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DAILY NEWS

New York's Hometown Newspaper

Friday, March 24, 1995

STUDENT PROTEST
TURNS VIOLENT

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IUSANWA1TS protest at City Hall yesterday over proposed budget cuts. POLICE hold off demonstrators with barricades, clubs and tear gas.

Gov. Pataki put the blame for yesterday's explosive demonstration at City Hall squarely on CUNY and SUNY officials for "waging a campaign of fear mongering and distortion."

"Professors have canceled classes so students could participate in protest rallies," Pataki said. "Administrators have used their taxpayer-funded resources to engage in partisan politics during working hours. "It is an outrage to observe such unprofessional and partisan political behavior by professors and administrators who should know better," he said.

Mayor Giuliani also ripped professors. "To me it is somewhat surprising that I would see teachers and professors leading the demonstration when these students should have been in class," he said last night. CUNY officials vigorously denied encouraging the protest, where 60 were arrested and 48 were issued summonses. "We did not endorse or encourage this. The college presidents did not endorse or encourage this," said Jay Hershenson, a CUNY spokesman. "This is not the method of communication we like to work with."

Hershenson acknowledged that CUNY officials knew of the rally and learned through the Internet that acts of civil disobedience were being planned as early as three weeks ago. "We reached out to [Police Commissioner William] Bratton's office," said Hershenson. "That's why there were so many police down there, because they knew."

But he said it was not CUNY's role to forbid students and professors from participating. "This is an academic community," Hershenson said. "This is not Philip Morris."

SUNY officials could not be immediately reached for comment. During the budget-cut rally, professors and students walked side by side, chanting
Cops in riot gear clashed with pockets of the more than 8,000 angry high school and college students who descended on City Hall yesterday to protest budget cuts.

The demonstration began peacefully with chants and speeches — but quickly deteriorated when some in the crowd tried to march to Wall St. Cops sprayed protesters with mace and clubbed them with nightsticks after an officer was knocked unconscious.

At least 45 were arrested. Five more — and 11 officers — were hospitalized with cuts and bruises. Mayor Giuliani said the police had exercised restraint.

"There were more police officers in the hospital than students," he said. "I'm very proud of them.

Earlier, he had accused students of overreacting to budget cuts that would raise $2.450 tuition costs by $1,000 at four-year public colleges. The cuts are "not an unreasonable thing to suggest," said Giuliani, adding that — compared with private college tuition — CUNY students "still are obtaining an education for free."

He and Gov. Pataki expressed outrage at professors who canceled classes and encouraged students to protest. The students, Giuliani said, "are supposed to be in class today, and they're not — and they're not paying for their own education, someone else is."

He also chided students for misspelled protest signs. "Maybe they should study harder," he said.

Thousands of protesters poured into lower Manhattan, many coming by foot over the Brooklyn Bridge.

They came from community colleges and public schools — students, teachers and parents arguing that the city's education system cannot survive the 25% cuts proposed by Giuliani and Pataki.

"Everyone in Albany said they were well-spoken, a delight, so articulate. Everyone was very impressed by CUNY students," Reynolds told student reporters. "I urge them to keep it up. The letter campaign is working.

"This university is really at a pivotal point in its future," she said. "We have to keep this up for two more weeks, so we all have to get our second wind."

Pataki said he hoped CUNY and SUNY leaders would "forgo the type of behavior that poisons the climate for an honest debate."

With Doreen Bousens

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