

On the first day of fall classes at University of California Berkeley Law (Boalt Hall), John Yoo was scheduled to return to teaching after a semester in exile at Chapman in Orange County. Over 60 people arrived on the Boalt steps for a press conference and protest called by World Can't Wait, the local National Lawyers Guild chapter, Progressive Democrats of America, Code Pink, and others. After an impressive, well-attended press conference, a bold protest flowed into the law school itself and up into Yoo's classroom.

When we first arrived at Boalt, reporters and TV news cameras were waiting. So were the UC police, who announced that anyone using amplified sound would immediately be arrested -- as if that could prevent this determined group from delivering our message.

The press conference went forward unamplified but loudly, with reporters and an attentive crowd hearing from speakers including four generations of UC and Boalt Hall alumni: Sharon Adams (UC Davis Law 1991), Dan Siegel (Boalt 1970), Anne Weills, Marc-Tizoc Gonzalez (Boalt 2005), and Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute founder Ann Fagan Ginger (Boalt 1960) spoke first; all are with the National Lawyers Guild.

Other speakers followed from World Can't Wait; Progressive Democrats of America; National Accountability Action Network, and Code Pink. A statement was read from Ruth Fallenbaum (UC Berkeley 1971) for the Coalition for an Ethical APA {American Psychologists Association}. [Click here for audio of these powerful statements.](#)

Protesters in orange jumpsuits and black hoods -- representing the detainees -- stood silent sentry around the press conference, and as students arrived the "detainees" flanked the doors, accompanied by teams handing out World Can't Wait's new brochure, "The Truth About Torture: Fire, Disbar and Prosecute John Yoo!" and talking with students and professors. [Click here to see the brochure.](#)

After the press conference, about 40 of us entered the law school just before Yoo's class was to begin. The hallway was filling with students, many took our flyers and talked with us as we lined the hall. Some of us went inside his classroom and mingled with Yoo's students, talking about his role as Bush/Cheney's legal architect of

torture, and why he should not be teaching law. We weren't surprised to find that like so many other people on campus and off, most do not clearly understand why we are calling Yoo a war criminal who should be fired, disbarred, and prosecuted.

Many people – including these students –are aware that Yoo is a figure of controversy, but few have looked closely at the details and extent of his crimes. And there is a lot of “moral relativism” when it comes to torture itself. Many students (and others) don't like torture, but somehow it's become part of the world they live in: more than a few say “I'm just a law student, it's other people who can do something to stop this, and I'm sure they will do the best they can.” By “other people” most often they mean the president and Congress.

As for what these future lawyers are being taught, many students say torture is wrong, but are awash in confusion about the ramifications of one of its key legal architects remaining on the faculty. The specious argument in defense of John Yoo's “academic freedom” coming from Dean Christopher Edley has spread this confusion. To say Yoo's views are wrong but his work for the Bush-Cheney regime is protected by academic freedom only encourages a “comfort zone” mentality, wherein the law school classroom (with a torturer harbored in it) is insulated and exempted from the outside world reality – where thousands have been tortured as a direct result of Yoo's “legal” work. Edley's lesson is being well-learned by some of his students-- those who tell the protesters, “Don't bring up the subject of torture here, you're disrupting my education.”

As John Yoo arrived and approached the classroom, he was surrounded by chanting protestors: “War Criminal! War Criminal! Torture is a War Crime!” Yoo went to his podium, guarded by police, as protesters continued to verbally confront him and to call out to the students. The police were scrambling to grab protesters and throw them out of the classroom. Some students cheered the police. Others watched, quietly. As one protester was being shoved out into the hall by the cops, a woman student reached over to touch her arm, saying very quietly, “Thank you.” Every student in the room was thinking about torture, about whether their professor is a war criminal and their government has been committing war crimes, and why people would care enough about this to stand up and protest.

Out in the hall, police threatened to arrest everyone, but the chanting and agitating kept on. We were especially calling on the students and other professors to take a stand, saying that every person in this country needs to learn the truth about the torture, and then take responsibility for what that truth demands – that if American torture is not stopped (because it's still ongoing) and repudiated, that it will become legal and permanent.

After another 15 minutes, although dozens of us were still in the hall we had temporarily quieted down, in anticipation that we'd be there to speak with the students after class. However, the police moved in and arrested a World Can't Wait leader, Stephanie Tang. As they handcuffed her, she continued to speak out about the Torture Professor, the torture, and other protesters did too. Several followed the police as they took Stephanie to the squad car, demanding to be arrested themselves (police refused to comply). Then minutes later, two more people were arrested, apparently for taking pictures of the scene, and then a fourth person was grabbed as well. All four were taken to the jail in the basement of the UC administration building, where they were cited and released, with two misdemeanor charges each: trespassing, and disturbing the peace. Also, all four people were given an official banning order, and can't be on any UC Berkeley property for 7 days. New plans are being made now to build support for them and to demand their cases be dropped.