

MARIO SAVIO

SIT-IN ADDRESS ON THE STEPS OF SPROUL HALL
THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY
DELIVERED DECEMBER 2ND, 1964

"...I ASK YOU TO CONSIDER -- IF THIS IS A FIRM, AND IF THE BOARD OF REGENTS ARE THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS, AND IF PRESIDENT KERR IN FACT IS THE MANAGER, THEN I TELL YOU SOMETHING -- THE FACULTY ARE A BUNCH OF EMPLOYEES AND WE'RE THE RAW MATERIAL! BUT WE'RE A BUNCH OF RAW MATERIALS THAT DON'T MEAN TO BE -- HAVE ANY PROCESS UPON US. DON'T MEAN TO BE MADE INTO ANY PRODUCT! DON'T MEAN -- DON'T MEAN TO END UP BEING BOUGHT BY SOME CLIENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY, BE THEY THE GOVERNMENT, BE THEY INDUSTRY, BE THEY ORGANIZED LABOR, BE THEY ANYONE! WE'RE HUMAN BEINGS!

... THERE'S A TIME WHEN THE OPERATION OF THE MACHINE BECOMES SO ODIOS, 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!!

... ONE THOUSAND PEOPLE SITTING DOWN SOME PLACE, NOT LETTING ANYBODY BY, NOT [LETTING] ANYTHING HAPPEN, CAN STOP ANY MACHINE, INCLUDING THIS MACHINE! AND IT WILL STOP!!"

WHO BOUGHT THE UNIVERSITY OF OREGON?

WRITTEN BY MAX JENSEN

THE BILLIONAIRE
CREATION OF THE
BOARD OF
TRUSTEES



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Written by Max Jensen
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What is the Board of Trustees?

A major structural shift in the orientation and operation of Oregon's universities has taken place which seeks antidemocratic control over the products of those universities. The University of Oregon Board of Trustees is a relatively new creation, started in July of 2014, it governs all aspects of the institution and has final say on:

- All campus policy
- Administrative directives
- Tuition levels and fees
- Construction projects
- Major contracts and appointments
- The budget of the student government
- Campus educational priorities

The creation of this unelected, unaccountable organization is ushering our public universities toward privatization and already has put these institutions under the direct control of millionaires and billionaires. Because of the totality of this control and the loss of student organizing infrastructure many of the issues we face on campus are created, maintained, or exacerbated by the board of trustees and the upper administrators who work for them.

Created by Billionaires for Billionaires

In 2010, UO President Richard Lariviere had one of his regular meetings with the Nike billionaire and UO mega-donor Phil Knight where they discussed a new governance model which would split up the Oregon University System into a constellation of individual boards of trustees which would control the goings on of each of the seven public universities.

By 2012 Knight and fellow billionaire, Columbia Sportswear CEO Tim Boyle would form the political action committee "Oregonians for Higher Education Excellence" to advocate for this new individual board system and the dissolution of the previous system. The two billionaires and their

[Speaking on Lariviere's plan]"...to take a step toward becoming more of a private university. I think the state provides about 7 percent of the funding now, so basically it is a private university that's hamstrung by public policy."

-Phil Knight (2010)

wealthy friends would each donate only ~\$65,000 toward the project but in 2013, with the support of the governor, Senate Bill 270 would be passed allowing individual boards to be formed the following year.

A Vicious and Exclusionary Cycle

The university president nominates new board members to the governor who fills their appointments with senate approval, and the appointed board then hires and approves future contracts for the university president creating a vicious loop of elite and private interests that control our education and excludes student, faculty, and community input into their town's largest public industry. To break this loop we need to build student power in Oregon and that power needs to be leveraged against the governor and legislature to select better board members, to fund higher education, spread decision making power and rights to other relevant stakeholders, and to change the mechanisms by which board members are selected. In other words, we need to democratize the university system in Oregon.



"With the passage of Senate Bill 270, we continue to move forward on our commitment to align funding and governance across the full continuum of education, from early childhood services through K-12 and post-secondary education. Local governing boards at our public universities will produce increased transparency and public accountability, while at the same time leveraging increased private investment and community engagement."

