

Officer who pepper sprayed UC Davis students awarded \$38,000

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Former University of California, Davis police officer John Pike—responsible for attacking peaceful student demonstrators with pepper spray during an anti-tuition hike protest in 2011—has been awarded over \$38,000 in workers' compensation for the "mental distress" he claims to have suffered in the aftermath of his criminal act of violence.

On November 18, 2011, administration officials led by Chancellor Linda Katehi ordered police to remove tents and tarps set up by student protesters from campus. Student protesters were faced with a phalanx of roughly 60 police officers in riot gear who marched towards the students and demanded that they leave the area. When students cited their First Amendment right to free speech, the police moved in an attempt to make arrests. Many students were handled roughly by the police, some thrown to the ground and others hit with police clubs.

Pike then approached a row of twenty students sitting with arms linked on the ground and doused them with pepper spray from close range. The brazen act of police brutality was defended by university officials. Only the week before, University of California, Berkeley chancellor Robert Birgeneau had categorized the act of peacefully linking arms as "not non-violent civil disobedience."

The day after the incident occurred, nearly 10,000 students gathered in opposition to the police raid. That evening, students broke up a press conference being held by the administration and Chancellor Katehi to spin the events of the day before.

In response to overwhelming popular anger against the administration and the police department, Pike was placed on paid leave. He eventually left the campus police force in July 2012.

On October 16, 2013, the California Division of

Workers' Compensation Appeals Board granted Pike's application for workers' compensation, claiming that a reward of \$38,055 "resolves all claims of psychiatric injury specific or due to continuous trauma from applicant's employment at UC Davis."

Pike had complained to the board that he was traumatized by the popular hostility against his acts of police brutality.

UC Davis issued a statement of its own, writing that "this case has been resolved in accordance with state law and processes on workers' compensation. The final resolution is in line with permanent impairment as calculated by the state's disability evaluation unit."

The decision amounts to a cash payment by the State of California for a job well done. The government's handout to police officers who have committed assault and battery against peaceful demonstrators is a green light to carry out similar attacks against future demonstrators. In the aftermath of decades of attacks on higher education, the state government and school administrators have every reason to expect further protests.

The demonstrations in 2011 occurred in the midst of efforts by the University of California to raise tuition by 9.6 percent for students at the system's 10 campuses statewide. The California State University system was also attempting to raise tuition by the same amount.

In the decade from 2002 to 2012, tuition had increased by roughly 300 percent at UC and CSU. In 2011, the average UC student graduated with over \$17,000 in debt, while the average CSU student left school with \$14,744 in debt.

Tuition hikes were paired with drastic cuts to University funding by the Democratic Party-dominated state government. Between 2008 and 2012, funding for UC fell by \$900 million, or 27 percent.

The protests of 2011 developed in response to the devastation of the public university system but petered out in the wake of the “pepper spray incident” as the middle class leaders of the protest movement, who were closely aligned with the “Occupy Wall Street” movement, sought to oppose calls made by the Socialist Equality Party for a turn to the working class. Several protest leaders responded with hostility to a resolution issued in response to the police attack by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality and passed by members of the UC Davis general assembly.



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