

# University students in US protest Israeli aggression

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The ongoing Israeli military action in the West Bank and Gaza Strip has provoked outrage internationally, including on college campuses across the United States, where hundreds of students gathered this week to protest Israeli aggression and support the rights of the Palestinian population.

On Tuesday, several Palestinian groups on campuses around the country called for a one-day action in remembrance of the April 9, 1948 massacre at Deir Yassin. On that day, a group of Zionist paramilitaries, led by Menachem Begin, the future prime minister of Israel, carried out a massacre of more than 100 Palestinian villagers in an early attempt to drive them from their land. That event was echoed this Tuesday, April 9, in the massacre of Palestinian civilians by Israeli forces at the refugee camp in Jenin in the occupied territories. [See Israeli massacre in the city of Jenin]

In all, more than 30 universities participated in the national day of protest. The largest rally took place at the University of California, Berkeley, where protests drew as many as 1,000 students. In preparation, police presence had been dramatically increased. Toward the end of the rally, 79 demonstrators were arrested after they entered a classroom building to recite a list of demands, including that the university divest itself of \$6 billion in holdings in Israeli companies. One individual remains in custody and has been charged with a felony, allegedly for assaulting a police officer while being arrested.

Berkeley has been a center for protests on behalf of the Palestinian population, and this has created concern within the university administration and the state. Last week, students at Berkeley shut down a nearby highway for several hours as part of a protest against the Israeli occupation.

A representative of the Students for Justice in Palestine, a group that began at Berkeley but has spread to other campuses and organized many of the demonstrations on Tuesday, said, "When people see images of tanks rolling into Palestinian cities, of ambulance drivers being shot at by Israeli defense forces, women giving birth at the checkpoints, it become clear that this is not just a case of two equally wrong sides fighting."

The Berkeley rally coincided with a remembrance of the Holocaust, which provoked some anger from pro-Israeli campus groups that have attempted to equate opposition to the Zionist regime with anti-Semitism. Abdul, another member of Students for Justice in Palestine, answered this hypocritical claim, saying, "These two events complement each other. We remember Jewish victims of the Holocaust, just as we are trying to stop another massacre from happening in Palestine right now."

At the University of California, Davis, hundreds of students marched in support of the struggle of the Palestinian people. On the previous Saturday, thousands rallied in Los Angeles. At that event, Michel Shehadeh, the western regional director of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, said, "It is vital that people understand that Israel is violating all the moral, international, and human rights laws. It is terrorizing, targeting civilians, and brutally subjugating an entire nation."

Protests have involved non-Arabs as well as Arab students. At Ohio State University, 60 protesters gathered with signs and chanted, "Stop the hate, stop the crime, help save Palestine." Ora Wise, 21, a junior at OSU, said, "I've always been taught my Jewish heritage is one of fighting for social justice. It's abhorrent to me that my people would be enacting such

brutality, such atrocities, on the Palestinian people.”

At the University of Minnesota, about 75 people attended rallies.

At the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor about 100 students gathered with signs that read “Palestinian voice: silenced by the occupation” and “Sharon = war criminal,” among others. Like Berkeley, Ann Arbor has a large Arab student population, a fact that has made it a target of right-wing commentators on numerous occasions. The current actions of Israel have been the cause of increasing concern and anger of a section of the student body, with regular demonstrations and rallies. The case of Rabih Haddad—the Muslim cleric and Ann Arbor resident who has been unjustly detained by the American government since mid-December—has also attracted widespread sympathy among students, Arab and non-Arab, concerned about the attacks on democratic rights being carried out by the Bush administration.

Many of the students tied their hands together and placed gags in their mouths to symbolize the silencing of the Palestinian population. Towards the end of the rally, after a march around the campus, protesters engaged in a mock skit in which all of the Palestinian men were asked to kneel on the ground with hands tied, to represent the oppression being carried out by Israeli military forces.

As with many of these protests, the demonstration was met with a small counterdemonstration of pro-Zionists, who raised an Israeli flag and chanted in an attempt to disrupt the rally. In Berkeley, pro-Zionists disrupted the rally after a Jewish sympathizer of the Palestinians began a traditional prayer of mourning in remembrance of Palestinians who have been killed.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to several students attending the demonstration. Asma said she was protesting Israel’s ongoing occupation of Palestine. She was particularly upset by the way the conflict has been presented by the US media, which generally lays the blame on the Palestinian population. She said, “They are categorized as terrorists even though most people don’t support the suicide bombings,” which she called the last resort of a desperate and defenseless people.

Maleeha told the WSWS she was attending the demonstration because “this is the smallest thing we can do, and we have to do something.” She also

complained of the role of the media for portraying the conflict in a one-sided and biased manner: “It is not only what they say, but the way that they say it and what they leave out.”

Sabir pointed out the media uncritically accepted Israel’s actions as a “campaign against terror,” thus legitimizing the repression. He denounced the role of the American government, saying, “Bush has taken such a flagrantly pro-Israeli line. Bush’s current call for Israel’s pull-back is not meaningful.”

Like all of these campus protests, the one at UM was a mixture of different perspectives and proposals. One of the main demands of the group organizing the protest was divestment from Israel. In particular, the demand was raised that the university abandon all contracts with companies that help in providing weapons to Israel. Other student groups raised similar demands in different contexts, with regard to university contracts with companies that run sweatshops, for example. These extremely limited proposals clashed noticeably with both the extent of the conflict in the Middle East and the passion students had for finding a truly just solution to the crisis.

The protests against Israel are part of a growing wave of student radicalism that has developed over the past several years. Plans for a demonstration in Washington on April 20 include protests against Sharon and Bush, in addition to protests against the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. These protests have generally attracted thousands of people, mainly youth and students, from around the country and internationally.



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