



# Campus Building Occupations, 2008-2010 and Today

2024-04-22

A wave of campus building occupations took place in response to austerity measures following the recession of 2008. As today's Gaza solidarity movement begins to experiment with encampments and building occupations, it could be

instructive to learn from the previous generation of student activists.

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On April 22, 2024, inspired by the resilience of the **Gaza solidarity encampment** at Columbia University and other demonstrators around the country, students at Cal Poly Humboldt in Arcata, California occupied Siemens Hall. This represented the first confrontational building occupation of a wave of student demonstrations in solidarity with Palestine.

Police attempted to storm Siemens Hall in order to evict it; they inflicted severe injuries on some students, but failed to gain entry. The officers established a perimeter around the building, but students and university faculty gathered around them, surrounding them and chanting "De-escalate by leaving!" In the end, **local media** reported that the police were forced to withdraw:

*10:50 pm: All law enforcement have left from in front of the building and appear to be leaving the campus. Scanner traffic appears to confirm that law enforcement has left the scene. One officer said that law enforcement is being "disbanded." Students are currently pouring in and out of the occupied building.*

"Cops go home!" the students chanted victoriously. "People power! *We are stronger!*"

Taking over a building and forcing the police off campus is no mean feat in the age of police militarization. Yet this is not the first time this century that student movements have employed these tactics. From December 2008 to March 2010, a wave of student building occupations helped to spark a new era of combative grassroots struggle. Starting with only a few participants, these building occupations eventually helped to inspire the Occupy movement, which catalyzed tens of thousands of people into action.

The following text chronicles the emergence of this wave of building occupations from the perspective of those who helped start it, first in New York and then in California. This article originally appeared in **issue 9** of *Rolling Thunder*, our *Anarchist Journal of Dangerous Living*. It appears here with a handful of modifications reflecting the decade and a half that has passed since.



Students occupied the New School in New York City in December 2008 and again in 2009.

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## Coast to Coast Occupations

*"The coming occupations will have no end in sight, and no means to resolve them. When that happens, we will finally be ready to abandon them."*

**–Preoccupied: The Logic of Occupation**

## **This is How We Learn, This is How We Fight**

*By a participant in the occupations in New York City of 2008-2009.*

In December 2008, the month of the **Greek rebellion**, the widely hated president of New York City's New School for Social Research fired the Provost and appointed himself. He also cut the library in half, shut down a building where students gathered, and raised tuition. When the Faculty came out with a vote of no confidence in him on December 10, previously apathetic students joined those trained by summit battles to take action. Standard campus activist SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] groups wanted to wait for the right time—"the movement is not ready," "we need more numbers." We thought otherwise.

After two grueling meetings, on December 16 at 8 pm, thirty students and non-students took the first floor of 65 5th Avenue, in the middle of Manhattan, blocking the exits with chairs, tables, and trash cans from the cafeteria. Within hours, hundreds of people came out in support, and students who until then had only read Hegel were fighting security guards with tables and blocking the streets outside. This lasted from Wednesday night to Friday morning. Authoritarian groups issued demands while autonomous groups conspired to bring in more people and expand the occupation. At key moments, against the formal consensus of some, friends outside were broken in with spectacular actions. A Greek solidarity march came by and livened up the party with a hundred more anarchists. The president was chased down the street to his home, and conceded to some of the demands soon after. We left with no repercussions, but bitter that the university still functioned at all.

After winter break, a plan was hatched to continue the struggle with a more daring



action. With dozens of new people radicalized and hundreds of new supporters, we set our sights high: we wanted the whole fucking building. We announced our threat early: *April 1 we shut the school down unless the president resigns*. We distributed our analyses everywhere and continued minor escalations: illegal teach-ins, graffiti, vandalism, "open" occupations.

New York University [NYU] joined the wave and occupied their student building in February, and we joined in with pleasure. After a massive street conflict outside and three days barricaded inside, we left with no charges. April 1 came and our plan was snitched, so we held off for another week until the NYC anarchist book fair. They thought we'd given up, but we came in like thieves in the night and seized the whole building, all with only 19 people, students and non-students. This time the university wasn't playing around.



A barricade of chairs at NYU in 2009.

