

Protests, building occupations follow California tuition hike

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29 November 2014

A series of rallies and building occupations at University of California (UC) campuses has taken place over the past week in response to a Board of Regents' November 20 vote to raise students' tuition and fees 5 percent annually for the next five years. The increases will begin to take effect next fall, and will raise yearly tuition to \$15,560 for California residents and to nearly \$45,000 for out-of-state students by 2020, not including the cost of living.

During the Regents' meeting at UC San Francisco, a group of over 100 students drawn from all the UC campuses protested outside, with their voices audible within the meeting room upstairs. On Wednesday, prior to a preliminary vote by a subcommittee of the Regents, students barricaded the entrance and broke a glass door, prompting police to arrest Jeff Noven, a UC Berkeley student, on charges of "felony vandalism and inciting a riot," according to the *Los Angeles Times*. Noven, 21, was released last Wednesday after posting bail of \$40,000.

A series of rallies were held throughout the UC system prior to the Regents' vote, with the largest taking place at UC Davis, where more than 500 attended.

After it became clear on Wednesday that the Regents would vote in favor of the tuition increases, the pseudo-left group By Any Means Necessary (BAMN) called on students present at the Regents' meeting to organize demonstrations and building occupations on each UC campus the following week.

On Wednesday, November 19, over 200 UC Berkeley students, led by members of BAMN and the liberal Cal Progressive Coalition, under the banner "The Open UC," began an occupation of Wheeler Hall, the main building occupied between 2009 and 2011 during the last student protests against tuition hikes. The number

of occupiers shrank over the weekend, and has disbanded for Thanksgiving break, to return again Monday, December 1. A rally and march was held in conjunction with other campuses on Monday November 24, which, at its peak, involved roughly 1,000 protesters marching through the city of Berkeley.

On Monday November 24, rallies were held on each UC campus, with building occupations following at UC Davis, UC Irvine and UC San Diego joining those underway at UC Berkeley and UC Santa Cruz. At the UC Davis rally, the crowd of roughly 300 first occupied the local Bank of America, as one of the regents, Monica Lozano, also serves on the bank's board of directors. Students then marched to Olsen Hall, a main building on campus, where they interrupted classes and studying students with repeated chanting of "Whose university? Our university!"

BAMN, the Cal Progressive Coalition, and the rest of the leadership of the protest movement are seeking to channel student anger over tuition increases behind the Democratic Party, which, no less than the Republican Party, bears responsibility for the UC system's policy of forcing students to pay for the state's social crisis.

At the Board of Regents' meeting where the tuition hike was imposed, protesters booed and attempted to block most of the regents from entering the building on Wednesday and Thursday, but cheered Governor Jerry Brown and Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom, both of whom have postured as champions of education and as opposed to raising tuition.

Brown backed passage of Proposition 30, claiming that this would shield education from further cuts. In reality, far from protecting public schools, the measure protects the fortunes of California's numerous billionaires, while providing a smokescreen for shifting funds from public education into privately run charter

schools. As the WSWS wrote in the aftermath of the proposition's passage, "Proposition 30 levied a new sales tax, a regressive measure which disproportionately falls on the shoulders of working people. The money extracted was then lumped into California's 'general fund' accompanied by the cynical promise that it would be deployed to stop cuts in education."

In his "opposition" to the current round of tuition hikes, Brown advocates an equally regressive option for students and their families. He promotes the implementation of a three-year degree program, the expansion of online classes, and the admission of a greater proportion of out-of-state students, whose higher tuition rates equal that required at many private four-year universities. These proposals, if accepted in future negotiations, would only further degrade the UC system.

The leaders of the Berkeley occupation released two statements showing their orientation to the Democrats earlier this week. In the first, released on Sunday, they state, "We are asking for the state to reinvest in schools and are ultimately standing for an accessible system of public education here in the U.S. and worldwide." In another, released Monday after the rally, they state "Public education is under attack. We can save it. Please join us in calling President Janet Napolitano and Governor Jerry Brown in support of public education and against tuition hikes."

The subservience of the protest groups to the Democratic Party is also reflected in a quid pro quo with the authorities in relationship to the occupations. So far there has been a conspicuous absence of police at the various rallies and occupations, with the only arrest that of Jeff Noven at the Regents' meeting. The police restraint is in contrast to the 2009 protests, in which the administration allowed students to occupy Wheeler Hall until the week of final exams, when the 66 remaining occupiers were arrested and cited.

Should the occupations take an independent form, or openly challenge the Democratic Party, the present police restraint will rapidly evaporate.

The state government has already laid the groundwork for the violent suppression of protests with the appointment as UC president of Janet Napolitano, former head of Homeland Security. As the WSWS wrote in 2013 at the time of her selection, "In the figure

of Napolitano, the ruling elite in California has found a representative who they are sure can be relied upon to meet with force a growing upsurge of students and working people in one of the nation's most important public university systems."

The appointment of the official responsible for organizing the nationwide police raids on the Occupy encampments to president of the nation's largest public university system indicates that the ruling class wants an expert who is closely tied to the police establishment.

The conspiracy against California's students and working class is underscored by the fact that Napolitano, also a Democrat, waited to announce the tuition increase proposal until two days after the November 4 elections.



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