

# Student Radicals Against UC

Flyers rained down on some of the best brains in the state at the April 24 inauguration of University of California Chancellor Robert Berdahl. Just as the assembled celebrities of academe and assorted national powermongers hushed in anticipation of the ceremonial moment itself, a dark haired student stood up and declared "You're locking our sisters and brothers out of school" and leaflets showered on Donna Shalala and the crowd amid chants of "Educate, Don't Segregate." The 50 to 100 strong pro-affirmative action demonstration made it onto local tv complete with the students' quotes about "one man's hypocrisy."

The fact is, Chancellor Berdahl barely made a move this spring that student activists didn't anticipate and mess up.

On April 18, Cal Day — the institution's grand fete for potential newcomers — neatly dressed seniors handed out helpful-looking materials to prospective freshmen and their parents: "Things You Should Know About Cal." Inside the handouts — more dirt on the administration's failure to stand up to the foes of affirmative action.

A day before the official announcement of the university's first post-affirmative action admissions figures, students turned the tables on the administration by pre-empting the Chancellor's press conference with one of their own. Their well-attended event leaked the dismal data before the university's media machine cranked into gear.

Outraged students, high schoolers and faculty grabbed headlines across the country and by week's end the terms of the debate were theirs. A flustered Berdahl, who claims to support affirmative action, had to defend his administration's rejection of roughly 2,000 black, latino and American Indian high-schoolers who had grade point averages of 4.0 and SAT scores of 1,200 and up.

Anti-affirmative action Proposition 209 went into effect at UC Berkeley this year, and the admissions department cut back black, latino and American Indian students 68 percent. If the accepted students enroll at the typical rate (roughly two-thirds usually take up the offer and this year more than usual may prefer to go elsewhere) fewer than a dozen blacks will participate in 1998's 1,800-person

freshman class. American Indians will make up 0.3 percent.

"Tired of Compliance. Time for Defiance." That was the students' message. Most spectacularly, on April 2, around 500 protestors marched behind a banner bearing those words through downtown Berkeley to Berkeley High School and sat in the middle of the large intersection at Telegraph Avenue and Bancroft. Teachers had to lock the gates to stop high-school kids from joining the march. (Some climbed the fence.) Comparable demonstrations took place that week at some sixty universities nationwide.

As all this has been going on, cynics have been paying little or no attention. It was, apparently, ever thus. Thirty years and more ago, when the political ances-

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tors of today's trouble-makers at Berkeley were launching the Free Speech Movement on that same campus, and traipsing over those same Sproul Plaza steps, Andrew Kopkind was working for Time magazine across the bay.

"If I wrote about it, I knew that people would say 'What are you interested in that shit for? Bunch of creeps', Kopkind wrote in his memoir, *The Thirty Years War*. 'The whole culture of Time was so anti-student and anti-black, anti-beatnik and whatever. There were these names one would be called, and so the response was not to get involved. And that's what produced the culture of the Time correspondent being alienated, the detachment and the cynicism.'

So shifted are the sands of cynicism that it's no longer Time that stands out, as a bastion of alienation, pessimism and name-calling. But The Nation.

As Berdahl's opponents were confronting him at the Zellerbach auditorium inauguration, the micro-pundit Eric Alterman was priming his popgun. Alterman assailed the "radical/academic" left, which he claims "concerns itself primarily with race, gender and sexual preference" for attacking "the reformist/social

democratic left" which Alterman says "is almost exclusively economic in emphasis." Together these two, he writes, complementarily, "cancel each other out."

Unsurprisingly, since he rarely leaves the confines of MSNBC studios, Alterman was wrong on the facts. Take those flyers for example. The ones floating down on Shalala et al were from a group, the Students of Color Solidarity Council. Their mission: "We believe in creating a world without racism, sexism, homophobia, classism or capitalism."

The Equal Educational Opportunity Initiative, written by Boalt Hall law students this winter and supported by UC students all over California, would overturn 209 and mandate the state to "consider the economic background, race, sex, ethnicity and national origin of qualified individuals." This beyond-affirmative action agenda is the one SCSC students have advocated at their rallies and protests this spring.

Maria Poblet, the dark-haired speaker in the student squad, is Chicana for sure — that's one "identity". She's also bisexual, a leader, a young person, a poet...a fan of *Rage Against the Machine*....Alterman says the "cultural left" believe the "higher the level of abstraction, the more subversive it is." Poblet says her most inspiring, subversive moment so far was talking to strawberry pickers in Watsonville at the April '97 UFW rally. That's what fuelled her efforts, with about 15 other students, to found SCSC last fall.

At a weeklong campus protest — The Third World People's College of 1997 — Poblet and her colleagues invited UFW organizers and Zapatistas; Immigrants', Prisoners' and Welfare rights advocates; media trainers, historians and lecturers on Free Trade, to give free classes to the students. And to party.