More than two hundred police vehicles responded, along with helicopters, emergency units, and hordes of SWAT, JTTE, and other teams; they closed down three streets and shut down Union Square. It took them seven hours to chainsaw their way in. Our friends caused a conflict outside as a distraction, but those inside couldn't escape. The occupation ended before our supporters could start a riot, but the action sent shockwaves across the nation.



The New School, occupied.

The following September, people at UC Santa Cruz took things up a notch, occupying a student center for a week with no demands and then seizing two massive buildings for over a week in November. UC Davis, UCLA, SFSU, and Berkeley were all occupied after that, raising the bar each time, and afterwards it seemed that there were only two options left: shut down more universities with multiple occupations, or extend the

struggle to the city and continue it there.

*[The foregoing text was written at the beginning of 2010; indeed, although the student occupation movement died down after that, the occupation movement itself exploded into public space in 2011 with the Occupy movement.]*



A banner reading "Everything," as in "Occupy everything," which became a popular watchword coming out of the student occupation movement of 2008-2010, helping to give rise to the Occupy movement that broke out in 2011.

## Thoughts for Future Occupiers

*Conclusions from the New School Occupations of 2008-2009 in New York City.*

- You don't need to convince everyone before the occupation. Everyone knows the situation. You just need to start the party.

- You don't need a lot of people to start an occupation—at least ten, maybe less. All you need to do is hold it until people come. What goes on outside is more important than what goes on inside.
  - You don't need a lot of time to prepare. We planned our first one in two days with twelve people. Just bring some locks and chains and take advantage of materials in the building.
  - When you take a building, don't immediately hold a meeting. That's a mistake. Start changing the space, preparing it, remolding it to your desires.
  - An occupation must expand; otherwise, it dies.
  - There are hard, soft, open, and closed occupations. There are one-room, floor, building, and multiple-site occupations. Every occupation demands its own style.
  - Demands are unnecessary; it's the action that counts.
  - If you know the occupation is going to end, escape early or end it with a riot. Anything else will wreck future possibilities.
  - Occupations are not enough—they must combine with other forms of action if they are to be meaningful in the future.
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The occupation of the New School in New York City in 2009.

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# The Berkeley Rebellion: A Semester at Siege

*By Josh Wolf.*

*"There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part; you can't even passively take part, and you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all!"*

Forty-five years after Mario Savio<sup>1</sup> spoke those words on the steps of Sproul Hall at the University of California at Berkeley, a new student uprising broke out on the campus.

With the California state budget barely coming together, cuts to public education and fee increases for the state's public college systems became almost certain. State workers lost wages in the form of furloughs, or unpaid leave; others were laid off. The Regents of the University of California, a board consisting mostly of wealthy tycoons appointed by the governor, proposed raising student fees to help offset the budget cuts.

All this ignited strikes and protests throughout the state's public universities and community colleges in late September. At UC Berkeley, workers, professors, and students called for a strike on September 24, 2009. Organizers from the Associated Students, the American Association of University Professors, and a wide variety of other groups endorsed the one-day strike. On the appointed day, about 5000 people gathered on campus for a rally that transformed into a march through downtown Berkeley.

# DEFEND PUBLIC EDUCATION WALKOUT

**9/24**  
thursday

## PICKETS at University Entrances

in solidarity with

UPTE (union of technical employees) &  
AFCSME (union of custodians)

7:15-11:15: Bancroft and Telegraph    Oxford and Center  
Piedmont and Stad. Rim Way    Hearst and Euclid

3:00-4:00: Bancroft and Telegraph

## Rally & March

12:00: SPROUL PLAZA

## General Assembly

6PM: Gather at Sproul Plaza

All students, faculty, staff welcome to participate and  
decide how to take the movement forward.

and teach-ins throughout the campus all day

**NO STUDENT FEE INCREASES, NO LAYOFFS, NO FURLOUGHS**  
**NO PAYCUTS TO THOSE EARNING LESS THAN \$40,000**  
**FULL DISCLOSURE OF THE UC BUDGET**  
**DEMOCRATIZE THE REGENTS**

### CALL TO ACTION ISSUED BY THE 9/16 UC BERKELEY GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

The 9/24 Walkout is supported by the UC Student Association (UCSA), Associated Students of the University of California (ASUC), the Graduate Assembly (GA), SAVE the University ([www.saveuc.org](http://www.saveuc.org)), the Solidarity Alliance, the Graduate Student Organizing Committee ([www.gradstudentstoppage.com](http://www.gradstudentstoppage.com)), UC Faculty Walkout ([www.ucfacultywalkout.com](http://www.ucfacultywalkout.com)), Student Worker Action Team (SWAT), Berkeley Alliance Against the Cuts, the American Association of University Professors.

