University of California prepares huge tuition hikes

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The Board of Regents for the University of California (UC) has proposed to raise tuition by up to 16 percent a year over the next four years. The increases would bring tuition to $22,000 for the 2015-2016 school year. Adding campus fees, room and board, and books and supplies brings the total cost of a four-year bachelor's degree program to a staggering $160,000.

UC President Mark Yudof claims the extreme increases are needed to meet the projected $2.5 billion shortfall in the current UC budget. The alternatives, according to Yudof, are increasing the number of higher paying out-of-state students—decreasing the enrollment of California students—or eliminating classes. Although several regents loudly opposed raising tuition, they offered no serious counterproposals.

One regent, Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom, suggested a new tax dedicated to the state colleges and universities, but his regressive proposal is little more than demagoguery given the opposition of the financial oligarchy to any significant increase in social spending.

Since coming to office, Democratic Governor Jerry Brown has approved a budget that may cut almost $3 billion from education. An earlier plan to raise taxes primarily targeting the state's poor was scrapped due to lack of support.

While Democrats control both houses of the state legislature, not a single politician has proposed raising taxes on the wealthy to preserve social funding. Currently only 11 percent of UC's $22 billion budget is paid for by the state of California.

Richard Blum, a UC regent and the multimillionaire spouse of Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein, has called for a turn toward outright privatization. "I've been watching this for 10 years, it has essentially been a waste of our time to beat on governors and legislators," Blum told reporters on Friday. "Where is the money? It's in the private sector, with corporations and with wealthy individuals."

At the same time that programs are cut and tuition soars, the Board of Regents has approved several bonuses to already highly compensated administrators. The largest of these, $744,950, was given to UC chief investment officer Marie Berggren, bringing her total annual compensation to $1.2 million. The bonus was required by her contract due to a better than expected performance of the UC's $70 billion endowment.

Similarly, on Thursday the board approved a $259,000 raise for UC Davis Medical Center CEO Ann Madden Rice, bringing her base pay to $960,000 a year. Using the same justification as the bailed-out banks to defend exorbitant CEO pay, the Board of Regents claims these huge paychecks are needed to stay competitive and retain "talent."

Significantly, most of the highest paid UC employees head programs such as sports or medical centers, which generate large amounts of money. Blum's push for corporate intervention would only accelerate the current trend of cutting programs that do not make money and concentrating wealth on the programs that do.

Financial aid programs like the Pell Grant are facing cuts of their own, deepening the crises for students from lower and middle-income families. Under these circumstances, young people will be forced to either quit college, or take out gargantuan loans.

These debts burden working class families for decades. Already by June of last year, student loans exceeded credit card debt in the US for the first time.

Unlike credit card debt, student loans cannot be discharged in bankruptcy and there is no statute of limitations for repayment. As tuition rises and the job market remains stagnant, far more students will find

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themselves in cycle of debt they cannot escape. In 2009 the percentage of people who defaulted on their student loans within two years of entering repayment rose from 7 percent to 8.8 percent.

There is no longer any significant section of the bourgeoisie that views public education as crucial to society. In bourgeois politics the only important question now is whether students will be employable.

Indicative of this is the *Los Angeles Times*' coverage of State Senate Bill 547, which would loosen high school standards for producing college-ready graduates. A recent editorial, for example, states, "not all students are interested in attending college, and not all of them should." Rather, what is needed is an education system that primarily trains students to "qualify for a satisfying and well-paid job." Nowhere is it suggested that education is important to a person's quality of life or the social fabric of society.

Students and their families must reject the position that they must either become indentured servants or beg from the rich—or perhaps do both—to get a basic education. Free, quality education from pre-school through university is a fundamental social right, which must be fought for on the basis of an independent socialist perspective.

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