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Wednesday 22 January 2020

# STUDENTS + WORKERS TEACH THE UC

Among the scant communications from our largely aloof chancellor, you may remember a recent announcement that proclaimed UCSC's election to the Association of American Universities (admin's PR machine ironically celebrated this as "radical" excellence), a consortium whose most enduring legacy in the American academy may have been its leading role in the ideological purges of faculty in the 1950s and the long wave of intellectual conformism that followed. Along with a litany of prestigious honors and association memberships, this is trotted out as self-evidence of the high distinction that students will somehow benefit from by attending this institution. As to how students actually figure in this operation, a more accurate picture is buried in data like that presented in the Economic Impact Report, which touts the university's capacity to draw hundreds of millions of dollars into the community through student spending on *rent, food, and transportation* (the costs of which are strangling us all). This money that pours into the coffers of local extortionist landlords is then put to further work, justifying increased enrollment and thereby further exacerbating the crisis, even as rising tuition dollars are pledged as collateral on bonds for new construction and capital investment elsewhere.

That there is a massive gap between proclamations of excellence and the lived reality of the student body will surprise no one, even among the less cynical. But the thoroughgoing degree to which students have been transformed into quantifiable elements of an economy of excellence is perhaps not immediately perceptible. Throughout the COLA grading strike, graduate student workers have been vilified from various quarters of the university for negatively impacting the academic experience and progress of undergraduates. And yet, as strikers have repeatedly insisted, no qualitative aspects of their educational roles were abandoned—in this respect the only "thing" withheld (our labor notwithstanding) was an abstract sign under which undergraduate academic work enters into circulation within funding structures, honors programs, admissions quotas, etc. As such data, student performance becomes a metric of excellence completely divorced from the learning, mentorship, and inquiry that this strike ultimately seeks to defend. Claims to the effect that the quality of undergraduate education is a primary focus of this institution—only interrupted by graduate students' demands—are misleading and false. The existence of this "education" is

increasingly only an excuse for other operations, which, under the guise of academic distinction, grant a patina of integrity to otherwise questionable investments.

No one is more responsible for this outcome than the UC regents. Looking at their meeting agendas, one might plausibly wonder what they actually have to do with education. The composition of this body—investment bankers, developers, high-powered attorneys and politicians grace its lofty ranks—tells a quite different story, one that only incidentally involves "education" (except, of course, as defined solely through reference to its market value). But make no mistake, even if they do not understand what it is, they have big plans for it. Their proposal for 5 consecutive years of undergraduate tuition hikes was abruptly removed from today's agenda,

when they realized it couldn't be slipped under the radar unopposed. We do not simply oppose

the increase of tuition, however, but the very existence of this body of hucksters otherwise known as the regents.

Wherever possible, their meetings should be opposed, crashed, and disrupted—exposed for the farce they are—while a new vision of education is asserted in their place.

## Strikes, organization, and more strikes.

This is what political education looks like, and is precisely what the university keeps at the margins, even if it cannot be kept off the table entirely (there are still some professors here who teach history). Is the strike with which K7 skilled workers just achieved a fair contract a sign of stirring good health beneath UC's regime of labor repression? We would argue, rather, that the workers themselves, through their ongoing strike activity (which includes the threat of shutting down access to transit this week) forced this very outcome. It is not that the administration is incapable of acting in good faith, but rather that their "good faith" is incapable of ever truly transforming this sick institution. Now another malaise is spreading across Academic Student Employees, one that has ultimately issued from university governance coupled with the daily reality of living in the paradisiacal squalor of rent-burdened Santa Cruz. As hundreds withdraw from university operations and obligations today to recover (call it a "sick-out"), many among us are taking our demands directly to the regents meeting. This is not because we think they will listen—though they might hear—but to renew our contacts with other campuses, embolden each other, and spread the strike.