A poster for the walkout and strike on September 24, 2009.

Not surprisingly, neither this nor numerous other demonstrations changed the minds of the UC Regents, who were scheduled to approve a massive fee hike on November 19. In anticipation of this, students and workers began striking on several campuses the preceding day. In addition to the tuition hike, they were protesting the privatization

of the public education system through increasing reliance on corporate money, rampant layoffs, and the ongoing worker furloughs.

Two days later, after the regents approved the fee increases, about forty people slipped into UC Berkeley's Wheeler Hall before dawn and locked all the doors. Some of the occupiers knew each other and had been organizing together for months; others had essentially stumbled into the occupation after joining a march the day before. Most were university students. All expected the police would break down the doors early the next morning.



**UC BERKELEY**

# NO BUSINESS AS USUAL!

# STRIKE

At their November 17-19 meeting the UC Regents will be voting on an additional 32% student fee increase. These proposed fees have already been pledged as collateral for \$1.35 billion worth of new construction bonds despite an "extreme fiscal emergency." The Regents will also vote to lay off nearly 2,000 more workers, continue with furlough plans and cut classes and critical student services. The executive administration wants to convince us that their hands are tied by Sacramento, but we know the real crisis is one of priorities. During these days The University Professional and Technical Employees (UPTe) will be striking, the Coalition of University Employees (CUE) will be striking and we will be converging at UCLA and at UC Berkeley to confront the Regents and fight their austerity measures.

## OUR UNIVERSITY!

november  
**18 • 19 • 20**

<b>wednesday</b>	<b>thursday</b>	<b>friday</b>
<b>WALKOUT</b>	<b>RECLAIM</b>	<b>ESCALATE</b>
UPTe pickets beginning at 5am <b>Noon: Mass Rally on Sproul</b> followed by a sendoff to those traveling to LA and <b>MARCH</b> ending with a... <b>Strike Meeting:</b> <b>What's Next?</b>	UPTe pickets beginning at 5am <b>Noon: Mass Rally at California Hall</b> <b>4pm, Lower Sproul</b> <b>Second Strike Meeting:</b> <b>What's Next?</b>	If the Regents increase our fees, lay us off and cut our pay, we will have no choice but to escalate our actions. <b>Noon: Gather at California Hall</b>

**Tent City throughout the strike**

In solidarity with UCLA sign the call >>  
*bring a pillow* **ucstrike.com**

The strike is endorsed and supported by UPTe Local 1, Coalition of University Employees Berkeley Local #3, Solidarity Alliance (ucsolidarity.org), Graduate Student Organizing Committee, Graduate Assembly, CalSERVE, Bridges Multicultural, Student Worker Action Team (SWAT), Berkeley Law Organizing Committee, UC Berkeley General Assembly, & Oct 24th Statewide Mobilizing Conference.

A flier for the protests of November 18-20, 2009, at the University of California at Berkeley.

## The First Occupation of Wheeler Hall

The UC police discovered our occupation around 6 am; it wasn't long before they

figured out how to break in. Most of us were gathered on the second floor, but a few were securing the basement when we heard the commotion.

"They're inside!" gasped a student who had just sprinted up the stairs, barely escaping arrest. Three behind him were not so lucky; we would soon learn that they had been charged with felony burglary.

He pulled back his shirt to reveal red marks from an officer's baton. Someone slammed the door shut behind him and secured it.

While some participants had been planning to occupy a building before the semester started, others had only had a few minutes to prepare. The first and only meeting had taken place less than twelve hours earlier. It quickly became apparent the locks and chains people had brought wouldn't be enough to adequately secure the doors. Searching the building, students found a stash of tables and wooden chairs with small desks attached. These seemed to wedge perfectly between the doors, which they then cinched shut with packing straps.

But the same setup hadn't held for more than a few minutes downstairs. We were certain that police would come storming through any minute. People pressed their bodies against the doors and held fast to the handles at each of the floor's four entrances.