- Governor Kitzhaber (2013)

Initial Justifications

One of the arguments for the policy was that with insufficient funding coming from the state for higher education, universities needed individual boards of directors to aid in fundraising for their institutions, a corporate non-profit model of operation that would absolve the state of its responsibilities to increase funding. Essentially the state was formalizing a public-private partnership they had been flirting with for several decades by way of defunding.

Even though the direct state funding amounts to only ~7.5% of the University of Oregon's budget, the state is paying much more in the form of student financial aid which is indistinguishable from private tuition. Public funding in the form of loans, grants, and scholarships support the school indirectly, laundered through the passing of hands from the state to the student to the schools. So like many neoliberal and private institutions the large universities present themselves as if they were independent institutions hampered by their public status, but really the system is designed to hide the public funding propping up the current university business model.

Another argument was that the individual board system would make universities more responsive to their specific campus communities in the way that Boards of Education on community college campuses govern themselves. These boards being closer to their communities would somehow make them more transparent and accountable.

Boards of Education on community colleges, however, differ from the Boards of Trustees on university campuses in that they are locally elected rather than appointed by the governor after being nominated by the university president. The local democratic authority of the Boards of Education and the lower levels of funding and prestige passed through them seem to keep the socioeconomic demographics of community college boards more in line with that of the community whereas the university seems to be the province of millionaires, billionaires, and those who serve the wealthy.

Elite Capture of Education

What is the purpose of the capture of the US education system by neoliberal wealth interests?

The co-optation of the institutions of higher education takes the means of mental reproduction and seeks to narrow its function to those which do not threaten the economic class interest of the already wealthy. By capturing institutions of higher education the elite are capturing the potential labor of all those students who earn degrees there. Whether they go into a public field or private after graduating, the billionaire elite has either

Neoliberalism is a political approach that favors surface level free-market capitalism, deregulation, and reduction in government spending on public services.

neutralized or optimized that educated adult in furtherance of the neoliberal agenda. In the public sector, they are producing representatives and bureaucrats who won't act against them and can be bought into neoliberal modes of governance. In the private sector, the university is training a workforce content in its own exploitation, and designed for the continued exploitation of the lower classes. ***We are the tools of the capitalist class, trained by a neoliberal institution to reproduce and maintain, in a neoliberal manner, the more sophisticated components of capitalist structures.***

The wealthy interests in our university mean to control the available solutions to the problems created by moneyed interests. Once the university is fully privatized it will work to this end more effectively by shutting out the lower classes from even this limited knowledge, becoming the training grounds for the children of the wealthy elite and those who will serve them while depriving everyone else of critical thinking skills. If the lower classes have the means to analyse the social systems which affect them they might mobilize to structure that system to benefit themselves similar to the ways the upper classes have done.

Elite Class Consciousness

The monied elite has a uniquely strong sense of class consciousness, which not only indicates awareness of class position and class self interests but also aligns personal philosophy and identity in class conflict. This suggests that the bourgeoisie recognizes that their class interest is directly oppositional to that of the working class and acts accordingly. In order to win class struggle against the proletariat the billionaire and millionaire classes are seeking out a stronger hold on different forms of power.

Power as envisioned by sociologist Steven Lukes is laid out in one, two, and three dimensions, where one dimensional power is that which one exerts over another to alter a course of action, two dimensional power has more to do with agenda setting and determining what does or does not get discussed, and three dimensional power determines internalized beliefs and biases shaped by society and education about what is possible, and whose authority is legitimate.

A three dimensional view of power is especially useful here as universities are a major component of the reproduction of cultural capital, they help to establish accepted truths about the world. Analysis of Antonio

Gramsci's writing on cultural hegemony lays out similar ideas where the views of the elite are widely propagated to the point of being accepted by the lower classes as common sense even though they are disadvantaged by them. In this way the lower classes give consent to their own oppression by way of fear and complacency, because things are how they are and to try to change them would just be too impractical. This ideological hegemony of the ruling class is also described in *The German Ideology* as follows:

“The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it.” (Marx & Engels, 1932)

The Powell Memo

A potential window into the interests of the elite is the Powell Memo, commissioned by the US Chamber of Commerce to identify threats to American capitalism and lay out potential solutions to this problem. Written by future supreme court justice Lewis Powell, this memo focuses primarily on the college campuses as the breeding ground of anticapitalist sentiment stating that “there is reason to believe that the campus is the single most dynamic source” of attacks on the American system of enterprise. College campuses were producing young people who “despise the American political and economic system” and that they were seeking employment in news media, politics, as writers, and educators reproducing anti-corporate sentiment in the public consciousness.

