

A warning to students and the working class

Who are California Governor Jerry Brown's appointments to the University of California Board of Regents?

By Evelyn Rios
10 September 2018

Democratic California Governor Jerry Brown announced the appointment of four new members to the University of California Board of Regents last month. The four appointees—Michael Cohen, Cecilia V. Estolano, Richard Leib and Laphonza Butler—are trusted representatives of the financial oligarchy and the military-intelligence apparatus and will play an essential role in the university's further integration into the state apparatus and corporate America.

The selections will join the 28-member Board of Regents, which dictates all aspects of life for the 238,000 students and 190,000 staff throughout the ten campuses, five medical centers, 16 health professional schools, three national laboratories and numerous satellite facilities that comprise the largest public institution of higher learning in the world.

As for their qualifications:

- Cohen has served as director of the California Department of Finance and as Brown's top budget advisor for the past five years. Since his early August nomination to the board, he has been named the Chief Financial Officer of the California Public Employee Retirement System or CalPERS. Cohen has been the California governor's top strategist for imposing merciless austerity measures on the working class, including years of massive cuts to CalWorks Welfare to Work program, Supplemental Security Income/State Supplemental Payment (SSI/SSP) recipients, and the axing of dental and vision coverage from Medi-Cal.

- Estolano was the senior policy advisor at the US Environmental Protection Agency from 1993 to 1995 and is a founder and chief executive at Estolano LeSar Advisors, a redevelopment consulting firm. Among her prior appointments is chief executive of the Los Angeles City redevelopment agency from 2006 through 2009 in the administration of former Democratic Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

- Leib is a longtime business executive and consultant who has spent years in the defense and spyware industry. Currently a member of the Solana Beach School District Board of Education and the CEO of Dunleer Strategies, Leib was the executive vice president and general counsel at US Public Technologies from

1994 to 1999 where his company developed applications to process and gather data for automated traffic enforcement. In 1999 Lockheed Martin acquired the company and Leib became vice president of the arms manufacturer from 1999 to 2001.

- Butler is Chair of the University of California African-American Advisory Council and president of SEIU Local 2015, the largest union in California, which represents 325,000 assisted living center and home-care workers. Butler's greatest asset for the ruling establishment is her perceived ability to corral the poorest paid workers within the ranks of the union and behind the Democratic Party. As a black woman, Butler rides the coattails of identity politics, raking in a yearly salary of over \$230,000 while posing as a champion of the poor by advocating a \$15 an hour statewide minimum wage, a paltry \$31,200 a year full time.

This year, under Butler's leadership, the union hailed the allowance of sick days as a progressive "baby step" for their workers who live in conditions of poverty with wages at or below \$12 an hour. Butler was previously the SEIU's Property Services Division Director and was responsible for "the strategic direction of the more than 250,000 janitors, security officers, window cleaners and food service workers across the country."

Before entering the leadership of the SEIU, Butler was the Director for the Board of Governors of the Los Angeles branch of the Federal Reserve System. The inclusion of Butler, a union bureaucrat, on the Board of Regents further confirms the right-wing and anti-working class character of the SEIU and other organizations like it.

The UC Board of Regents is so despised by students and the university workforce, that every meeting it holds is met with demonstrations. At the board's meeting in May, police officers escorted the Regents out and declared the protest "unlawful," warning the assembled low-wage service sector workers that if they did not disband in five minutes they would be arrested.

Beginning in 2011, when they voted to increase fees by 30 percent, the Regents were forced to conduct their business in secret, meeting solely on the UC San Francisco campus, where there is no undergraduate population.

The University of California is the largest non-governmental

employer in the state of California, in turn the world's fifth largest economy with a GDP larger than the United Kingdom. In 2017 the state reported global assets of \$109.8 billion. The UC System plays a critical role in setting the bar for wages and working conditions throughout the state and beyond its borders. According to the UC Office of the President, the behemoth of an institution "generates more than \$46 billion in economic activity in California" and "supports 1 out of every 46 jobs" in the state.

California is home to more of the "super rich" than anywhere else in the US. At the same time it has some of the highest poverty rates and highest cost of living. According to the Economic Policy Institute, California ranks among the top five states with the highest income inequality.