As a journalist, I tried at first to act as an "objective observer," staying out of the action while my fellow students literally put their bodies between me and riot police. Later, a girl asked me to help her take a break; realizing how ridiculous it was to think I could remain an impartial observer in such a situation, I accepted a shift holding the door. I'm glad I did; when it came time to arrest the people inside, it made no difference to the police that I was there as a journalist with a police-issued press pass around my neck.

With the police separated from us by only a wooden door held by a handful of people, we realized that we were about to be hauled off to jail without even briefly interrupting

the machine.

"Did anybody call the media?" A handful of laptops appeared from book bags and people raced to find the phone numbers of local TV stations. Another person began posting to indymedia, while others called their friends to tell them we were inside. One student copied down all our names and emergency contacts and emailed them to the National Lawyers Guild. Other students sat down to write up a list of demands.

We had all agreed before the occupation that one of the goals of our action would be to force the university to rehire thirty-eight janitors from the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), who had been laid off. Someone suggested we should demand amnesty for our friends who had been arrested earlier and were now facing felony charges. Why not ourselves, too? We stipulated that no one should be charged or face student disciplinary action for participating in the protest.



Occupiers address supporters from the second floor of Wheeler Hall on November 20.

The small group added two more demands: that the university renew its lease with the Rochdale Co-op—it had been threatening to use the building for market-rate student housing—and that it enter negotiations in good faith to renew the leases of the predominantly minority-owned local businesses at the Bear's Lair food court. While it



was impossible to meet to reach consensus with the students spread out guarding the entrances, news of these demands quickly circulated and no one seemed to have any objections.

Later, many outsiders would ask why we didn't demand that the administration roll back the fee hike. One of the occupiers responded that we had limited ourselves to making demands the Berkeley administration actually had the power to grant. This was a tactically sound decision, but not one we had made together. After months of meetings and protests, the participants were suddenly forced to make decisions quickly—sometimes independently—while fighting to keep the occupation alive.

As minutes turned to hours, spectators began to arrive outside Wheeler Hall. At first, it was just a lone student here and a news camera there; but soon a crowd coalesced and began to grow. A student picket line formed blocking the path to class. The AFSCME union reinforced the student picket; it eventually became a sit-down barricade, before being enveloped by the crowd. Inside, we could hear the police banging away and pulling at the handles, but the doors held.

"Whose university?" one person would yell.

And the halls would reverberate with the sound of forty determined voices: *"Our university!"*



Supporters outside the occupation of Wheeler Hall.

At 9:13 am, Chancellor Robert Birgeneau sent out an email to the entire campus urging students, staff, and faculty to avoid Wheeler Hall until further notice. Of course, the Chancellor's communiqué only drew dozens more to the crowd, which had gathered outside the classroom window where some of us had congregated. Acting as police liaison, one of the occupiers called the police to deliver our demands and discuss possible negotiations. The officer told her she would call back later. After some time had passed, the officer called back just to repeat that she'd call back later again.

The crowd continued to grow throughout the day. The police force increased as well, as officers from the Berkeley Police Department and deputies from the Alameda County Sheriff's Office joined the UC Police in and around the building.

The police erected metal barricades around the perimeter of the building, and

repeatedly attacked students who approached. An officer shattered the wrist of a student resting her hand on the barricade. Another officer shot a student in the stomach with a rubber bullet, and the police injured countless others with their batons. In response, students physically resisted attempts to bring more officers into the building and to control the crowds; some even fought off the police.



Occupiers address supporters from the second floor of Wheeler Hall on November 20, 2009.

Eventually, the administration announced that they wanted to negotiate. We offered to parley on the public lawn outside the window, over the local radio station, or even privately on the phone, but the police chief demanded that we take down our barricades and let them in first.

We smelled a rat, and rejected the offer. Everyone continued holding the barricades as the afternoon passed and the crowd continued to grow. As it grew dark, one of us

called out to ask if people would stay through the night. The crowd cheered: they were there to stay. Shortly before 6 pm, a deafening banging erupted at all the blocked doors at once. Were the police breaking through the doors with battering rams? Fear and uncertainty gripped us.

Before long, the group defending one of the entrances abandoned its post and ran to the classroom facing the window over the crowd. We had discussed retreating to this room when the police finally penetrated our defenses, so the crowd outside would witness their behavior while our cameras captured it from the inside.