Powell advocated for the formation of an intellectual arm of the corporate right, to co-opt the concept of academic freedom, fairness, and balance to influence educational institutions toward the right. He proposed the creation of a “Faculty of Scholars” in the Chamber of Commerce, essentially the creation of right wing think tanks to push back on left academia, advocate for “equal time” and balance of ideas in faculty hiring, among campus speakers, in textbooks, and in television media. They would write essays in scholarly journals, write popular books, and they would develop the infrastructure to affect politics and court decisions and

the organized action against educational institutions would lay the groundwork for all of that.

“Strength lies in organisation, in careful long-range planning and implementation, in consistency of action over an indefinite period of years, in the scale of financing available only through joint effort, and in the political power available only through united action and national organizations.”

Powell was writing before the neoliberal takeover of American thought. He believed that if corporations proceeded too forcefully that they would be too conspicuous and draw backlash to their plans, but those foundations have been laid now, and these billionaires are able to go beyond the future Powell envisioned. The wealthy elite are now looking toward full institutional capture and privatization.

Engineered Austerity

A major contributor that led us down this path of neoliberalization toward privatization was the passage of tax avoidance policies and the shrinking of the state. This structural shift away from state funding and toward student tuition increases set the stage for the reenvisioning of Oregon universities as private institutions, creating the argument that the “state only funds around ~7.5% of university expenses anyway.” This is how the billionaire class creates solidarity with the middle and even working class, so they will vote in favor of immediate self interest and against their long term common wealth.

These tax policies aren’t necessarily part of a long term conspiracy to steal higher education. Any one neoliberal advancement is aligned with and lays the groundwork for the next without need for a shadowy cabal to do any explicit planning even if they may form from time to time. This is an ideology which persists and has grown over generations in the open, in board rooms, in lecture halls, across the internet, and on the evening news, fueled by the monied self interest of the ruling elite, those who serve them, and those who aspire to become them.

Ballot Measure 5 and 50

Ballot Measure 5, passed in 1990, capped local property tax revenue at \$5 for every thousand of property value toward local education funding and another \$10 per thousand of property value for all other local

expenses. The year following the passage of Ballot Measure 5, tuition for in-state students at the UO went up by 32%, the highest percent annual increase in the available history of the UO. By the time ballot Measure 50 which further restricted local revenues by limiting the property value assessed had passed in 1997, tuition for out of state students had already more than doubled and in state students increased by 85% since 1990 levels.

The Oregon Kicker

In 1980, a tax referendum was passed in Oregon which took unspent funds from the end of the state's biennial budget cycle and instead of recycling it into a surplus fund that could be used on other programs, returned it to the tax payers in amounts proportional to the taxes they paid to the state. In 2023 this rebate totalled \$5.6 billion, enough to pay for tuition free university for all in-state Oregonian students for at least 2 years. This rebate only benefits Oregon tax payers, skipping over the poorest Oregonians, and focuses benefits proportionally on the wealthiest Oregonians, but the larger effect is that state government services are kept artificially underfunded.

Managerial Capture

Within our institutions a significant cadre has aligned itself against the popular interest and toward the wealthy elite. They are rewarded for their ability to bring in donations and keep costs down. They avoid and quash descent and controversy and some of them think they have noble intentions, but the more they dig us out of the problems of a neoliberalism and underfunded institution the deeper embedded we are in a system controlled by millionaires and billionaires. If the objectives of administrators ever aligned with those of students and faculty, or the local community, they must have diverged some time before the creation of the Boards of Trustees, possibly with the progressive defunding of higher education in Oregon. More likely, they were always divergent from the public interest and merely became more so as more and more money came from donations and tuition rather than the state.

Managerialism is an ideology which centers managers' interests in the operation and organization of institutions, with management "systematically embedding themselves in an organization and is propagated and legitimated by the teaching of business schools."

(Shepard, 2018) The idea could be described as the ideological practice of managerial expansionism within an institution, and is becoming more popular in educational institutions as they seek to operate with a businesslike efficiency.

