

Police crack down on California student protests

California governor denounces “terrorism”

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California police, with the support of university administrators, are engaged in a major crackdown of student protests against budget cuts, tuition increases and the attack on public education.

On Saturday night, police arrested eight students who were among about 75 involved in a protest at University of California Berkeley Chancellor Robert Bergenu's home on campus. In an ominous attempt to intimidate students involved in protests, and in a sign of the measures the state is preparing to take against those opposed to budget cuts, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger denounced the students for engaging in “a type of terrorism.”

The action followed the arrest of 66 students in the early morning hours on Friday. Police stormed into Wheeler Hall at the UC Berkeley campus, where the students were engaged in a week-long occupation. This followed by one day the arrest of 25 students at San Francisco State University, who were also engaged in an occupation to protest budget cuts.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that as many as 75 people surrounded Bergenu's mansion, known as University House, Friday night. The protesters were alleged to have broken windows and thrown torches at police and Bergenu's residence, and to have overturned planters and scattered garbage brought from nearby student housing. Eight people, including two UC Berkeley students and two UC Davis students, were reportedly taken into custody.

The *Daily Californian* online reported Saturday that “all are charged with rioting, threatening an education official, attempted burglary, attempted arson of an occupied building, felony vandalism and assault with a deadly weapon on a police officer. The eight were all issued exclusion orders which bar them from returning to

campus, police said.”

No one was injured in the incident, but the police and university officials responded with hysterical denunciations. “These are criminals, not activists,” Bergenu declared. “The attack at our home was extraordinarily frightening and violent. My wife and I genuinely feared for our lives.”

The eight students remained in custody Saturday with a bail set at \$132,500 and are expected to appear in court Monday or Tuesday. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger immediately weighed in by declaring, “California will not tolerate any type of terrorism against any leaders, including educators. The attack on Chancellor Bergenu's home is a criminal act and those who participated will be prosecuted under the fullest extent of the law.”

As always, it is impossible to rule out the role of police provocateurs. It was when police attempted to break up the demonstration that it turned to vandalism. According to eyewitnesses, many of those detained by police were bystanders who were swept up by the police in the confusion. Jobert Poblete, a UC alumnus, was at the march on the chancellor's house but decided to leave when “things were getting out of hand,” he told *Liveweek.net*.

Police then took into custody James Carwil, 34, a visiting PhD student from the City University of New York. “Carwil hadn't been doing anything at the time. Now he's in jail on his birthday, and they just raised his bail from \$50,000 to \$132,000. There's no way we can raise that much money. This is a travesty,” said Poblete.

Callie Maidhof, a student organizer, told *Liveweek.net*, “Regardless of what one thinks about the events of last night, the minor vandalism that occurred cannot be viewed outside the context of the physical violence inflicted by police on student activists and the broader

assault on public education.”

The demonstration Saturday night began as a concert to denounce the arrests of the students the previous morning. Police monitored the concert closely, and followed the students as they marched in demonstration to Bergenau’s house.

The arrests Friday came at the end of an “Open University” occupation at Wheeler Hall, a major classroom building on campus. The students were protesting budget cuts, a 32 percent fee increase, and the reduction to student space and services.

Students had been occupying the building for a week, and were planning on leaving Saturday morning, before final exams began. The administration claimed they decided to make the arrests after they heard of plans for a free music concert on Friday evening. However, the arrests have the air of a deliberate provocation.

Bail was originally set at \$25,000 for some of those arrested, according to a blog on the Facebook page of Transform Public Education, the group organizing the occupation. That bail requirement has since been dropped, and everyone without outstanding warrants or “other criminal issues” was cited and released. Some were not eligible for release due to previous arrests, including one individual who was on federal probation.

“People were not given a final warning—police burst in while people were sleeping and immediately started locking doors and arresting people. Many students have papers due today, and finals to take starting tomorrow,” said Elias Martinez, an undergraduate.

Roey Kruvi, a third year geography student at UC Berkeley, reported that he was sleeping in the hall when he was arrested. He told the *San Francisco Bay Guardian* that he was put in zip-tie handcuffs and taken down to the basement of the hall where he and the other protestors were kept for two hours without any of their possessions.

“We were not allowed to speak to lawyers, we had all our stuff taken from us, and we were kept unaware of what was going to happen to us,” he said. “It was a freezing cold room where we were kept and some students had no shoes on. One boy did not even have pants on—he was left in boxers and a T-shirt in the cold all day.”

The arrests at UC Berkeley followed by one day the arrest of 25 students at San Francisco State University, after a group barricaded themselves into the business administration building. The occupation began on Wednesday morning, and at one point involved as many as 300 students.

The students’ demands included an end to the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Gaza; free education at every level; the return of Wall Street bailout money; and debt forgiveness for student loans.

Campus police, in full riot gear, with the support of the San Francisco police, broke into the barricaded building, smashing windows in the process, to forcibly remove the students inside around 3:15 a.m. on Thursday.

Police arrested 12 students who were inside and charged them with trespassing, and 11 more were arrested outside the building for unlawful assembly and resisting arrest. Two other students who were blocking traffic in protest were also arrested.

The police crackdown on students this past week follows a similar wave of arrests and police intimidation during protests staged last month. At least two students at UC Los Angeles were tasered, and dozens were arrested at UCLA and UC Davis.

The protests by students reflect the growing popular opposition to the budget cutting in California, which is being carried out with the full support of the Obama administration and both political parties in the state. Crippling cuts in education will force many working class students out of school, while budget cuts at the K-12 level will lead to the elimination of programs, layoffs and cuts in teacher pay.

As opposition grows, the response of the state will be ever more open forms of repression. With a new round of budget cuts planned for this coming year, the statements by Schwarzenegger and university administrators should be seen as a direct threat against all those who oppose the demands of the corporate and financial elite.

The *World Socialist Web Site* condemns the arrests of these students and demands their immediate release.



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