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Statement from John Bruning about his arrest

John Bruning

November 25, 2009

11/25/09

I first want to thank everyone for your continued support during this ordeal. I have never seen the UCI community feel so strong and empowered than in the past few days. I only hope that my personal fight can be used constructively and positively by students in furtherance of our movement against budget cuts, administrative secrecy, and police violence.

I was present at the rally yesterday, November 24, which I think 700–1000 students attended. At the beginning of the rally, I was asked to give some introductory remarks about why we were there. I spoke about the attacks by police against students at UCLA and by administrators against AB540 students (I have since learned that administration is no longer classifying AB540 students as “undocumented alien” or “undocumented student”). I also stated my belief that this campus belongs to students, that we shouldn’t put up with the administration continually taking from us through tuition and cuts in services and classes. I concluded by saying that we will need to take the campus back, “building by building if we need to.” I was asked later

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Retrieved on November 29, 2009 from
occupyuci.wordpress.com

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to briefly MC. Between speakers, I drew students' attention to police putting on riot helmets and carrying batons and tasers, saying that the administration was so scared of us having a voice that they needed police to intimidate us.

We then marched around Ring Road, with a number of riot-ready police tailing us. I'm referring to these police as "riot-ready" because they were not formally equipped as riot police; that is, they carried batons, tasers, and helmets, but didn't have the full Stormtrooper costume. As we proceeded around Ring Road, students negotiated with professors to cancel class, and in others got students to walk out of class. When we arrived back at Aldrich Hall, the UCI administration building, we encountered police barricades erected, and behind that, 2 lines of UCIPD and IPD officers wearing helmets and holding clubs. The officers held and played with the batons in such a way to suggest that they were ready to use them even if unprovoked. Police — especially UCIPD — each had a handgun on one side and a taser on the other. It should be pointed out that the murder of Oscar Grant by BART police in Oakland happened because the cop mistook his gun for his taser. These tasers, yellow X26 models, have been denounced by the ACLU and Amnesty International and are responsible for a number of deaths.

Students showed a great deal of strength in approaching their barricades, standing within tasing and beating distance of police to hear speakers. The police would not budge, and students retreated to Ring Road... only to reapproach Aldrich Hall from a different entrance. This entrance in particular, on the first floor across from Starbucks, was designated by signs on all the other entrances that this entrance would be open to the public. As we got near, police grabbed the door and quickly shut it. A group of students approached the door, and began banging on it. One officer verbally threatened to tase students. On three occasions, officers opened the door to pepper spray or mace students. The third time, about 6–8 officers rushed out-

side and the students closest to the door quickly retreated into the crowd.

At this time, I left the protest to find a bathroom, because my ear and arm were burning from the chemical agent. I felt irritation in my eyes and throat as well. When I came back a few minutes later, the police had agreed to let 2 students into the building to speak with administrators. This showed just how disingenuous the police and administrators are, as the students reported back that Vice Chancellor Gomez was in his office but wouldn't see them, and Chancellor Drake as always was out of his office. His chief of staff, Ramona Agrela, said she could see about setting up a meeting with Drake, but wouldn't promise anything or provide a timeline; Ramona asked the students to submit a list of names for the meeting via email. I have tried to schedule meetings with Drake since February and have yet to receive an appointment. The administration at UCI is particularly adept at giving students the run-around and avoiding accountability. After this was announced, I encountered a student reporter from the *New University* (the campus paper) who asked me about the pepper spray incident. As I was speaking to him, about 8 police rushed around me. They grabbed me hard, said "John Bruning, you are under arrest," and forced me up the hill and into Aldrich Hall. The entire time they were moving me, they were twisting my arms up behind my back and twisting my wrists to subject me to pain. I saw a number of my current and past students, and some friends; I heard at least one student say, "hey, that's my TA!" As I was walking, I repeatedly asked why I was being arrested and told them they were hurting me. I was taken past the line of riot police and into Aldrich Hall, where I was thrown to the ground, lightly kicked in the head (though this may have been incidental), and handcuffed. They tightened the handcuffs to the extent that later that evening I still had red lines around my wrists and red marks on my right hand from where circulation was cut off. I also have a pain in my right bicep from my treatment that persists 24 hours as I

write this, and some tingling in my right hand. One of the officers told me, “nice performance out there.” When I told him I was really in pain, he just laughed.