Successful managerial expansion destroys the democratic means of defense, upper administrative managers seek unipolar control within the institution and identify the work of managers as separate from the rest of the institution but of vital importance to its survival. Shared governance, unionization, student protest, would all be seen as a threat to management needing to be quashed systemically and preemptively.

For these reasons, and likely others, managers are deeply aligned with the interests of the billionaire class and the gutting of the public interest. Now that the university administrators answer directly to the billionaire and millionaire classes on the boards of their respective universities and are empowered to oversee the day to day operations of the universities by the authority of their boards, these administrators have become the official servants of the billionaire class and this dynamic will be even more difficult to untangle.

Expansion of Managerial Power - Trends in student control and shared governance

The Dismantling of the Oregon Board of Higher Education - the Oregon Board of Higher Education was a central body which oversaw funding and policy on Oregon universities. The fact that it was a single body managing seven public universities meant that students across universities and community colleges could mobilize en masse against tuition hikes or unfavorable policy. Under this model larger universities also subsidized smaller universities to maintain a more equitable funding model for students across the state.

The Establishment of the UO Police Department - the creation of the UO Police Department was enabled by 2011 law SB405 as a request from a public university to the then State Board of Higher Education, and empowered new police departments to enforce both criminal law and any rules created by university administrations “with all the authority and immunity of a... ..police officer of the state”. That same year the UO Police Department was created against the will of the students who voted

78% opposed, and was first armed as of 2013, effectively giving the board of trustees an armed private police force.

The Demonstration Team - it was discovered through records requests that the University of Oregon had established in 2015 a secret network of administrators who would listen for and inform on students coordinating political protests. (Solidarity News, 2022) Since its discovery the university has rebranded the organization as “Demonstration Education & Safety Team, whose charge is to plan for and monitor events to balance freedom of speech with safety, while also minimizing disruption to university operations.” (University Communications, 2024) It now operates publicly with staff sitting in on and measuring decibel levels at protests.

Attacks on Unions and Shared Governance

Following the unionization of the university faculty in 2012 university administration tried to limit the faculty union’s bargaining unit to tenured faculty who didn’t oversee any Graduate Employees, which would amount to a unit of only a few dozen faculty. The year following, a memo was drafted from the University’s general council to then interim university president Robert Berdahl. The memo claimed that, by unionizing, the faculty had forfeited its right to representation on the university senate, and laid out options for the disempowerment and dismantling of the university senate which was the primary institution for shared governance on campus and had authority over academic policy and norms. Seemingly in direct retaliation for faculty unionizing, the memo stated:

“The faculty has traded its voice in internal government and management for the union’s voice, and the union’s only legal role involves terms and conditions of employment for bargaining unit members.” (Geller, Personal Communication, May 17, 2012)

During the 2014 Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation strike, after attempting to force teachers to scab and perform Graduate Educators duties during the strike, the newly formed UO Board of Trustees attempted to pass a “Policy on Policies” and “Policy on the Retention and Delegation of Authority” without consulting the university senate or faculty. With the dissolution of the Oregon University System which legitimized many policies on shared governance, these new policies sought to determine the governing structure, powers, and authorities of the different

bodies at the University of Oregon, seemingly narrowing the powers of the university senate to those proscribed by law and superseding the university constitution the senate had negotiated in 2011 until the union and senate mobilized in force to secure their remaining power.

The Tiered Tuition Model - In March of 2020 the UO Board of Trustees unanimously passed the guaranteed tuition model which locks in individual student tuition levels for five years preventing tuition hikes for that student. The policy then quietly foists those potential tuition hikes onto incoming students. Before this model students would be threatened with 3-5% tuition hikes and one or two hundred students would flood the Tuition and Fee Advisory Board meetings to advocate against those hikes. Now that current students don't feel the increases to tuition there's no one advocating to keep tuition down and each year the incoming student demographics skew richer and more complacent as low income students are quietly filtered out.

