

University of California outlines future police action against student protests

Jack Hood
18 May 2012

In the midst of an ongoing public relations disaster following November's crackdown on anti-fee hike protests, the University of California system has released a draft protest policy report. The report presents future UC plans of privatization, falsifies the factual record of previous demonstrations, and takes no steps to prevent future police brutality.

The report follows an announcement that UC officials plan to increase tuition by 6 percent for the 2012-13 school year. UC tuition has tripled in the past decade, and Democratic Governor Jerry Brown and the Democrat dominated legislature slashed \$750 million, or 20 percent, from the school's budget for the 2011-12 fiscal year. A recent announcement that California's deficit has nearly doubled to \$16 billion means that harsher cuts are likely.

The draft report, released on May 4, and open to public comment until May 25, should serve as a warning to California students and working people: The drive to privatization will not be halted by the events of the previous months. The report treats further protests as inevitable; a sign that administrators are planning to force students and their families to carry more of the burden for funding higher education, even as the economy continues to stall. With national student debt levels topping \$1 trillion and youth unemployment in California climbing above 25 percent, the situation for students and their families is only growing more desperate.

Far from denouncing police violence, the "Response to Protests on UC Campuses" report, commissioned by UC President Mark Yudof, and headed by UC General Counsel Charles Robinson and UC Berkeley School of Law Dean Christopher Edley, it is the latest in a series of hollow "reports" and "inquiries" meant as a veneer to placate a public that overwhelmingly opposes fee hikes and public education cuts.

A Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) poll released last November found that only 14 percent of California voters are likely to approve of the Democratic controlled

state legislature's handling of public higher education. Fully 86 percent of those surveyed believe that college affordability is a problem in the state, and 69 percent of respondents said they oppose any student fee hikes to balance the budget.

Conscious of these public sentiments, the report covers up the actions of the administrators and the police who seek to prevent, at all costs, public opposition to the reactionary dictates of President Yudof, the unelected Board of Trustees, the Democratic Governor, and the Democratic state legislature. The first words of the report give away its falsification of the historical record: "After physical conflict erupted between police and students during demonstrations at UC Berkeley and UC Davis in November, 2011..." As those who watch videos of the events can plainly make out for themselves, the students were completely peaceful.

Physical conflict did not erupt "between police and students," but rather was perpetrated entirely by police clad in riot gear and armed with pepper spray, batons, shields, paintball guns, and other more lethal weapons against peaceful students, who were sitting or standing while linking arms.

Although the report claims it is "premised on the belief that free expression, robust discourse, and vigorous debate over ideas and principles are essential to the mission of our University," this could not be further from the truth.

An email sent to students and faculty by President Yudof in advance of demonstrations planned for May 1 outlined the true authoritarian nature of the administration. Yudof warned students and faculty to "avoid all demonstrations as a precaution," and especially to avoid "cities with a large immigrant population and strong labor groups."

The email, which outlined Yudof's "tips for reducing your vulnerability," warned students and faculty with a thinly veiled threat of violent assault: "even seemingly peaceful rallies can spur violent activity or be met with resistance by security forces," the email explained. "Bystanders may be arrested or harmed by security forces using water cannons, tear gas or other measures to control grounds."

Finally, Yudof explained that students and faculty should “dress conservatively... maintain a low profile by avoiding demonstration areas... and discussions of the issues at hand.”

In other words, Yudof and the UC administration continue to threaten students and faculty that they faced violent repression if they even so much as *discussed* issues related to austerity, tuition hikes, and budget cuts. This is the true nature of the administration and its coercive force: the UC Police Department. In this email, the administration signals that it has no qualms about using violence in the most undemocratic manner, as it has proven on multiple occasions in the recent past.

The announcement also comes as 12 UC Davis students and faculty face the possibility of 11-year prison sentences and up to \$1 million in restitution for blockading a US Bank building on campus. For several weeks, UC Davis students and faculty, known as the Baker’s Dozen, prevented the bank from operating and forced the bank to cancel its multimillion-dollar contract with the University. Yolo County and the University of California, Davis is using the full force of the law to make models of these students and to prevent similar nonviolent actions from being taken by students across the system.

In this context, the Robinson-Edley report makes not a single recommendation that could prevent the further use of police violence against student demonstrators. In fact, many of its recommendations will only serve to aggravate high tension situations, making it easier for administrators to spy on and coerce student demonstrators.

Among the recommendations the report makes is the requirement that the University send high-ranking administrators on protest sites to communicate directly with police commanders about when to use violent means to disperse nonviolent protesters. High-ranking University officials are almost always on-site at student protests, and in the case of UC Davis last November, at the very least, administrators accepted the violence of the UC Police. At worst, they ordered the brutal police crackdown.

At UC Berkeley, it was Chancellor Robert Birgeneau who justified the violent actions of the police, stating, “It is unfortunate that some protesters chose to obstruct the police by linking arms and forming a human chain to prevent the police from gaining access to the tents. This is not nonviolent civil disobedience.”

Furthermore, the report claims that administrators and police must be more vigilant in explaining to students “that civil disobedience by definition involves violating laws or regulations, and that civil disobedience will generally have consequences for those engaging in it because of the impact it can have on the rest of the campus community.” In other words, the University must be better at threatening its

students about the effects that participating in demonstrations may have on their academic careers.

Aside from making token recommendations that police undergo more vigorous training (presumably on how to avoid embarrassing the University by making international news stories out of small protests), the report also recommends that “[t]he University’s response to protests can also be handled better and more efficiently by building strong working relationships between police officials and administrators.” In light of the Freedom of Information Act requests that have highlighted undercover police infiltration of student demonstrations, as well as complex networks designed to infiltrate student protest groups, this recommendation can only be taken as another threat.

The Robinson-Edley report is a shameful attempt by UC to deflect attention away from the brutal nature of the police crackdown against students facing unprecedented tuition rates, mounting debt levels, and little hope of secure employment. As Democrats and Republicans step up the attack on education and other social services at state and federal levels, so too have they stepped up the level of police violence against protesters.

The anti-democratic attack on students in California is just one part of a growing trend towards authoritarianism in recent years. The Obama Administration has reserved the right to assassinate American citizens anywhere in the world, and with the passage of the National Defense Authorization Act, has stripped Americans of the basic right to trial.

These measures are not accidental—they come as the ruling class anticipates further opposition to the attack on social rights. In order to be successful, this opposition must be directed through the independent mobilization of the working class under the principles upheld by the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact