

Drop All Charges Against Pro-Palestinian Protesters, Union Supporters!

UC Irvine, District Attorney Target Campus Protests

From San Francisco and Berkeley to Davis and Los Angeles, campus officials and cops at the University of California have been on the warpath against student protesters fighting to beat back drastic tuition hikes and other attacks on the right to an education. But nowhere have protesters been met with more fierce repression than at UC Irvine (UCI), where students and trade unionists are now facing a slew of criminal charges stemming from demonstrations that occurred last year. Buttressed by the armed fist of the capitalist state, the UCI administration aims to intimidate students and silence dissent on campus in anticipation of further tuition hikes and deeper budget cuts ordered by California's Democratic governor, Jerry Brown, on behalf of the capitalist masters.

The first wave of attacks took place on 8 February 2010 when 11 students were arrested by UCI cops for energetically protesting a speech on campus by Michael Oren, Israel's ambassador to the U.S. A few months later, the administration jacked up the repression by accusing the Muslim Student Union (MSU) of having organized the protest. As a result, the group was suspended for one quarter and placed on probation for another two years. In addition, its members were ordered to collectively perform 100 hours of community service.

Now, in an ominous and outrageous escalation of the assault on the right to free speech and association, the Orange County District Attorney's office has charged these 11 students with one misdemeanor count each of conspiracy to disturb a meeting and one misdemeanor count each of disturbing a meeting, which could mean six months in jail. Their arraignment is on March 11. It is in the vital interest of students, workers, faculty and staff to demand: ***Drop all the charges now against the pro-Palestinian protesters! Down with the administration's disciplinary measures against the MSU!***

The reprisals carried out by the UCI administration in league with the DA against defenders of the Palestinian people are in the service of the bourgeoisie's bipartisan "war on terror." While people from the Middle East and Asia, including Muslims, have borne the brunt of the government's witchhunting attacks, the war on terror is in reality directed at blacks, minorities and, ultimately, the workers movement to stamp out any challenge to the capitalist order. Continuing where Bush left off, the Democratic Obama administration has dramatically escalated attacks on civil liberties in the name of "fighting terrorism," including last September's FBI raids targeting activists in solidarity with the oppressed in the Middle East and elsewhere (see "Protest FBI Raids on Leftists, Union Activists!" *WV* 966, 8 October 2010). Doing the government's bidding, the UCI administration is determined to send the message that it will allow nothing to stand in the way of Washington's alliance with Israel, U.S. imperialism's staunchest ally in the Near East.

In response to the prosecution of the Irvine 11, more than 50 protesters rallied outside the Orange County district attorney's office on February 1 demanding that the charges be dropped. Then a week later, the Jewish Voice for Peace delivered a petition to the DA with 5,000 signatures denouncing his decision to charge the 11 students. In addition, an open letter by 24 Orange County civic, legal and religious organizations stated that indictments against the Irvine 11 would have a severe chilling effect on the exercise of free speech on campuses and elsewhere, while a letter by 100 UCI professors called on the DA to drop criminal charges against the protesters. Even the *Los Angeles Times* felt compelled to demand, "Free the Irvine 11."

While defending the pro-Palestinian protesters against the criminal charges, the UCI professors ***supported*** the administration's disciplinary measures against the Irvine 11 and the MSU as "sufficient punishment." In contrast, we in the Spartacus Youth Club solidarize with the pro-Palestinian protesters' action against Oren, a leading architect of the Zionist oppression of the Palestinian people. With the blood of countless Palestinians on his hands, Oren praises the Israeli Defense Forces that massacred some 1,400 Palestinians during its heinous assault on the Gaza Strip in 2008 and lauds Israeli commandos for slaughtering nine people aboard the Turkish aid ship *Mavi Marmara* last May. Any punishment meted out to protesters for shouting down this war criminal is an outrage.

Adding its voice to the wave of protest against the attacks on the Irvine 11, the Partisan Defense Committee, a class-struggle legal and social defense organization associated with the Spartacist League, stated in a 14 February letter sent to the DA, "These prosecutions serve as well to engender an atmosphere of paranoia and hysteria, especially targeting Muslims, and to intimidate into silence anyone who speaks out against the brutal colonial occupation of Iraq or Afghanistan, or who defends the Palestinians against murderous assault by the Zionist state." In defending the Palestinian people against Zionist terror and heinous national oppression, we Marxists demand: ***All Israeli troops and settlers out of the occupied territories! Down with U.S. aid to Israel! U.S. hands off the world!***

UCI Goes After Unionists, Pro-Union Students

Two weeks after the protest against Oren, 17 people—including students and AFSCME Local 3299 organizers—were arrested for occupying the UCI chancellor's office in Aldrich Hall. Two students demonstrating outside the building were also arrested. Then in December, nearly a full year after the sit-in, the very busy Orange County District Attorney's office charged the protesters with trespassing, disturbing the peace and refusal to disperse. A UCI alumnus was charged with an additional count of trespassing—for daring to step onto the campus he once attended. And two of the demonstrators who are accused of rolling a dumpster up against the doors of the building are being slapped with the draconian charge of false imprisonment! In a 17 January letter to the Orange County DA, the PDC wrote, "For exercising their right to protest in defense of public higher education and workers rights, the UCI administration and OCDA have responded with vicious repression. This is an attack on the First Amendment rights of free speech and association whose purpose can only be to criminalize dissent. The PDC stands in solidarity with the protestors and demands that all charges be dropped now!"

