

The police assault at University of California, Davis

Jerry White

23 November 2011

The November 18 police assault on protesting students at University of California, Davis has exposed the reactionary and brutal character of political, social and economic relations in the United States.

For all its endless and self-congratulatory tributes to democracy, the American ruling elite's hypocrisy and insincerity are unmasked for all to see the moment the super-rich and *their* government perceive a threat to the interests of the corporate and financial aristocracy that controls the United States.

The university police were armed as if they were entering a battle zone. It is clear from their actions that they looked upon the students not as human beings, but as *things*—to be controlled, brutalized and even shot down if the orders to do so were given. The policeman who sprayed the students with a noxious chemical went about his work placidly and methodically, treating his victims as if they were insects or, perhaps, weeds in his backyard. His fellow storm troopers did not indicate the slightest discomfort with his actions.

The US government has used the issue of human rights to justify its attacks on whatever regime runs afoul of its geo-political interests. One can imagine the uproar in the media if the events at UC Davis had occurred at Tehran University. In fact, there is not a ruling class in the world that has anything to teach the American corporate elite when it comes to repression and violence.

It is no mere coincidence that the attack on UC Davis students occurs as the US-backed military regime in Egypt is brutally suppressing demonstrators in Tahrir Square. The scale of the attacks may be different, but the content is the same.

Throughout the world, workers and young people are involved in an expanding class struggle against austerity and mass unemployment. The response of

every government is to use state repression to impose the dictates of the financial elite.

The brutal treatment of the California students is a measure of the fear and anxiety felt within the corporate and political establishment. If this is the response to the first stages of social opposition, involving as yet a relatively small number of students and young people, one can only imagine the scale of violence the American ruling elite will unleash once it confronts mass strikes and demonstrations by far broader sections of the working class.

It is an indication of the decay of American democracy and the explosive growth of social inequality that the Occupy movement has from the beginning been met with violence. The mass arrests of demonstrators on the Brooklyn Bridge on October 1 have been followed by an increasing crackdown throughout the country. This has included the use of tear gas and plastic bullets in Oakland, which left an Iraq War veteran seriously injured, and the military-style assault to destroy the Occupy Wall Street encampment in Manhattan's Zuccotti Park. Last weekend, a young protester in Seattle, three months pregnant, had a miscarriage after being struck twice in the stomach before being pepper sprayed by police.

Across the country more than 4,600 people involved in the Occupy protests have been arrested so far. Local governments, advised by the FBI and the Obama administration's Department of Homeland Security, have coordinated their efforts to crush the movement.

This repression reveals two basic truths. The first is that democratic rights are incompatible with a system in which society's wealth is monopolized by the richest one percent. The demands of the financial elite—for austerity, the destruction of social programs and war—cannot be realized through democratic means. The

opposition of the overwhelming majority can be overcome only through the ever-greater resort to authoritarian methods.

The second is that the state—the politicians, the police and the courts—is not a neutral body. It is a *capitalist* state, which functions to defend the property and political rule of the corporate and financial oligarchy.

It should be noted that the police violence in California is being presided over by the liberal icon and Democratic governor, Jerry Brown, and that the head of the university police at UC Davis is a woman, as is the chancellor. At the top of the US government sits an African-American. So much for the proponents of identity politics, who endlessly peddle the claim that the political system can be changed by placing women and minorities into positions of power!

Nor is it a question of appealing to the powers-that-be to act more humanely. In the midst of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, the Democrats and Republicans are engaged in a bitter struggle over the best way to slash trillions from government spending. Earlier this week, President Obama reassured the financial markets he would not back down from carrying out the most draconian cuts to education, health care and other social programs on which tens of millions of people depend.

Behind these actions are definite material and class interests. The financial elite and its political representatives are seeking to make the working class pay for the global crisis of the capitalist system. The profit system has failed. It cannot educate young people. It cannot provide jobs. It is good only for enriching the top one percent and organizing wars and state repression.

The impact of the worsening social conditions is driving ever-larger sections of workers and young people into struggle. It must be understood that this is a political struggle involving irreconcilably opposed social and class interests. If social needs are to take precedence over the profit interests of the banks and corporations, a fundamental and revolutionary transformation is needed. The working class—the vast majority of the population—must take the reins of political power in its own hands.

A redistribution of wealth from the top to the bottom is urgently needed. This requires replacing capitalism

with socialism so that society's wealth is put at the disposal of the majority—that is, the working people who produce the wealth.

Among workers there is widespread opposition to the police attack at UC Davis and sympathy for the Occupy protesters. The conditions exist for forging the most powerful unity between young people, fighting against tuition hikes and for the right to a decent future, and workers facing an unrelenting attack on their jobs and living standards.

Students at UC Davis and other Occupy protesters cannot restrict their activity to the campuses and encampments. They must turn to the working class—to all those who live from paycheck-to-paycheck and work in the offices, factories and social services—and transform this sympathy into a powerful political movement, independent of the two big business parties and armed with a program to put an end to social inequality forever.

Jerry White



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact