

New club procedures at UC Berkeley give police effective veto power over campus events

Gabriel Black, Joseph Santolan
17 October 2017

The University of California, Berkeley issued an interim campus policy August 14 that authorizes the UC Berkeley Police Department (UCPD) to review all student events, determine whether or not they deem that these events require a police presence, and compel student organizations to pay the cost of the police presence that the police mandate.

The policy is currently undergoing public review, but no one, not even the Berkeley campus paper, the *Daily Cal*, has reported on it, nor has any group organized a meeting on the topic. This may in part be an expression of the fact that it is now almost impossible to organize meetings on the Berkeley campus. At the end of October, the public review period on this anti-democratic measure will close, and the policy will become permanent at the beginning of January.

The new policy is an attack on free speech that prevents student organizations from presenting their views on campus. The police on campus have effectively been given the power to censor organizations by charging them money to hold controversial political events on campus.

All events must be submitted for approval by the administration eight weeks prior to their scheduled date, and groups must seek approval from the police six weeks in advance. It is impossible under such conditions for a student organization to respond to any current development. A request to hold a protest rally on Sproul Plaza in response to current developments, such as the repeal of DACA, a vital and long-standing tradition at Berkeley, would automatically be denied.

According to the memorandum, events that involve over 200 people, or which the police deem worthy of scrutiny, will be treated as “major events.” The police thus become the first and last arbiter of campus speech. They are authorized to select which events to scrutinize

and can charge for “services rendered,” running any impoverished student organization into the ground. Free speech will be for those the police deem safe, or those wealthy enough to afford it.

If its event is deemed “major” by the police, the petitioning student group must submit its request directly to the police department in order to secure a room. The student group must then fill out a “Police Services Request” form, supplied by the UCPD, which legally obliges the student organization to cover all costs associated with policing the event.

To secure a room on campus, student organizations must provide a payment option to the UCPD. One of the options is to submit to the police a check—necessarily blank because the police have not yet informed the group what costs they will incur. There is no assurance given to the student organization that costs, once agreed upon, will not change. A request for clarification on whether costs can change after the initial agreement is reached has not received a response.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality has already been impacted by this anti-democratic process. In late September the Berkeley IYSSE applied for David North, the chairperson of the International Editorial Board of the WSWWS and a leading expert on the Russian Revolution, to deliver a lecture at UC Berkeley in late October on the centenary of the Russian Revolution. The request was initially denied without any reason being given. On October 6, the IYSSE was informed that its request required processing by the UCPD because it had indicated that David North would be the event’s speaker. The event, in other words, was being singled out for its political content.

The IYSSE immediately submitted a request for the

event to the UCPD and included a list of questions seeking clarification on the process. The IYSSE asked if its event had been deemed a “major” event, and who had reached such a decision and on what grounds. The club inquired how students, with limited funds, were supposed to hand over a blank check to the police department and a signature guaranteeing that the club would pay for all expenses, without any knowledge of what those expenses might prove to be.

At the time of writing, the UCPD has not responded to the request and questions of the IYSSE. The lengthy turnaround involved in this process—the request was initially submitted in late September—effectively prevents student groups from organizing and advertising their events.

These measures are the direct result of the pressure tactics of the leaders of the Antifa movement. In the spring semester thousands of students gathered to protest the appearance of right-wing provocateur, Milo Yiannopoulos, at UC Berkeley. Most assembled to state their political disagreement with his views. Antifa activists, however, claimed that they needed to physically shut down his event to prevent “fascism” from growing on campus and to pressure the University administration to ban the event.

Mark Bray, in his book *Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook*, sympathetically describes Antifa’s vandalism as an appeal to the campus police to ban Yiannopoulos: “In the days leading up to the event, students had met with the chancellor, written op-eds, amassed a petition—all to no avail.

“On the night of Yiannopoulos’s speech, shortly before it was scheduled to begin, black-clad anti-fascists arrived at the larger ongoing demonstration and started to pull down police barricades, launch fireworks, smash windows, and spray-paint graffiti, causing what was later estimated to be \$100,000 worth of damage. And what weeks of advocacy, argumentation, and public dialogue could not accomplish was instead achieved in about fifteen minutes, as the police quickly announced the cancellation of the event, citing security concerns.”

Antifa bases its politics on appealing, by violent means if necessary, to the administrative officials to carry out political censorship on campus. The methods of Antifa provide the University administration with a pretext for which it has long sought to harass and

repress left-wing organizations.

Last year a student course titled “Palestine: a settler colonial analysis,” was suspended on spurious procedural grounds before the administration admitted that it halted the class because it believed it was “political indoctrination.” Earlier in 2016, the UC Regents proposed a motion that would treat all opposition to Zionism as anti-Semitism, until protests made the regents change the text of the resolution slightly.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact