

# The Board of Regents of the University of California and the subordination of higher education to the war machine

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*On Saturday at 4:00 p.m. US Eastern Time, the World Socialist Web Site and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) are holding a public meeting, “Mobilize the working class to defend the University of California strike against genocide!” Register for the event here.*

On Monday, May 20, 2,000 graduate student workers, teaching assistants and other academic workers at the University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC) began a strike motivated by the attacks on student and faculty opponents of the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza at the Los Angeles and Irvine campuses of the UC system (UCLA and UC Irvine).

The strike was called after academic workers across the 10 campuses of the UC system, members of United Auto Workers Local 4811, the bargaining agent for 48,000 graduate workers, voted four-to-one for a strike to oppose the police attacks on student protesters. Because of the overwhelming opposition among the graduate workers, the UAW bureaucracy, which is desperately seeking to contain the strike, has been compelled to call for strike action at UCLA and UC Davis beginning Tuesday, May 28.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) is calling for the expansion of the strike to all of the campuses in the UC system and for the mobilization of the entire UAW membership, including autoworkers and workers in the weapons industry.

In order to understand and effectively fight back against these attacks, students and workers have to understand the class forces they are up against at the university, which is deeply integrated into the state apparatus, Wall Street and the Democratic Party.

The entire Board of Regents of the University of California system is either elected or appointed by the Democratic Party. Eighteen members of the board are handpicked by the governor of California, Gavin Newsom, a Democrat. The governor himself is one of seven ex-officio members of the Board of Regents, all of whom occupy high offices in the state government and all of whom are members of the Democratic Party.

The appointed regents include:

•Ana J. Matosantos, who served as cabinet secretary in the Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, and director of the California Department of Finance in the previous administrations of governors Jerry Brown (Democrat) and Arnold Schwarzenegger (Republican).

•Nancy Lee (net worth \$3 million), the chief of staff to Robert A. Iger, CEO of the Walt Disney Company (Democrat-turned Independent).

Howard “Peter” Guber (net worth \$800 million), chairman and CEO

of Mandalay Entertainment Group and previously the chairman and CEO of Sony Entertainment.

•Mark Robinson, a partner at Centerview Partners global investment banking firm. He previously worked at Merrill Lynch & Co. and was responsible for its global investment banking and healthcare operations.

•Hadi Makarechian, founder and chairman of the board of Makar Properties, a multi-billion-dollar commercial land development company. He is a Republican.

The dominance of corporate and Democratic Party forces on the Board of Regents of the University of California is typical of elite universities across the country. This includes, most infamously, the president of Columbia University, Minouche (Nemat) Shafik, a former leading official with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, who set the precedent for violent police assaults on student protesters with the deployment of New York City riot police against Columbia students.

Like other elite universities, the UC system functions more like a corporation than an institution of learning. A 2021 report listed the UC system’s general endowment fund at \$19 billion.

Jagdeep Singh Bachher, the chief investment officer of UC, revealed that \$32 billion in assets held by the UC system are targeted for divestment by the student protesters. This represents approximately one fifth of UC’s total assets of \$175 billion.

Of the \$32 billion, \$3.3 billion is linked to weapons manufacturers, \$12 billion is in US Treasuries, \$163 million is invested with BlackRock, the world’s largest asset management firm, and an additional \$2.1 billion in bonds is managed by BlackRock.

BlackRock is notorious for its large-scale investments in companies such as Lockheed Martin, RTX, Northrop Grumman, Boeing and General Dynamics, which manufacture the weapons and drones that are used for the mass murder of Palestinians.

An additional \$8.6 billion in UC assets is tied to Blackstone, whose billionaire CEO Stephen Schwarzman is a leading Wall Street donor to Donald Trump. Of the remainder, \$3.2 billion is linked to 24 additional companies that are implicated in the genocide.

Thus, the UC administration is dominated by the same forces that are responsible for US imperialism’s central role in the genocide. It is defending very real, material interests with a stake in the continuation of the genocide.

This multi-billion-dollar investment in mass murder is not simply the result of a mistaken policy or decisions of individual universities or their presidents. Rather, it is the product of the transformation of

universities into de facto corporations.

The same process that has resulted in skyrocketing student loan debt and the elevation of CEOs, Republican and Democratic Party operatives, bankers, and hedge fund managers into the position of running universities has led to their integration into the imperialist war machine.