I was taken to the first floor of Aldrich Hall, where I was searched and had all of my belongings taken out of my pockets. The officer that searched me was Officer Chon or Chan (I didn’t get a good look at his nametag), who was involved in the beating of students at the Regents Meeting a week ago at UCLA. I was instructed to sit down. I began coughing as the chemical agent from earlier began to irritate my throat and lungs more. Another officer who was also involved in the violence at UCLA, Monsanto or Monsato, in photos next to the previous officer, gave me water. I repeatedly asked officers why I was arrested, and the most helpful comment was that I wasn’t arrested, only detained. Funny, considering I had already been placed under arrest. After some time, I’m not sure how long, I was moved down the hallway, past the entrance where students were. I noticed they had a set of doors closed with paper over the windows to keep students from seeing that I was being taken out of the building. I also heard the chants of “Free John!” outside, and those gave me a lot of courage. Knowing then that so many were supporting me kept me going through the remainder of the ordeal. I was moved farther down the hallway to a stairwell. The police were about to put me in there, and I was worried they might try to inflict more pain upon me there. Instead, a woman came down, and seemed completely flustered by the presence of the 4 or 5 police grabbing me. The police let her out into the hallway. I told her that I had been arrested and that they weren’t telling me what for. She responded with something along the lines of “oh dear!” and scurried down the hallway. One officer told me, “don’t fucking talk to her” and “don’t ever try to pull that shit again.”

I was taken by squad car to the campus police station, on East Peltason Drive by the Verano housing complex. There I was put in a cell. I whistled some old revolutionary songs, like Solidar-

the struggle. They may beat us or jail us but they will never stop our movement.

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given their lethality, and I would not at all be surprised if sometime this year police shot a student dead or killed them another way. Looking into the eyes of the police yesterday, in all but a few cases, there was the appearance of outright contempt for students and their safety. A few looked as if orders were the only thing keeping them from clubbing skulls. My arresting officer carried a look of hatred on his face, as if students' needs were the only thing keeping him from happiness. One has to wonder, with all of the rage these men contain where their souls should be, how they take care of their aggression when there aren't protests. At home, on their families? I hope not, for their sake. Maybe they have a nice hobby, like playing baseball.

I doubt I will be the last arrest, even at UCI. The way that the police are escalating the struggle, we need to be prepared for them and their weapons and find terrain where we have the upper hand. If we are honest with ourselves and truly want to create a better society, we need to become increasingly comfortable with the risks associated with victory. We will lose comrades and friends to a variety of things, whether it's the cold steel of the jail cell or the gun. This is becoming our reality. In the coming months, we need to stand strong together, as a community, because only as a community can we construct something better.

I am humbled by the outpouring of support I have so far received, and will continue to draw on that for strength as my legal fight continues. I also encourage all of you to stand in solidarity with the 52 students arrested last week at Mrak Hall at UC Davis, the 41 arrested at Wheeler Hall at UC Berkeley, Doug G., and Brian Glasscock, and Olivia Egan Rudolph from UC Santa Cruz, and the 14 students arrested inside the UC Regents meeting at UCLA.

I do not believe I have done anything illegal or unjustified. Even if I am prosecuted for these charges, I will never give up

