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17 May 2007, Hunger Strike, 9th Day

A REPORT OUT FROM THE MEETING OF THE REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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This report is from Jedidjah de Vries, Tri-Valley CAREs' Outreach Director.

Enjoy...

On Thursday, May 17, I went to the UC regents meeting along with 40 hunger strikers and many many supporters. Here's what I wrote up for the blog at nonukehungerstrike.blogspot.com.

The regents' meeting began at 8 with an announcement. Because so many people had signed up to speak during the public comments period the regents elected to extend the time allotted from 20 minutes to a full half hour.

Despite the extra 10 minutes not even close to everyone had the opportunity to have their voice heard. A number of the hunger strikers - for whom this was the ninth day without food - spoke out, as well as many supporters, including myself, Jackie Cabasso of the Western States Legal Foundation, Professor Charles Schwartz of UC Berkeley and representatives from Physicians for Social Responsibility, including Dr. Robert Gould.

The comments were amazing to listen to. They exhibited the students' depth of understanding of the issue with their detailed critic of RRW. They attacked the regents for continuing to choose to involve the university in the immoral nuclear weapons' business. They conveyed the broad community support for severance. And, most importantly, they spoke of the passion and commitment of the students. One hunger striker reminded the regents that "We are not starving for fun". Another described his aching body and then explained that the ache in his heart every time he thought about the University's role in the creation of nuclear weapons was far greater. As he spoke the students' spontaneously all held up peace signs.

After the public comments period everyone left the hall and gathered outside on the grass in a giant circle. One by one, going around the circle, everyone spoke. Unlike inside, there was time for everyone. Students expressed their joy of being part of this group that was fighting to steer the university towards a new, conscientious, path. They reminded each other that they - the students - were the real university; and, that they held the power to bring about a better future.

Next came the nitty-gritty, the planning. Everyone bunched up close together and, through consensus, decided how to proceed should the regents ignore the demands of their constituents and choose to continue with their regular business: the nuclear weapons' business.

The group filtered back into the meeting around eleven. At first we were told that there weren't enough seats but eventually everyone was allowed inside. We listened to the tail end of a presentation by the faculty senate which explained that the only way to maintain the quality and character of the university was increased state funding. Many in the audience were dismayed that the regents seemed unaccepting of this news.

Finally, the Committee on Oversight of the Department of Energy Laboratories convened. It was quickly clear that the regents did not intend to even acknowledge the moral quagmire they drag the university into, let alone resolving it by severing ties with the weapons labs. A group of hunger strikers stood up and demanded the regents respond to their demands. Regent Norman Pattiz assured the group that the regents had heard their message and that "[The regents] need to go forward with the business of the university." Up on the screen was the first slide of a presentation entitled "Report on the National Nuclear Security Administration Vision for the Nuclear Weapons Complex of 2030" i.e. the plan to revamp the nuclear weapons complex in order to restart production and create new nuclear weapons, the first of which (RRW-1) is already being designed at the Livermore lab.

The hunger strikers made it clear that so long as the regents chose "to go forward with the business of the university" when that business was creating new nuclear weapons and refused to even discuss the matter, the hunger strikers and their supporters were going to continue to demand accountability and moral responsibility from their university.

The regents brushed off the protest by saying it was not through proper channels. They seemed to think they were not responsible for nuclear weapons in any way. Someone shouted out to the regents "what would you do?" Pattiz told the hunger strikers "I hope you will go and have some lunch." A chant of "Give Peace a Chance" was taken up by the crowd. Intermittently people would shout out things such as: "You don 't need to be a subsidiary to Bechtel." "Listen to your students." "The University's business is the nuke business," "Don't build new nukes."

Most of the chanters were still sitting peacefully in their seats, hoping the regents would at least discuss their role in nuclear complex and consider the demand for severance. Instead the regents eventually left and called in the police to clear the room. After the police announcement all, but thirteen, of the hunger strikers and their supporters left the room. The thirteen that remained locked arms and waited to be arrested.

Outside the room the energy continued with chants of "Whose university? Our university!" and "UC Nuclear Free!" as well as informal teach-ins and in depth discussions of the issue. Liaisons kept in close touch with the police and a representative of the regents to keep track of the arrestees. The regents eventually resumed their meeting, but now without any public to witness it. The students moved outside the building, making themselves, and especially the hunger strikers, available to the media. A car was quickly dispatched to pick up the arrestees who were being cited and released and a nearby jail.

The hunger strikers and their supporters took some time to talk amongst themselves on the lawn behind the building. The mood was jubilant because they knew they had just exercised their power as students. But, it was also serious because the threat of nuclear weapons remains, the university

continues to be part of that threat and there is still much organizing and work to be done. As everyone dispersed to return to their communities and campuses one hunger striker remarked, "I was really ready to go into the meeting, and I 'll be ready for the next one in July."

Addendum – For the record: The discussion item the regents were about to go into when students and supporters disrupted the meeting was entitled:

REPORT ON THE NATIONAL NUCLEAR SECURITY ADMINISTRATION (NNSA) VISION FOR THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS COMPLEX OF 2030

[Complex 2030 is the plan to revamp the nuclear weapons complex in order to restart production and create new nuclear weapons, the first of which (RRW-1) is already being designed at the Livermore Lab.]

The official description of the item runs as follows:

"Mr. Glenn Mara, Principal Associate Director for Weapons Programs, Los Alamos National Laboratory, will provide a summary of this key NNSA initiative in which both LANL and LLNL are integrally involved."

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Wednesday, May 23, 2007

At Cheadle Hall Camp Site, UCSB Hunger Strikers to Announce Major Campaign Breakthroughs, End of Their Fast

A REPORT OUT FROM THE MEETING OF THE REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Press Conference, 12 p.m., In front of Cheadle Hall, UCSB

"No More Nukes In Our Name" Hunger Strikers

Only a few days after collectively breaking their fast, the UCSB contingent of the multi-campus "No Nukes In Our Name!" hunger strikers will hold a press conference to announce the multiple breakthrough successes that resulted from this recent bold act of civil resistance. They will also announce some of the next steps in their campaign to demilitarize the University of California.

Among the hunger strikers' announcements will be that they have secured meetings with members of the UC Board of Regents to discuss UC nuclear weapons lab severance, a June 8th UCSB faculty senate resolution to support some of the goals of the hunger strike, and the repercussions - politically and judicially - of their direct action at the May 17th UC Regents meeting at UC San Francisco. Thirteen people were arrested at the meeting, including 10 UC students.

"In the three years I've been involved in the campaign to sever the UC's nuclear weapons ties, this is the first time I've seen the students put the UC Regents publicly on the defensive regarding their role as weapons lab managers," said Will Parrish, a UC Santa Cruz alumnus and hunger striker who fasted for 11 days. "Not only that, but support for the campaign has grown immensely, among all sectors of the UC community - students, staff, faculty, and alumni. Though the hunger strike did not achieve its ultimate goal of UC weapons lab severance, we have achieved some major breakthroughs, and we are poised to achieve even bigger ones very soon, as a result of the momentum the hunger strike has created."

Maia Kazaks, a hunger striker and third-year UCSB Environmental Studies major, said: "These recent steps have been really powerful. But we have to keep educating and keep expanding our foundation of support. This will ultimately lead not only to a nuclear-free university, but a more peaceful world."

Many of the supporters who were critical to the success of the hunger strike, including UCSB faculty members and staff, will be on hand at the press conference. After its conclusion, the hunger strikers and their supporters who camped in front of Cheadle Hall will disassemble their tent community, which is in its 15th day as of this writing.
