University of California Regents summon riot police to expel students protesting further militarization of campuses

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With a phalanx of riot police present and over the protests of students on Thursday, September 19, the Regents of the University of California (UC) approved the purchase of an extensive list of "military equipment" to be used by police on UC campuses including Berkeley, UCLA, UC Santa Cruz, UC San Francisco and UC Merced.

The UC system consists of 10 campuses, and students at all of them organized anti-genocide protests in the last 11 months. Between May and June 30,000 academic workers at six campuses went on strike over repeated police attacks on students and faculty who participated in Gaza solidarity encampments.

These protests as well as hundreds of rallies and demonstrations around the world in opposition to the US-backed Israeli slaughter have been met by the ruling class and their police agents with assaults, suspensions, bans, arrests, and the deployment of "less-lethal" weapons which often resulted in significant injuries.

Terrified that these protests will not only continue, but expand to encompass broad sections of the working class, who are being made to pay for the genocide in Gaza and proxy war in Ukraine with further attacks on their living standards, college administrators and wealthy regents are expanding the repressive elements under their command in an attempt to bludgeon and beat back the anti-war movement.

In a letter from the office of the president to the Board of Regents addressed to the Compliance and Audit Committee recommending the procurement, the president stated that this year's request reflects "minimal use of the specified equipment" and "zero complaints or concerns received system-wide in connection with the specified equipment."

This blatant lie was disputed by students in attendance at Thursday's meeting as well as by the UCLA chapter of the Students for Justice in Palestine, who wrote on their Instagram the report was "falsified" pointing to the massive injuries suffered by students, particularly at UCLA.

Among the new items requested for the police departments include:

- Drones for UC Berkeley, UCLA, UCSC and UCSF
- A "Kinetic Breaching Tool" for UC Berkeley
- UC Merced is requesting to purchase five Def-Tec 40mm launchers and 100 rounds of "eXact iMpact" 40 mm Sponge Rounds
- UCLA is requesting four FN Herstal 303 launchers, four Pepper Ball VK-SBL, 3,000 PAVA Capsaicin Rounds, 400 rounds of Def-Tec 40mm munitions of varying types.

According to the manufacturer, the FN Herstal 303 "less lethal system" enables "temporary neutralization of an individual or a group of individuals with maximum effectiveness." The weapon can be loaded with 15 spherical projectiles that contain pepper spray or that are for "impact."

The manufacturer of the Pepper Ball VK-SBL sells its "less lethal" option for approximately $1,480. The VK-SBL is able to deploy .68 caliber pepper ball rounds or propriety "VXR" projectiles upwards of 150 feet.

UC police already have devices to break doors down (Kinetic Breaching Tool), drones to spy on protesters, distraction devices to disorient crowds with noise and light, and pepper spray as well as 40mm sponge rounds, which are replacements for rubber bullets. Despite the "less lethal" characterization of these items, they are still dangerous.

The British Medical Journal found that 3 percent of people hit by rubber bullets died of the injury. Four years

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ago, Chilean riot police shot hundreds of rubber bullets at workers protesting low wages and a high cost of living. 268 protestors suffered severe eye damage and 30 percent of them became blind in one eye. More sinister than the "less lethal" requests, is the massive stockpile of lethal weapons already hoarded by the various police agencies on campuses: 209 semi-automatic rifles and 261,500 rounds of ammunition, including 93,000 rounds of 5.56 cartridges, which are currently used by NATO, and 155,010 rounds of the similar .223 cartridge. Campus police departments reported that they used over 25,500 rounds of 5.56 and .223 in training exercises last year. They are clearly preparing for deadly confrontations.

Prior to Thursday's meeting, roughly 40 student protesters and members from the "UC Divest Coalition" met outside the room to oppose not only the funding of the police, but the implementation of new anti-democratic policies instituted across the UC system, and virtually all colleges and universities in the US banning any protests or encampments.

"Right now, the UC regents are trying to pass AB 481. The UC is requesting military-grade weapons to shoot our peers. This is fascism, funded by our tuition money," one protester said outside the meeting before it began, student-run UCLA Radio reported.

After a delay, the meeting began with a discussion on approving the military equipment: "Why did you shoot us?" one protester questioned the Regents referring to the mass arrests and assault of students by police in response to anti-genocide encampments earlier this year.

In response, *Cal Matters* reported that Regent Jay Sures, chair of the compliance committee snapped, "If you want to disrupt the meeting, you can disrupt the meeting. We're going to clear the room. It's not going to be productive. You're all going to waste your time. What I would suggest is you listen. If you have issues, you can send letters for regents." Sures then called on the riot police, who were already on standby in an adjacent room to declare an "unlawful assembly" and clear the room. The police removed the students immediately and followed them outside where they held a rally.

After clearing out the audience, the Board of Regents approved the committee's recommendation for all the military equipment requested.

18 of the 19 Regents of the University of California were appointed by Democratic governors Gavin Newsom and Jerry Brown. So how has the pseudo-left responded to the threat of militarization on campus? *Jacobin* magazine, the voice of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) just published an 8,000-plus word article, "Two Demands: Free Gaza, Free Speech" on the attacks on rights on college campuses, without mentioning a single Democratic politician.

This is a remarkable achievement given that some of the most repressive police acts in the last few years have been under the auspices of Democratic politicians. The murder of George Floyd and the crackdown on protests were under Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, Harris's current vice presidential candidate.

In response to massive support for "defunding the police," President Joe Biden chose the opposite. "I've said it before, the answer is not to defund our police departments, it's to fund our police and give them all the tools they need, training and foundation and partners and protectors that our communities need." Subsequently he proposed a massive budget windfall for "fighting crime," allocating more than $32 billion for the police in 2023.

Every day brings new attacks on free speech. This week Stanford University enacted guidelines titled "Freedom of Expression." Included in the rules are bans on overnight camping, hanging banners out of dorm windows, refusing to provide IDs and refusing to remove masks when requested.

At the University of Michigan, as 11 pro-Palestinian protesters are being pursued on criminal charges by Democratic Attorney General Dana Nessel, some members of the Socialist Equality Party have been banned for a year from campus for campaigning for the SEP presidential candidate Joseph Kishore, an intransigent opponent of all imperialist war and the capitalist system.

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