

University of California's regents approve tuition hikes

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On Thursday, the University of California board of regents voted to approve sharp UC tuition fee hikes throughout the state. The variable fee hike will likely lead to tuition increases of 5 percent every year for five years. In real terms, the current cost of \$12,192 a year could rise to \$15,564 by the 2019-20 school year. This does not include the cost of rent, books, food, health care and other necessities.

The vote followed two days of protests on virtually every campus of the UC system. More than 500 students at UC Davis took over the administration building for an hour on Tuesday. Wednesday night, 200 UC Berkeley students occupied a major lecture hall on campus demanding an end to the hikes. Mariah Watson, a UC Davis student, summarized the heated mood, "Raise tuition and we'll raise hell."

The first fee hike will happen next fall, during the 2015-16 academic year. Under the plan voted on, the fee hike may vary depending on the support of California state. If the expected amount of state funding is given, then tuition will increase by \$609. Every year this will rise, leading to a \$741 increase in the fifth year. In total, tuition is expected to be \$3,369 more a year—about 28 percent higher than it is now.

In addition to directly increasing the cost of tuition, the plan increases the student Services Fee, which all UC students pay, by 5 percent next year. There will also be an increase of extra tuition levied on students in professional programs. Every year for five years the professional degree supplemental tuition will increase by 5 percent.

In addition to this, there will be a one-time 20 percent increase to professional degree supplemental tuition for nursing students. Five degree programs which currently do not have to pay this fee will also have to start paying it. This fee varies across campuses and schools; for

example, a medical student at UC Davis currently pays \$19,914 in supplemental tuition, a nursing student at UC Davis, \$8,358.

When first appointed one year ago, UC President Janet Napolitano, former head of Homeland Security, declared, "I want tuition to be as low as possible, and I want it to be as predictable as possible," adding that UC will continue to reduce costs and pursue alternative revenues. Napolitano's statement was based on the deceitful notion that, after massive tuition hikes that saw tuition quadruple from roughly \$3,000 a year in 2000 to \$12,192 in 2014, Proposition 30, voted in two years ago, would provide the state funding necessary for public education.

Governor Jerry Brown's reactionary Prop 30 was a fraud from the beginning, a sales tax increase, which disproportionately affects poorer people, sugarcoated with a harmless income tax hike on the wealthy, was said to resolve the shortfalls in public education budgets. Brown's 2013 budget passed in the aftermath of Prop 30, actually pushed for the wide growth of charter schools and online education. Less than half of the Prop 30 funds actually went to education.

The pseudo-left and union apparatus, however, lined up behind Jerry Brown's Prop 30. The International Socialist Organization, for instance, published an opinion piece on socialistworker.org by the president of a local American Federation of Teachers union titled "Why I'm supporting Proposition 30." The author described the proposition, which launched a sales tax increase on the whole population, as something that would "take \$6 billion out of the pockets of the rich and put it back into public services."

In fact, in 2012, a group of graduate students at UC Berkeley's sociology department published a study arguing that most of Prop 30 education funds would be

going to major banks, particularly Merrill Lynch, JPMorgan Chase, and Goldman Sachs, owed money due to predatory financial swaps. The authors wrote that “UC is taking huge losses because interest rates plummeted following the financial crisis of 2008 ... and have stayed at record lows. Swap deals already have cost UC nearly \$57 million, with \$200 million more in losses anticipated.”

Proposition 30 levied a tax on workers in order to pay back banks and restore only small parts of the billions cut from the California education system. After the dust settled, what remained was the essence of the capitalist crisis: either additional budget cuts or more tuition increases will follow.

Brown’s budget for 2014-2015 boasted a projected surplus for several billions of dollars. Yet, none of the previous cuts were reversed. In fact, General Fund spending per student remained the lowest in 30 years.

The contradictions caused by the cuts suffered by public education in the last decade are reflecting through various conflicting statements made by administration representatives.

Most notably, the alleged friction between Brown and Napolitano is a smokescreen. The media has presented the governor as a protection against tuition increases. This is utter nonsense when speaking of a governor who has systematically slashed education costs as well as supported the speedy firing of teachers. Brown, who voted against Napolitano’s proposal, advocates an equally punishing option. For Brown, the way forward is to radically reduce the quality of the UC system by advocating a three-year degree program and online classes. In addition he calls for the state to let in more out-of-state students. These students are charged as if the UC was just another private four-year university. Such an option limits local California students and further pushes the UC system towards a private model.

The debate among ruling circles, therefore, is about how to distribute the burden at the bottom. Ultimately, the effects of either policy are identical: the cost of the crisis weighs on the working class by way of increased spending for services, such as education, which are basic social rights.

The claim that there is no money for education, as well as other social services, is a lie used by those who seek to place the burden of the crisis on the backs of workers. California is home to 111 billionaires, more

than any other state in the world. A single individual, Lawrence Ellison, CEO of the software firm Oracle Corporation, would have enough wealth to cover the state’s entire budget deficit, let alone that of the state university system, and still have well over \$10 billion in net worth.

Brown warned in 2013 that “great risks and uncertainties lie ahead... the federal government, the courts or changes in the economy all could cost us billions and drive a hole in the budget.” As the world economy worsens, especially when the current stock market bubble breaks, Brown and company will eagerly return to the chopping block. The various “progressive” coalitions and pseudo-left groups that operate around the Democratic Party have and will continue to lead students into a dead end. The only way to fight the international problem of austerity is through an international movement of students and workers seeking to expropriate the wealth of the super-rich and establish socialism.



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