The Loss of the Oregon Student Association

At its height this organization had seven member campuses, five universities and two community colleges, each paying a small fee per student per term to fund the organization and register ~55,000 students to vote every two years. With those registered voters, students were seen as a demographic to be listened to by legislators and the state government as they could unseat senators and representatives if they didn't listen. With this power they got colleges and universities hundreds of millions of extra dollars from the state, they passed k-12 ethnic studies, tuition freezes, instate tuition for undocumented students, cultural competency training for teachers and staff through the legislature. The organization held conferences with between 700 and 1700 participants like the Oregon Students of Color Conference and the Northwest Student Leadership Conference, to train students to organize and help students spread ideas. By the time the Covid Pandemic came in 2020, the organization had already started to dwindle losing its largest member campus OSU, and then by the time universities had opened up again only UO and LCC were members of the organization, and student memory of their mission and operations had fizzled out. As they were trying to rebuild, hiring new staff, a car accident on the way to a staff retreat killed one new staff member

and left the executive director in the hospital for months. With only two staff left in the organization, the nonprofit closed its doors.

The Loss of Hiring and Firing Power

Some professional staff whose salaries were paid for through the Student Incidental Fee were at one point hired by panels of students rather than by administration. Prior to the 2010s and definitely during the 1990s this power existed allowing students to prioritize the hire of more radical directors and advisors for different student centers and offices, though this didn't always occur like that. Once advisors and directors were hired by administration they also became built in spies for the demonstration team, some merely forced to report on student protests, others acting as willing informants, with student informants of their own.

Student Owned Property

Before the creation of the board of trustees the university administration still sought to take control of student owned property, using underhanded tricks to convince students to relinquish ownership of the university Health Center; The university charged an annual fee to the student health center of \$170,000 which threatened to increase to \$300,000 in 2008. At this time the Health Center and the Rec Center were both operating on a significant deficit, \$600,000 and \$100,000 respectively, but both had students pay additional fees for major construction bonds and both were handed over to the university administration.

Similarly, after students voted to fund a \$90 million remodel for the EMU through a \$67 fee starting in 2014 the student body president in private meetings with administrators and later with student senate approval gave ownership of the EMU and its associated fee to administration In 2022. Now that all property has been seized, the university tells student leaders that their funds are no longer permitted to be used for permanent infrastructure. Whether this is true needs to be verified.

Summary

The authorities over higher education in Oregon are now dispersed and difficult to target, they've armed themselves with campus police forces, they've clad their private wealth in the official authority of government, divided and weakened the student body, kept students ignorant of the increasing expense of education, and fought to squash collectivization

and unionization efforts. These actions all have the effect of atomizing and weakening the non-administrator stakeholders of the university system. Before there was a board of trustees the university had already been captured by billionaire interests, and was already operating against the interests of faculty staff and students. These events are part of an enclosure process meant to go unnoticed that leaves us with less democratic control over public resources and institutions than we had prior, year after year, until what was public has become private property.

Solutions

The Board of Trustees and the administration have many advantages over students; they have longer memories than us and more time to enact their plans, they have billions of dollars both individually and in foundations, they have undemocratic policy making power over our operations and environment, they have approval powers over our professional and student staffing and a network of informants and enforcers embedded within and above those hires. We need to whittle away at these powers as we build our own, and we need to educate one another about what's happening to the institution of public education.

As we build power through voter registration or student fee autonomy campaigns and collectivize ourselves in unions and associations we gain leverage over those who hold power over the board of trustees; the legislature, the governor, and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission. With this kind of power we can regulate the powers of the Board of Trustees, establish elements of shared governance, and eventually democratize the board all together.

A democratized board would have stakeholder votes for the different unionized bodies of the university and the students at large, and involve local elections for community members who have a vested interest in the operations of the university, similar to the system which oversees the community colleges.

The leverage that would allow us to democratize our board would also allow us to significantly increase funding to higher education, thus removing the original conditions which left the university system vulnerable to billionaire exploitation creating the board of trustees in the first place. Proper investment in higher education would inoculate us against the neoliberal thinking which only serves to consolidate more power in the hands of the rich.

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anti-democratic managerial class, and the levers of governance are moved out of reach.

Students across Oregon, at universities and community colleges need to organize what Gramsci might call an organized anti-hegemonic force, mirroring the kind of organization advocated for by Lewis Powell which would instead operate openly and democratically toward popular victory in the war of class consciousness. Students need to learn the language of revolutionary union militancy to mobilize our numbers to affect the few levers of power we still have access to: protest, organized undergrad and graduate labor, student media, the student fee, and particularly voter power, and build new levers that expand our power deeper into these and other realms.