While public funds for universities have been savagely cut, more and more money for research has come directly from the Department of Defense, the CIA and other state agencies of war and destruction. According to the latest available annual university reports on federal awards, the DOD expended the following amounts at colleges that have seen significant anti-war protest activity over the past few months:

- \$348 million at the University of California system (2023)
- \$229 million at the University of Texas system (2023)
- \$71.9 million at the University of Michigan (2023)
- \$60.4 million at Arizona State University (2022)
- \$49.2 million at Columbia University (2021)
- \$48.2 million at Cornell University (2021)
- \$40.8 million at Ohio State University (2021)
- \$40.5 million at Harvard University (2023)
- \$36 million at the University of Minnesota (2022)
- \$35.4 million at Yale University (2022)
- \$26.2 million at Washington University (2023)
- \$25 million at Indiana University (2023)
- \$21.2 million at New York University (2021)
- \$19.5 million at Brown University (2023)
- \$14.2 million at Rutgers University (2022)
- \$11.2 million at George Washington University (2022)
- \$5.9 million at Princeton University (2022)

A 2023 report by the Congressional Research Service, a federal legislative branch agency, on federal scientific and engineering research and development (R&D) funding highlights the critical role universities play for the Department of Defense.

DOD funding made up 46.2 percent of the entire 2023 federal R&D budget, followed by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which only received 24 percent. The DOD's Research, Development, Test and Evaluation (RDT&E) funding was \$139.7 billion in 2023.

The report states that the DOD is responsible for 62 percent of federal funding in aerospace, aeronautical and astronautical engineering; 58 percent for electrical, electronic and communications engineering; 55 percent for industrial and manufacturing engineering; 48 percent for mechanical engineering; and 47 percent for computer and information sciences.

The report cites upwards of 100 different Defense Department R&D programs this funding goes toward at various universities, including awards passed through to sub-recipients, most commonly major military contractors—BAE Systems, Raytheon, Boeing, Booz Allen Hamilton and General Dynamics are among those listed—or other universities. Some universities, like Columbia, even list the “Israeli Ministry of Defense” as a sub-recipient.

The DOD's own description of its university-based Science and Technology program characterizes universities as being an integral part of the military-state apparatus:

Many congressional policymakers are particularly interested in DOD S&T program funding, since these funds support the

development of new technologies and the science that underlies them. Some in the defense community see ensuring adequate support for S&T activities as imperative to maintaining U.S. military superiority into the future.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) endorses the calls for university divestment as a necessary component of the fight against the militarization of universities. However, we insist that it cannot be achieved on the basis of pressuring the boards of universities to divest. The information presented above clearly shows that the subordination of universities such as the UC system to the war machine and to private profit go hand in hand.

Graduate student workers in the UC system have taken a courageous stand against the genocide and the complicity of their university in the crimes of US imperialism and its allies. But the issues about which they are protesting cannot be resolved on the campuses alone.

It is critical to recognize that the genocide in Gaza is one front in a global war that is being spearheaded by US imperialism and its NATO imperialist allies—a new world war arising from the historic crisis of the capitalist system. It is an attempt by desperate imperialist powers to overcome their insoluble contradictions by military conquest and a redivision of the world.

This involves the escalation of the US/NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine into a direct shooting war against Russia, which threatens to unleash a nuclear holocaust, together with the expansion of the genocide in Gaza into a direct war with Iran and the preparations for war against China.

The corollary of world war is the destruction of democratic rights at home as well as all of the past social gains of the working class, to pay for record military spending and to attempt to crush rising social opposition. Hence the brutal repression of student-led protests against genocide and war and the turn of the ruling classes to far-right and fascistic forces and dictatorial forms of rule.

In voting for a political strike against the genocide in Gaza and the complicity of the university, and in defense of the democratic rights of student protesters, the grad student workers have initiated a struggle against the entire political establishment which they can only win by consciously broadening the fight to shut down all 10 campuses and appealing for the active and direct support of autoworkers and other sections of the working class.

Workers, in turn, must recognize that the struggle waged at the universities has far-reaching implications for the working class as a whole. The policy of the ruling class of subordinating higher education to the imperialist war machine and the assault on the democratic and social rights of the working class go hand in hand.

The fight to defend democratic rights, end the genocide in Gaza and demilitarize the universities is inseparable from the fight to transform the universities into true institutions of learning that provide free and high-quality education for all. This struggle requires the independent political mobilization of the entire working class, in the US and internationally, against capitalism and for socialism.



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