The University of California typifies this process, having built an army of low-wage temporary workers while rapidly expanding the number of highly paid administrators. The Great Recession of 2008 was used by the UC administration with the support of the unions as a wrecking ball against the working class, casualizing labor across the system. What followed were perpetual layoffs, the ushering in of thousands of low-wage temporary workers, while students saw the imposition of unprecedented tuition hikes, the closing of libraries across the campuses, and ending of all forms of student support services.

According to a report produced by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME): "[T]he number of six- to seven-digit salaries escalated for UC executives, as did the ranks of its middle managers. Even with \$1.4 billion in tuition increases to replace \$900 million in state funding cuts, UC administrators resorted to multiple cost cutting strategies. This included the outsourcing of hundreds, if not thousands, of service jobs (including maintenance, custodial, and food service)."

The UC has been assisted in this massive attack on the working class by the unions, which have made it their goal to "work with UC," assisting it in pushing through layoffs and furloughs in the aftermath of the recession.

AFSCME is the largest union in the UC System, representing its lowest paid layers, nearly 24,000 UC employees, over 8,000 of whom are service workers and 13,000 are engaged in patient care. These workers have been on the job without a contract since June 30, 2017. Like all of the established trade unions, AFSCME is working with the administration to ensure that workers remain at poverty wages, are compelled to pay more toward their own retirement, and that the UC Retirement option is gutted and replaced with 401k plans.

The union takes no responsibility for the brutal poverty of its members. In 2014, AFSCME openly admitted that "99 percent of service workers [are] currently income eligible for some form of public assistance, and some full time UC workers [are] even living in their cars." Since then, things have only gotten worse.

AFSCME has defended the UC system against the anger of its own membership, calling a three-day strike in May to vent steam while giving the UC weeks to locate scab labor. After this stunt, AFSCME urged its members to call the office of Janet Napolitano, President of the Board of Regents, to plead for improved conditions and pay.

Rather than uniting workers in opposition to their exploiters,

AFSCME has sought to divide them on the basis of race and gender. A recent report by AFSCME, *Pioneering Inequality*, argued that the real travesty is not that workers are paid poverty wages, but that a Latino female service worker makes a dollar less an hour than her white male counterpart. The study recommended a more equal share of low wage work.

Conditions are not better for many students. A report published in December, *Global Food Initiative: Food and Housing Security at the University of California*, found that "19 percent of UC students indicated they had 'very low' food security... An additional 23 percent were characterized as having 'low' food security, defined by the USDA as reduced quality, variety or desirability of diet, with little or no indication of reduced food intake." Five percent of UC students reported in surveys that they experienced homelessness, and among students who were independent—those without the support of family or parents—the number is twice that, ten percent.

The protests at the UC Board of Regents are one expression of how such conditions are breeding immense social anger. The UC campus police have been readied to meet and suppress this anger, having been increasingly militarized, clashing with students in riot gear and turning campuses into war zones. These supposed "Peace Officers" across the UC system have carried out some of the largest mass arrests in history and have aggressively attacked students, beating them with batons, shooting them at point blank range with rubber bullets, and dousing peaceful protesters with pepper spray.

Anticipating even larger demonstrations, the UC campus police have repeatedly attempted to acquire military grade mine resistant armored vehicles from the Department of Homeland Security. At least 117 colleges have acquired equipment from the Department of Defense under the federal 1033 Program, which transfers military surplus to law-enforcement agencies and campus police.

The new appointees, and the UC regents as a whole, are representatives of the financial aristocracy and enemies of the working class. It is not by accident that Janet Napolitano, the former Secretary of Homeland Security under President Barack Obama, was selected as the President of the Regents. It was a calculated preparation by the financial oligarchy in anticipation of upheavals among workers and students.

The Socialist Equality Party calls on UC workers, students, faculty and staff to build chapters of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at their campus as well as rank-and-file workplace committees to oppose these appointments and the militarization of their universities. The UC system must be taken out of the hands of the financial oligarchy and the corporate-approved Board of Regents, to be transformed into an institution that provides free high-quality public education for all.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>