ity Forever, Bandiera Rossa, and A Las Barricadas to pass the time and give myself strength. One officer came to ask me questions for booking. Later, the arresting officer, I think his last name was Arnold told me my charges: attempted vandalism and resisting arrest. This was the same officer that maced students earlier, and who warned me not to talk to anyone. When I asked what I tried to vandalize, he told me it was for banging on the door to Aldrich earlier. Both charges were misdemeanors. He read me my rights. I asked to see a lawyer, and he denied my request, saying I couldn't speak to counsel until my arraignment. He said I would likely be sent to Orange County Jail. The Orange County Jail is by far one of the worst jails in the world, and apparently worse than even LA County. The number of neo-Nazis and institutional power of white supremacist gangs would have posed a major risk to my safety. He asked me a few questions, to which I answered only in vague terms and generalities about the intent of our movement, not with my own personal involvement. I finally told him I wouldn't answer any more questions without a lawyer present. He left. More waiting. Then more booking questions. I was asked to show the officer my tattoos. I asked the processing officer if I could have my personal belongings released to another student. They told me they would try, but no promises. A little while later, my partner Cristina came to the station with a few other friends asking about me. The officer asked if I wanted my property released to her, and they gave her everything. More waiting. Then I was taken out to get fingerprinted. Then back to the holding cell and more waiting. More exchanges happened with the police. I was finally asked to come outside by a new officer, Sloan, to fingerprint and sign my citation for the two misdemeanors. The citation also listed my court date for January 26, 2010. I was given my copy and my shoes and he opened the door for me to leave. I was released around 4:30pm.

I walked back to campus, where I met up with Cristina and other students. We quickly ate, I called a journalist friend at

Santa Cruz to update him, and then called my mother to let her know I had been arrested. We then went to an emergency meeting in the Cross Cultural Center to discuss the day's events and look ahead to the future. As we were meeting, the same officer from earlier, Monsanto/Monsato, drove up in a police SUV. A few students from Black Student Union, Muslim Student Union, and Umbrella Council approached him outside to see what he was doing there. He then asked them a number of questions, most if not all concerning me: did they know me? was I associated with their group? did they know anything else about me? The students went back inside without answering the questions, and informed the group about the exchange. At the meeting, we discussed the possible meeting with the Chancellor and who would represent the group. We selected seven students and one union representative to meet with the Chancellor.

I think there is enough evidence through the series of events yesterday to suggest that I have been singled out as an organizer by UCI Administration and UCIPD. I also believe that this arrest was intended to keep me out of commission for the Langson Library study-in next week, as well as to further intimidate students from organizing.

This morning, I was informed that a rumor is circulating that I was arrested for punching a police officer. This is categorically untrue, and obviously untrue given the charges. I believe this is the result of a deliberate attempt by the UCI Administration to smear my credibility as I fight these charges, bring bad press to the movement, and undermine outrage against these ridiculous charges.

Ramona also responded to us this evening about the meeting. A meeting with Drake has been scheduled for Friday, December 4, at 3:30pm. Out of the list of five individuals sent to Ramona, per her request, only three were "approved" for the meeting. Two individuals involved in the ongoing workers' struggle were explicitly banned from meeting with Drake.

A request for a *New University* reporter to be present was also ignored. Apparently Drake pre-screens students to see which ones he thinks he can manipulate, either through personality or institutional pressure, such as club funding. I know that the students who do meet with him will hold it down in the meeting though, assuming Drake doesn't pull out at the last minute.

What we have long understood but which is now more apparent, is that the UCI Administration completely lacks any semblance of accountability or moral leadership, and the UCIPD has enjoyed total impunity for their actions. This needs to change; but protesting can't change this. We will always be locked out of Aldrich Hall and Drake will always be gone for the day. We need to explore other venues for creating the university we want to see, rather than just begging for change. And since our pleas have thus far fallen on deaf ears, we need to find ways to take for ourselves what we need.

The California State government already spends more money on jails than on schools, and three times as much to house a single inmate as to educate a UC student for a year. But the lines between student and prisoner, while rarely distinct, are becoming more blurry. Over one hundred UC students have been arrested in the past week for protesting the disastrous 32% tuition increase. Our police are also becoming more militarized, and function more as prison guards than as peacekeepers. As the number of building occupations around the state nears 20 and our protests have turned into skirmishes and are growing ever closer to riots, it is clear that we are nearing the cusp of ungovernability. UCOP, the Chancellors, and the UCPD are beside themselves trying to figure out how to control us.

The tactics of UCPD have quickly escalated in the past week. The last political arrest at UCI was a few years ago, during the struggle to insource workers. In my time at UCI, there has not been an incident where police pepper sprayed students, especially not at a peaceful protest. The use of tasers is troublesome