Everyone had already scrambled into the room and had been sitting there, hands over heads, for some time when the police finally broke through the barricades. We watched in silence as they ran past the door, then came back to unlock it and let us know we were all under arrest.

But by now the crowd had grown to more than a thousand angry students, and every news camera, mainstream and independent, was turned on Wheeler Hall. The university realized it couldn't charge us with the felonies that the police had doled out earlier that day. With the volatile crowd surrounding the building, the police didn't even take us to jail. Instead, they held us in the hallway and issued us a citation for misdemeanor trespassing, which the district attorney later dropped. We were then escorted out of Wheeler Hall into the glare of high-intensity spotlights and cheering crowds.

It was a bit uncomfortable—we knew that it wasn't the forty-three of us who had made the occupation into such an important event, but the thousands outside.

This message was echoed by several others who had been inside the building, as we passed around a megaphone in front of an old tree at the edge of the crowd. There was revolution in the air, and we felt that we were making history.





"Occupy everything": public artwork in support of the movement.

## Growing Unrest

The next few weeks were punctuated by a series of actions.

The Associated Students hosted a forum with the police to discuss the behavior of the police outside Wheeler Hall during the occupation. Rather than participate in a process that would never yield results, a student climbed onto a chair and delivered a verbal assault on the police, after which about thirty of us—ninety percent of the people inside—marched out to hold our own meeting.

On December 3, the anniversary of Mario Savio's famous Free Speech Movement address, the Associated Students once again attempted to diminish student power by holding a "non-political" commemoration of the speech. We set out to interrupt it,

arguing that the Free Speech Movement was anything but apolitical and that there was still no free speech on campus. We arrived with fliers and banners. When people began taping banners to the wall of Sproul Hall, the police took them down and refused to give them back; this became less of a problem once the cameras arrived.

Veterans of the movement spoke alongside current students about past and present crises; everyone seemed to agree that the best way to commemorate the Free Speech Movement would be to have free speech. But at 1 pm, the university-sanctioned hour of free speech came to an abrupt halt when the PA system was turned off without warning. A UC professor who had been involved in the Free Speech Movement as a student was in the middle of his sentence.

From the steps of Sproul, the group of fifty or more people marched around campus, ending at the Bear's Lair food court for a meeting. Unlike meetings earlier in the year, this one seemed to have a concrete direction and purpose.

When we'd barricaded the doors to Wheeler Hall on November 20, we had followed Savio's lead and thrown our bodies upon the gears, demonstrating that we had the power to make the machine stop. Now it was time to demonstrate that we also had the power to bring it to life.





Supporters outside the occupation of Wheeler Hall.

## Live Week: Wheeler Hall is Re-Occupied

At Berkeley, the last week before finals is known as “dead week” because there are no classes scheduled, although some teachers hold class anyway. As many classrooms stand empty during the week while limited study space is available for students, we decided to return to Wheeler and transform it into an open occupation: *Live Week*.

We modeled our plan after the European occupations earlier in the year. We would not seal the doors with locks and chains, but would simply occupy the space with our bodies, demonstrating an alternative to the university system.

During the preparations for Live Week, some of the organizers who had been active earlier in the semester were noticeably absent. Many of the groups involved in the

movement had met at a conference in late October to begin planning a “day of action” for the following March, and it seemed these people, many of whom were involved with campus socialist groups, felt our energy would be better spent working toward this future event.

After only a few planning meetings, we arrived Monday around 2:30 pm and set up an infoshop in the foyer. Students stopped to pick up a zine or cup of coffee as they left the review session in the auditorium; meanwhile, as the class dispersed, we assembled inside.

Shortly before a UC professor began a lecture addressing the systemic problems in the public education system, we were told that we had to leave the auditorium unless we were willing to rent it from the school.

We refused, and the lecture continued as scheduled. We shared a communal vegetarian meal a few students had prepared at a student co-op using donated food. After dinner, we were told again that we had to leave. Eventually the police showed up, trained their cameras on us, and informed us that if we did not leave we could be arrested or face student conduct charges. It was about 8 pm, two hours before the building was scheduled to close.

We stayed and the police did nothing. Almost one hundred of us held the first general assembly of the occupation. Shortly before 11 pm the police returned with their cameras and repeated their formal order. There were more this time and it seemed possible that they would arrest us.

