

Friday 14 FEBRUARY 2020
day #5 – news on the picketline

COPS OFF CAMPUS / COLA IN MY BANK ACCOUNT

This week, “business as usual” has been rendered impossible at this university. What has been most significant over the course of the last few days is the potent combination of collective size and spirit that we have been able to sustain. By sticking together—the real meaning of solidarity—we have fused the moral claim that a COLA4ALL is necessary with the political claim that real power resides in our collective capacity to strike. What’s clear is that this power is most evident when we disrupt the regular course of things. There is the strike, of course, with graduate students withholding their labor, but we’ve also witnessed so many undergraduates mobilizing the physical barricade—surely any sense of normalcy at UC Santa Cruz has taken to its heels, along with, apparently, the inhabitants of Kerr Hall. As a result, demands previously framed by the administration as simply “impossible” are now suddenly within reach, a clear outcome of unrelenting picketing, blockade, and mass assembly. Surely what admin really thought was impossible was our willingness to fight them this far. We have called their bluff.

For the last two days our strike effectively shut down campus for the entirety of each afternoon. Blocking the main entrance for hours, hundreds of undergraduate and graduate strikers, faculty as well as staff, withstood police repression and ultimately forced outnumbered phalanxes of riot cops to stand down. Seventeen of our comrades were arrested (and suspended from school) on Wednesday, while even more were subjected to police violence. The administration has worked hard to routinize the presence of its militarized police this week (going so far as to grant armed officers use of the “Community Room” in Family Student Housing for a break room and bathroom). Instead, it has multiplied animosity and expanded our movement, obviously much further than admin was banking on. One cop—probably out of frustration with his inability to manage the situation—simply told one of us that their orders “came from Larive.” It’s hard to imagine such a moment of candor coming from the Chancellor herself.

Yet, there have been difficult moments where we’ve brushed up against tactical impasses. Following the legacy of civil disobedience, many of us sat down on Wednesday, unwilling to voluntarily move according to police orders. Though courageous, these moments quickly opened onto significant peril. We suddenly found ourselves pleading with the cops, leaning on moral claims—“SHAME!”—against a social force that has absolutely no moral basis. But as we all know, there is no pleading with the police. Their historic and institutional function militates against any moral imperative. Thus what began as non-compliance quickly became involuntary compliance, as our comrades were attacked, arrested, and hauled away. We are not here to get arrested (which, aside from being dangerous, holds no inherent strategic value) but to make arrest impossible by virtue of our strength and tactical agility. We are here to win.

The administration’s mistake has always been to misidentify where real power resides—not in their petty but well-compensated titles (“executive vice whatever”), nor in the institutions of the legal system

that cops pretend to uphold. Class power—the daring struggle of the exploited, overworked, and dominated; be they workers, students, or the down and out—intervenes in the present, and shapes our relationship to the future no less than the past. Power does not lie exclusively in our claim to moral righteousness. It lies in our capacity to integrate our demands into offensively, securing real material gains through coordinated, collective action. This process is not rooted in symbolic appeals to journalists (we are familiar with the rapping of social media activism), politicians, or union bureaucrats—all of which, incidentally, can be features of the movement—but struggle.

How many years have our peers asked previous administrative leaders to make the changes we need? To fund our libraries and our student services? To defund UC police and fund adjuncts? To reduce housing costs for students and workers alike? There is no more asking. We will win our demands through collective force, or we will get nothing at all. Undergraduates, in a significant example, have acted this week in powerful ways, in large numbers and autonomous groups, and have begun to articulate demands radical enough to turn this institution on its head. They have channeled the demand for “COPS OFF CAMPUS” into a real antagonism with police on campus, while drawing on recent movements that have employed militant anti-police tactics elsewhere (take, for example, the mass unrest in Ferguson MO, which propelled forward a national movement against racist police violence).

We should not silo our tactical decisions to the historical record of our own strike when there are so many historical references, and contemporary parallels, to pull from. It is clear that it is not only other academic workers and students who are watching our struggle right now—all around the country we are gathering support from people who are putting up a fight for liveable wages, more autonomy and dignity, and healthy working and living conditions. Wherever there is exploitation, there is struggle against it. People, everywhere, are running up against the limits of what it means to exist in this society, and are actively pushing these forward towards a transformative vision of social life. This week the university itself has been changed into a site of struggle, but also the glimpse of something else: there has been celebration in the street, and in place of the daily miseries wrought by the institution, there has been joy. Let us carry this forward.



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