The sit-in at Aldrich Hall, in which many members of the Workers-Student Alliance (WSA) at the Irvine campus participated, raised a series of demands directed at the UCI administration and the UC Board of Regents. In addition to insisting that no academic or legal action be taken against the Irvine 11, the protesters called on the university to in-source, or directly hire, janitorial and maintenance workers employed by a wage-gouging subcontractor. This move raised the hackles of the administration because it would open the door for these outsourced workers to join the union. The building occupiers also called on the university to rehire three laid-off groundskeepers and end unpaid furloughs forced on AFSCME workers.

Representing many campus workers, AFSCME has been demanding for two years that the university hire the workers

directly. However, the administration has responded by making insourcing contingent on the workers submitting to full background (read: citizenship) checks—a condition that AFSCME has rightly rejected. Such checks have played a key role in the deportations of nearly 800,000 immigrants in the last two years and are central to the “desktop raids” preferred by the Obama administration for firing and deporting undocumented workers and for victimizing union activists. In the midst of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s, the bourgeoisie is feverishly scapegoating immigrants for the disastrous conditions it alone has created. To break down the racial, ethnic and national divisions in the working class promoted by the Republicans and Democrats alike and to unite the workers in class struggle against the bosses, we fight for full citizenship rights for all immigrants.

Organizing the janitors at UCI into the union would strengthen all campus labor against the capitalist administration. We strongly support such organizing drives and fight for one campus union throughout the UC system representing all workers, faculty and staff. However, in the last decades, union membership nationwide has plummeted dramatically as a direct result of the policies of the pro-capitalist union bureaucracy, whose organic ties to the racist capitalist Democratic Party have hamstrung class struggle. The revival of class struggle in this country goes hand in hand with the fight to oust the union bureaucrats and replace them with a labor leadership based on a class-struggle program.

The historic task of revolutionaries in this socially and politically most backward of industrialized capitalist countries is to break the proletariat and the oppressed masses from illusions in the Democratic Party, the other party of American capitalism. The Democrats—no less than the Republicans—exist to regulate the affairs of the American ruling class and to ensure the dominance of U.S. imperialism at home and abroad. Abetted by the labor bureaucracy, the Democratic Party professes to be the “friend” of labor, blacks and the poor, making it more effective than the Republicans in cajoling the working people into making sacrifices demanded by the capitalists. Where the Republicans openly attack workers and minorities, the Democrats lie and do the same thing.

In the struggle to build a revolutionary workers party that is independent of the capitalist parties, the SYC—the youth auxiliary of the Spartacist League—understands that students and youth by themselves have no social power. Those yearning for social change must ally with the proletariat, the only force in modern society with the power, social cohesion and interest to topple the bourgeoisie and advance to an egalitarian socialist society in which class exploitation and all manner of racism, anti-immigrant bigotry, the oppression of women and homophobia will be faded memories of a long-distant, barbaric past. To fight for

this perspective, we seek to win students to the side of the working class as part of the struggle to forge a revolutionary workers party.

Besides taking up the cause of the campus workforce, the Aldrich Hall protesters directed their fire at looming budget cuts, homophobia, cop repression and growing racism on campus—as evidenced by the fact that ever-fewer numbers of black students can even dream of being admitted to the UC system. The racist purge of the universities resulting from the destruction of affirmative action and rising fees is also being translated into vile attacks on black students, as occurred last year at UC San Diego, where a despicable anti-black frat party was followed by the appearance of a lynch rope in the library (see “Lynch Rope Provocation at UC San Diego,” *WV* No. 955, 26 March 2010).

Despite their anger at rising tuition costs, however, the activists did not oppose the administration’s budget slashing outright, instead offering advice on how to distribute the cuts equitably. Thus they demanded that until state funding is fully restored to the UC system, all budget cuts imposed in the fall should be redistributed by imposing an equal percentage cut to each UCI school, adding, “We understand the position [the] administration is put in when the state chooses to divest away from the UC system.”

Based on a liberal program, the demands of the AFSCME organizers, the WSA and the other sit-in participants alibi the UCI administration in an effort to pressure it to improve the political, social and economic climate on campus. The fact is that the university administrators, including the UC Board of Regents, are the capitalist watchdogs over the university, and the universities in racist capitalist America are bourgeois institutions that serve the interests of the ruling class. In addition to promoting respect for the capitalist regime and inculcating allegiance to bourgeois values, the universities train the next generation of administrators, CEOs, military officers, spies, bourgeois politicians and diplomats to run the affairs of U.S. imperialism. To beat back skyrocketing tuition costs, open the doors of the university to minority students or defend the right to free speech on campus, students must link up with the power of the working class in struggle *against* the administration.

As socialists, we in the SYC stand for free, quality integrated education for all. We say: ***Abolish the administration and the Board of Regents! For worker/student/teacher control of the universities! For open admissions, no tuition and a state-paid living stipend for all students!*** Our starting point is the understanding that to lead a successful fight against racism, anti-immigrant bigotry, the attacks on education and the exploitation of the working class, it is necessary to build a revolutionary workers party dedicated to the struggle for socialist revolution and a collectivized, planned economy.

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