Officers took up posts at the doors to prevent more people from entering. Some people who didn’t want to risk arrest left, but most stayed, and efforts to prevent more people from coming in proved fruitless. Around midnight, the officers gave up trying to keep people out, and most of them left. We had won the battle.

Some people patrolled the space throughout the night in case the police returned.



Others busied themselves cleaning up in preparation for classes to resume in the morning.

By the next morning, Live Week had become part of the university. The transformation extended beyond Wheeler Hall. It was subtle at first: students made eye contact with each other when they might not have before, exchanged a few more friendly hellos.

Yet by reclaiming a building from the administration, we had begun to realize our potential. The awakening was contagious: students began to flock to Wheeler from across the university.

They didn't come for the movement-building meetings. They didn't come for the dance parties, rock concerts, and hip-hop shows. They didn't even come for the free food. No, left with nowhere else to study late at night, the classrooms became a vibrant study hall—in fact, someone painted a banner reading “study hall” to indicate where students could find a quiet place to prepare for their exams.

At the meetings that took place after the occupation got started, activists questioned why we hadn't drawn a bigger turnout. We had successfully held the building for multiple days, and yet there were so few of us. On the first night there had been over one hundred people at the general assembly, but now there were perhaps twenty. An additional fifty or sixty students were studying in the classrooms at any point throughout the night—but with tens of thousands of students on campus, where was everyone? Someone suggested we throw a concert with a big-name act to bring in people. Maybe The Coup?

The next day, Boots Riley of The Coup was confirmed and fliers circulated promoting the show. Meanwhile, a debate developed over whether the occupation should continue after the Friday night show. Most people eventually agreed to clean up and clear out of the building before finals began on Saturday morning.

But early Friday, around 4:30 am, while all the occupiers were asleep or deep in their

studies, the police raided the space. Officers handcuffed the doors shut to prevent anyone from leaving and woke everybody up to the news that they were under arrest.

At first, police told students that they didn't need to get dressed and that they wouldn't be hauled off to jail. But they changed their plans after marching the students, some in their boxers and bare feet, to a classroom in the basement.

After being charged with misdemeanor trespassing, the students were taken to Santa Rita, the main jail in Alameda County. Most weren't released until late afternoon or early evening. Sixty-six people were arrested, forty-two of them students. Most of the non-students were people who live outdoors and had been invited inside Wheeler to escape the cold rain.



Building occupations can give teeth to mass movements—or even catalyze them.

## Counterattack

Angered by the arrests and determined that the show must go on, a few organizers sent out an announcement that the concert was still happening and called for people to meet outside Wheeler Hall. After hours of trying unsuccessfully to find a venue, at the last minute someone convinced Casa Zimbabwe, an off-campus co-op north of campus, to host the show.

That night, dozens of activists from across the state converged outside Wheeler Hall in the pouring rain to show their support for the Berkeley rebellion. Some students came all the way from UCLA; others arrived from UC Santa Cruz, UC Davis, and San Francisco State. We marched across the dark campus to the co-op, where several bands performed in the underground garage, including Boots Riley with Roberto Miguel on guitar. After the concert, some of the attendees donned black masks and headed back to campus to respond to that morning's assault.

About sixty people marched down Euclid Avenue, a street near the north side of campus, around 11 pm. A few people kicked over newspaper stands and dragged them into the street. Others dragged them out of the road and put them back on the sidewalk. The chanting crowd turned and headed down the edge of campus along Hearst Avenue.

Someone lit a half dozen or more torches and handed them out as the crowd turned onto the paved path to University House, the chancellor's on-campus home. As the crowd approached, the energy increased. A few individuals emerged from the sea of black, smashing the street lamps along the entryway to his house and overturning the planters in front of it. According to later reports, incendiary objects were thrown at the house and the windows were smashed out.

A police car roared up, sirens blazing and lights flashing, and the crowd scattered. The participants dropped their bandanas and quickly blended into the scattered groups of students walking through the rain. Other squad cars arrived from all directions as some

continued to run, while others tried to walk away calmly.

