leadership and organization has been a significant factor throughout this fight. It was Chicano students who put out the initial call for January 15, and at the conference itself, there was a high percentage of Chicanos. However, to defeat the Bakke decision it will take the united effort of all California students. The battle to defend preferential admissions will not be won by Chicano students alone. Many students, especially Blacks, Asians, and women, are equally outraged by the continued attacks on preferential admissions, and are looking for allies and want to fight back.

In Los Angeles, for example, SCAR ran into a Black student from an organization called Black Communications Network. He wanted to know how his organization could

help out in the fight to reverse the Bakke decision. The Black Panther articles will also draw more Black students into the fight. We will want to do everything possible to involve all students who are ready to struggle.

The turnout by white students at the conference is also important, and illustrates the potential to win the majority of students to a fighting perspective.

### Opponents

In addition to the large number of independent activists that attended the conference, a number of opponent groups made their presence known. The most prominent were CASA (Center for Autonomous and Social Action), Revolutionary Student Brigade, Spartacist League, and the August Twenty-ninth Movement (ATM --- a Chicano Maoist grouping). The Communist party also attended, but did not openly participate.

The fact that these organizations attended reflects the growing momentum around this issue. As with all struggles the YSA is involved in, the YSA is willing to work with any organizations or individuals with whom we can arrive at a common program for activity.

Participation of many independent activists in the conference made it difficult for our opponents to red-bait the conference, although some serious attempts were made. The most important was carried out by the August Twenty-ninth Movement (ATM). ATM is a small sectarian Chicano Maoist group that has members in California, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah.

In the week leading up to January 15, ATM members organized a meeting of about thirty people -- largely themselves and a few independent activists. Their meeting called for a separate conference, counterposed to the January 15 conference call. However, the ATM soon realized that the broad endorsement received by the January 15 conference made it unrealistic to compete with. They dropped their conference call and mobilized about thirty people to intervene in January 15.

Their intervention at the conference consisted of raising a series of demands very similar to those proposed by the Bay Area Coalition Against the Bakke Decision, but in a much more general form. The conference voted to incorporate their demands into its list of slogans.

The Communist party and CASA had a little different approach to the conference. Beyond mobilizing some of their members, they did little to build the conference. CASA, however, did speak at a few campus rallies that

were held in the Los Angeles area, and ran articles in their newspaper, Sin Fronteras. CASA's major charge in their red-baiting campaign at the conference was that the conference was scheduled to be a state-wide MEChA meeting and that all Chicanos needed to leave the conference to "caucus" and discuss out Chicano participation into the whole thing. They marched out of the conference, taking about fifteen students with them.

Rodolfo Acuna, one of the featured speakers at the conference and who was responsible for bringing a large number of Chicanos from Northridge with him to the conference, had been absent at the time of the walk-out. In the general confusion created by the walk-out, Acuna declared his support for it because he felt that Chicano students have the right to organize their intervention into such a conference.

This so-called caucus met throughout the entire conference and the thirty or so people who attended missed the rest of the conference activities -- although some Chicanos went back and forth from caucus to the conference.

The major function of the "caucus" was to red-bait the conference and attack the YSA and SWP. Rodolfo Acuna took the floor a few times and defended the YSA. He explained that the YSA had been one of the major builders of the conference as well as leaders of the whole fight against the Bakke decision. The caucus organizers retaliated by refusing to recognize Acuna in the discussion.

Five Chicano YSA members who attended the caucus explained the role of red-baiting, its negative effect, and pointed to the need to build a broad coalition of students. Their comments were well-received by independent activists attending.

The caucus was an example of some of the problems we can expect to face in the future as the fight against the Bakke decision continues. It will be necessary to continue to educate on the negative role red-baiting and exclusion tactics play. YSA members will have to educate other students on how best to build the broadest and biggest campaign possible -- a campaign that is definitely needed to defeat the Bakke decision.

A very minimal role was played by the Revolutionary Student Brigade at the conference. They limited themselves to handing out leaflets and spoke maybe twice. However, a significant change in the RSB's position on affirmative action was noted. In the past the RSB had opposed affirmative action, claiming that it was divisive and played off poor whites against Black and Chicano students and workers. At the conference, the RSB voted for proposals

to defend preferential admissions and to defend affirmative action.

Building February 25

All in all, the participation of seventy-three YSA and SWP members was very positive. We were clearly seen as serious activists and equipped and capable organizers by many students.

In the period to come, collaboration between the YSA and SWP will be key. Regular party-YSA consultation should occur in the thinking out of our work. SWP members may know individuals or organizations who will be willing to endorse or help build February 25 actions -- trade union comrades, women's liberation activists,

It will also be important to send regular reports to the national office on our work in building the February 25 actions. This will be valuable in coordinating our efforts nationally.