

# Students protest tuition hikes and police violence at UC Davis

Our reporters

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Several hundred students at the University of California, Davis participated in protests on Monday in opposition to tuition increases and the pepper spraying of peaceful protesters earlier this month.

Students on campus have set up an Occupy encampment to protest social inequality and spiraling tuition, including plans by the UC Regents to increase fees by as much as 81 percent over four years. The average annual tuition is already \$13,181, twice what it was five years ago. Many working-class students are simply being priced out of a quality college education.

The attack on public education is now being overseen by Democratic Governor Jerry Brown, who, together with the state legislature, has overseen a new round of punishing austerity measures in the most recent budget.

On Monday, the UC Regents met to discuss plans for further tuition hikes. In an effort to avoid protests, the meeting was held at four different locations, coordinated by teleconference. At the last minute, the principal regents members due to attend the component in Davis did not arrive, citing supposed security concerns.

In a move that was carefully coordinated with the United Auto Workers, which has unionized graduate students in the UC system, the meeting at Davis was transformed into a question-and-answer session involving the “student regent,” Alfredo Mireles, Jr., the sole student representative on the board.

The UAW, a strong supporter of the Democratic Party, no doubt engaged in discussions behind the scenes with administrators over the best way to proceed. The aim was to divert student anger into a format where it could be suppressed or ignored.

Student protests were also organized at the other locations—San Francisco, Merced and Los Angeles—temporarily disrupting the meeting. In the end,

however, the regents unanimously passed a \$2.8 billion budget plan that, absent additional state finding that will almost certainly not be forthcoming, will lead to drastic tuition hikes.

According to students who attended the meeting in Davis, security measures were set up that mimicked the type of restrictions now common at airports, including metal detectors and bag searches. This is despite the fact that the only violence that has been deployed has come from the police and the university administration. One person who sought to attend the meeting was turned away for having a water bottle.

A march was organized in the afternoon at Davis, involving several hundred students. The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to several of those participating. Supporters of the ISSE distributed a statement calling for a break with the Democratic Party and the building of an independent working-class movement to oppose tuition increases and defend democratic rights.

Bryan, an undergraduate, said he was participating in the demonstration because he was “angry about capitalism.” The tuition increases being imposed on students, he said, “are about the privatization of our universities and our universities’ focus on just trying to get grants and not focusing on the lectures or the development of students. They are limiting access to the wider class strata.”

He added that the resignation of UC Chancellor Linda Katehi, who ordered the police action against students, was not the end goal, but was “one step up the chain of command.”

Nathan, a student from UC San Diego, said he had come up to support the UC Davis students. “All my friends are just graduating from college and they’re coming out into a workforce where they just aren’t

really being accepted at all,” Nathan said. “They’re going to interview after interview and just being turned away or not even getting a call back.”

Lonny, another undergraduate student, said she had been camping out since the first day of the occupation on November 18. “I am out here to support the cause of possibly changing the system. I want there to be some fundamental change to this system because it doesn’t work.”

On the Democratic Party and the Obama administration, Lonny said, “I’ve seen a constant train of people being very optimistic about Obama, and I just haven’t seen it. Even from the first day, he’s just a figurehead. He’s not the perfect answer to all our problems, no one person is. The problem is the system.”

Joanne said she thought that the soaring tuition was “insane.” “I just graduated last June, and I have a sister who goes here. She’s two years younger, so we had two kids going to this school at the same time. We had our parents helping us out, but there are many students that don’t have that help.”

“The chancellor and lots of the executives in power are paid outrageous sums of money. I don’t know what they do really. I’ve been here four years, and I don’t really know.”

On the growth of social inequality in the US, Joanne added, “I guess that’s what the whole Occupy movement’s about. The richest 1 percent owns the rest of the 99 percent of us. Something has to change.”

Mario said he had graduated two years ago. “I remember our fee hikes were 33 percent, and I thought that was outrageous. Compared with what they’re doing now, with 81 percent, it’s ridiculous. I really think that something needs to be done to raise the appropriate revenue to allow students to come to the UC campus. Because we don’t want to go privatized, where the fees are raised so high that it becomes privatized.”



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