Eight people were arrested that night. Their charges included rioting, threatening an education official, attempted burglary, attempted arson of an occupied building, felony vandalism, and assault with a deadly weapon on a police officer; UCPD alleged that when they reported to the scene, "things on fire" were thrown at their cars. The next day, governor Arnold Schwarzenegger described the march to the chancellor's house as terrorism. The chancellor told the media that he and his wife had feared for their lives. Once again, the student movement at UC Berkeley was national news.

As it turned out, the police had only managed to capture the ones who decided not to run. The arrestees included a journalist who was documenting the events that night and several students and non-students who did not participate in the property destruction, according to witnesses. Held on over \$130,000 bail, many of the arrestees spent the weekend in jail waiting for arraignment. But the district attorney dropped all the charges, and they were released after their day in court.

While many in the student movement criticized the attack on the chancellor's home, others defended it as a legitimate response to the terror the police had inflicted on the students arrested earlier that morning at the Wheeler occupation. Some students feared the movement would lose support now that protestors had turned to violence; others questioned whether the property damage at the chancellor's home should be considered violence. They argued that the response seemed appropriate in view of the violence administered by the university against its own students.

In still other circles, it seemed that the attack itself wasn't as offensive as the fact that students had acted autonomously. "What makes those individuals think that they have the right to impose their political views on the entire group?" demanded a student in an email to a campus mailing list. "This hypocrisy must be intolerable to the ENTIRE group! We cannot allow that to happen again. If someone thinks that individuals taking unilateral action, without the consensus of the general assembly, is appropriate, then I place them in a category with (UC President Mark) Yudof."

While this appeared to be a minority perspective, many questioned whether the action outside the chancellor's home was tactically sound. They worried that if we wanted the administration to work with us to make the changes we demanded, this assault could hinder our goals. But others doubted we could win the war for public education without such skirmishes: unless we can threaten the status quo, what leverage do students have against the university?

These quarrels threatened to divide the movement, but students still came together for the court appearances and disciplinary hearings. About forty people gathered for an end-of-the-year picnic in **People's Park** before the students all scattered for winter break.

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*"I believe that the university administration not only set the stage for a violent turn in protests by acts which have repeatedly raised tensions and undermined belief in its good will, but actually engaged in most of the violence that has occurred."*

*-Education professor Daniel Peristein, after witnessing the events at the chancellor's house from his office window*





Wheeler Hall, occupied.

## Afterwards

On January 6, 2010, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger proposed a state constitutional amendment requiring the state budget to allocate at least ten percent of its funds to the state college system. He said the money should come from cuts to the state prisons.

Instead of scaling back draconian sentencing and setting nonviolent offenders free, however, Schwarzenegger suggested that the state could save money by privatizing the prisons. While students had demanded "books not bars" throughout the semester, no one was calling for privatization. The governor had hit upon a devious way to play students and prisoners against each other. Most student activists wrote off the governor's announcement as hollow lip service.

Despite everything, there was a whiff of victory in the air. “Those protests on the UC campuses were the tipping point,” the governor’s chief of staff Susan Kennedy acknowledged in the *New York Times*. The *Times* neglected to mention that the previous time the governor had addressed the UC protests he had described them as terrorism. While Kennedy did not suggest that it was the march to the Chancellor’s home that prompted the governor to act, the combination of peaceful and confrontational organizing has historically proven to be a powerful recipe.

A mass mobilization was scheduled for March 4, 2010. Some have called for a general strike, and meetings are planned across the state’s college campuses. But with more than a month of vacation between the two semesters, momentum died down.

The march on March 4, 2010 did not revitalize the movement; its high point had passed. But it did bring together many of the people who would go on to participate in the Occupy movement in fall of 2011, under slogans—such as “Occupy everything”—that had originally been employed only by the most radical and risk-tolerant participants in the student movement.



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## Further Reading

- [After the Fall: Communiqués from Occupied California](#), 2010
- [Blockade, Occupy, Strike Back](#)
- [Communiqué from an Absent Future](#)
- [The Do-It-Yourself Occupation Guide](#)—2024 edition
- [First We Take Columbia](#)—published April 2024
- [The New School Occupation](#), 2009
- [University Occupations](#)—France 1968, 2006; Greece 2006; NYC 2008-9

1. Mario Savio (1942-1996) was a leader in the Berkeley Free Speech Movement. On December 2, 1964, Savio delivered a famous speech in front of Sproul Hall, which was the university's main administration building at the time. ↩