But almost everything about SCSC contradicts the conventional liberal "wisdom" about splits in the "left" and "identity politics." The "cultural" politics of this crew encompasses the culture of class as well as race. Far from preaching only to their own converted, they mentor Berkeley High Schoolers and visit prisoners in Dublin jail.

Alterman asserts the "cultural left" lacks "even the most rudimentary strategy for translating theory into praxis..." Tell that to Berdahl, who's got a lot of moral high ground to regain before school starts next fall. ■

## CAQ Editors Speak Out The Purge At Covert Action

**V**igilant students of CounterPunch's masthead will have noted that our friend Terry Allen was responsible for the newsletter's production until—ahem—certain “streamlining” moves caused us to move this operation from Terry's computer in either Washington, D.C. or Vermont, to Jeffrey St. Clair's hill-side redoubt in Oregon City.

Now we hear from Terry a disgusting tale of all-round low behavior by self-proclaimed leftists. For just over eight years Terry has been the editor of Covert Action Quarterly, and has made it an increasingly effective and interesting publication.

Here's how Terry and her two workmates describe the sequence in a letter e-mailed to supporters of CAQ.

“Last week the publishers fired the entire staff on payroll at CAQ...We'd like you to know how and why.

On Sunday morning, May 10, a courier makes the rounds to three apartments in Washington, DC. He slides a plain white envelope under the front door.

At the same time, a few blocks from the White House, owners of a small corporation watch as the security company they hired changes the locks on the door of a workplace. Their employees across town are now bending down, placid with weekend sleep, to pick up the intrusive white oblong by the door. As the workers tear it open, the owners, back at the office, begin to search systematically through all the drawers and files of each of the employees. They go through the letters the workers wrote to old friends, colleagues, writers, and lovers; they search through phone logs, old medical bills, photos, e-mail, as well as through the company records. They own the business and they have the right, under the law.

We are the three people who opened the envelopes...and read that we were summarily fired without cause.

For the last eight and a half years of the magazine's 19-year life, we are the people who have brought you credible, solid news reporting and articles that have consistently added to the historical record and fueled social change. Terry Allen (editor) and Barbara Neuwirth (staff) have worked at the magazine for almost nine years, along with Sanho Tree (associate

editor) who joined the staff last year. We, are the people who did the work, who produced the magazine. They have a piece of paper that grants them legal ownership; our ownership in sweat equity was earned.

Louis Wolf, based in Washington, and Ellen Ray and William Schaap, who operate out of New York, are the people who fired us. These publishers/owners consider themselves socialists, leftists, progressives, whatever. All have done some good work in the past. But all of them acted on that rainy Sunday morning like corporate thugs. They did not try to dis-

### One publisher wanted to expose Hitler's current hideout in Antarctica.

cuss problems with our collective; they did not lay us off with notice and dignity. They cowardly hired others to sneak an envelope under our doors; they seized the contents of desks and computers and sorted through personal information. ‘Arrangements will be made,’ their letter noted, ‘for you to remove from the office under our representatives’ supervision, any personal property currently there.’

Why this sordid little covert action? Why the firing of three employees whose job performance was consistently excellent? Well, here are the reasons they gave in the letter: ‘Your employment is terminated...effective immediately’ because of ‘interpersonal relations and work styles ... creating a hostile and unproductive environment for all of us.’

Only a few days before the purge, [Schaap and Ray] wrote to us praising the latest issue as “terrific”.

As for interpersonal relations: they were fine among the three people who actually produced the 64-page magazine four times a year. We did it on time, on budget, and on target with annual costs under \$200,000. Interpersonal relations were admittedly less good between management and workers, but no worse than at many workplaces.

As to how we were fired, there can be

no explanation. The method speaks for itself. As to why, there are two basic reasons. The first and most important was our refusal to be bullied by Wolf, Ray, and Schaap into publishing wacko-conspiracy theories.

Among those championed by one or another of the publishers was a proposal to expose Hitler's current hideout in Antarctica, an undocumented piece on alleged US release of screw worms as a weapon of war, a story presenting Serbia as the blameless victim of Bosnian aggression, and a reference by Schaap and Ray to President Aliiev of Azerbaijan as a model of progressive governance. Some of these we were able to stop immediately and others took endless discussions before they were dropped.”

On May 19, the three publishers issued a statement in response to the staffers' letter saying they felt “fully justified in their actions, which were “due solely to interpersonal relations and conduct,” though the statement does not explore this topic further. Schaap did insist to CounterPunch that the publishers had not examined any personal materials of the staffers. He also denied that any of the publishers had intended to expose Hitler's whereabouts. For her part, Terry Allen maintains that Louis Wolf met for over two hours with a man proffering maps marking the ice-bound bunker and informed her, as she recalls, “we've got to run an article on this.” ■

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